

# **INVESTIGATING CRISES**

**South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics,  
and Trajectories**

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**Edited by Sameer Lalwani  
and Hannah Haegeland**

**STIMSON**

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**STIMSON**

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## PREFACE

With gratitude and pride I present Stimson's latest South Asia Program book, *Investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories*. This volume builds on three decades of Stimson research and writing on the threat of conflict in South Asia. Within these ten chapters, authors from China, India, Pakistan, and the United States offer analysis based on their personal experiences and scholarship. We anticipate *Investigating Crises* will prove useful to policymakers, strategic analysts, and students of the region's troubled dynamics.

A durable peace appears distant two decades after India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests. These tests were supposed to lay the groundwork for deterrence-based stability on the subcontinent. Pakistan and India are not out of the woods – far from it. Future crises lie ahead. The essays in this volume offer fresh analysis on nuclear dangers and crisis dynamics. Our authors consider how crises are triggered, the role played by the media, organizational pathologies of the intelligence and national security establishments, and the severity of “nuclear-tinged” crises.

Stimson could not do this meaningful work without the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Nuclear Security Administration. As ever, we are in their debt.

Sincerely,



Michael Krepon  
Co-Founder, Stimson Center



## KEY TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Air-independent propulsion diesel-electric submarine (SSK)  
Arms control regime (ACR)  
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)  
Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)  
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)  
Confidence-building measures (CBM)  
Crisis Management Group (CMG)  
Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)  
Group of Ministers (GoM)  
Indian Air Force (IAF)  
Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)  
Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM)  
Kargil Review Committee (KRC)  
Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Co. (KGL)  
Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)  
Line of Actual Control (LAC)  
Line of Control (LoC)  
Maritime exclusion zone (MEZ)  
Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)  
National security advisor (NSA)  
National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO)  
National Security Guard (NSG)  
People's Armed Police (PAP)  
People's Liberation Army (PLA)  
People's Republic of China (PRC)  
Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW)  
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)  
Special Operations Forces (SOF)  
Submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM)  
Surface-to-air missile (SAM)  
Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)  
Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)  
U.N. Security Council (UNSC)



# INTRODUCTION

*Sameer Lalwani*

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Twenty years after India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons, observers continue to brace themselves during every crisis between these two nuclear-armed rivals for the possibility of severe escalation. Major interstate India-Pakistan crises began at the initial partition of colonial India and have always raised concerns from international observers due to the size of both countries and their formidable conventional capabilities. South Asian crises took a distinctly ominous turn in the 1980s, particularly with the 1986-87 Brasstacks crisis, when it became clear that both sides were developing nuclear arsenals. Crisis anxiety advanced into dread after both countries tested nuclear weapons in 1998. While the subcontinent has since experienced nearly incessant cross-border fire, interstate raids and skirmishes, and even a militarized conflict that many scholars classify as a war, the region has thus far managed to evade major escalation to full-scale conventional war and accompanying pressures to pursue nuclear use. Some analysts attribute this successful avoidance to deterrence, others to chance, and still others to third-party intervention.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the frequency of kinetic exchange, whether through cross-border fire or subconventional aggression, creates a large-looming and constant risk of a crisis, and any incident between two nuclear powers with a rivalry as old and bitter as India and Pakistan's demands greater attention and scrutiny. After all, based on the Interstate Crisis Behavior dataset, the India-Pakistan rivalry has produced more crises than any other dyad excluding the former U.S.-Soviet rivalry.<sup>2</sup>

## Dangerous Background Conditions, Increasing Risks

Recent geopolitical, economic, military, and social trends suggest a need for more concern than at any time since the 2008 Mumbai attack about renewed crisis onset, escalation, and instability between India and Pakistan. South Asia has returned as a site of numerous intersecting fault lines and contestations

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1. Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Vipin Narang, "Posturing for Peace? South Asia's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009/10): 38-78; Michael Krepon, "The Myth of Deterrence Stability Between Nuclear-Armed Rivals," in *Deterrence Instability and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon, Joshua T. White, Julia Thompson, Shane Mason (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2015), 15-41; and Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

2. Michael Brecher, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Kyle Beardsley, Patrick James, and David Quinn, *International Crisis Behavior Data Codebook*, version 12 (Durham and Los Angeles: International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Project, 2017), <http://sites.duke.edu/icbdata/data-collections>. Though the ICB Project employs a different definition and criteria to code an interstate "crisis" than some of the authors in this publication, it is noteworthy that it includes 13 crises between India-Pakistan, second only to the U.S.-USSR dyad of 23 crises, and more frequent than crises between historic rivals like the France-Germany, Germany-U.K., Israel-Egypt, Israel-Syria, North Korea-South Korea, and Angola-South Africa.

South Asia remains one of the most crisis-prone regions in the world with some of the highest levels of contested borders, militarized interstate disputes, and terrorist attacks.

over the past five years. Both the Obama administration's "rebalance" to Asia and the Trump administration's "Indo-Pacific" strategies have claimed India as a critical piece on the geopolitical chessboard. China has expanded its diplomatic, economic, and military presence in South Asia and behaved more aggressively toward India. New Delhi's need to balance against Beijing and India's aspirations for enhanced status to match its growing economic strength have propelled it to court "dehyphenation" from Pakistan in international relations. As a rising major power, India rejects being treated in the same club as Pakistan and therefore eschews many types of bilateral engagement.<sup>3</sup> These ambitions, alongside the downward spiral in India-Pakistan relations and demise of sustained "back channel" negotiations, have eroded most public mechanisms of dialogue and communication – previous conduits for stemming disinformation and controlling spiraling misperceptions.<sup>4</sup>

In the past five years, ceasefire violations and cross-border activity have steadily risen, increased public agitation and political violence have generated new waves of instability in Kashmir, and the politics of religious majoritarianism mixed with nationalism have intensified.<sup>5</sup> India and Pakistan have also traded accusations of subconventional warfare after recent terrorist attacks on security forces in Indian-controlled Punjab and portions of the Kashmir region and after horrific attacks on soft targets in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces.

Even though there has not been a major war in 50 years, South Asia remains one of the most crisis-prone regions in the world with some of the highest levels of contested borders, militarized interstate disputes, and terrorist attacks.

3. For more details on the logic of dehyphenation, see Ashley J. Tellis, "The Merits of Dehyphenation: Explaining U.S. Success in Engaging India and Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2008): 21-42.

4. Steve Coll, "The Back Channel: India and Pakistan's Secret Kashmir Talks," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2009; and Kallol Battacherjee, "Revive Back Channel Talks, Say Former Envoys," *The Hindu*, April 30, 2016.

5. See data from South Asia Terrorism Portal at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data\\_sheets/index.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/index.html); and "Religious Majoritarianism on the Subcontinent: Impacts on Domestic Tranquility and Regional Security" (event held at the Stimson Center, Washington, D.C., July 27, 2017), <https://www.stimson.org/content/religious-majoritarianism-subcontinent-impacts-domestic-tranquility-and-regional-security>.

India and Pakistan's continued expansion of their fissile material stockpiles and nuclear arsenals and modernization of their conventional forces add layers of risk, especially in periods of power transitions.

At the same time, it is important to maintain perspective. Key Indian and Pakistani decision-makers genuinely do not want war, and many of these concerning trends are not entirely new. Surveying past crisis episodes can provide instructive lessons and help anticipate future challenges while also reminding us that many of the seemingly novel features of contemporary crises have played out before.

For instance, many contemporary observers treat the current Indian government's approach to cross-border terrorism as "unprecedented and audacious."<sup>6</sup> Analysts have either lauded considerations of Indian airstrikes on Pakistan's territory or claims of cross-border "surgical strikes" as doctrinal innovations or condemned such actions as dangerous new escalations.<sup>7</sup> It is worth remembering, however, that both options were openly discussed at the highest levels nearly three decades ago during the 1990 Compound crisis. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen recount:

The BJP's [Bharatiya Janata Party's] national executive committee passed a resolution urging the Indian government to "knock out the training camps and transit routes of the terrorists." This stance was supported by the party's contention that: "Pakistan's many provocations amount to so many acts of war today. It is literally carrying on a war against India on Indian territory." The BJP further argued that the doctrine of "hot pursuit is a recognized defensive measure."<sup>8</sup>

This being said, Indian demand for cross-border strikes and hot pursuit can play out very differently among a host of new variables on both sides including enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, advanced air defense systems, standoff precision-strike weapons, and short-range nuclear delivery systems, all of which add new challenges and risks to crises than previously experienced on the subcontinent.

These background conditions increase the likelihood of an interstate crisis and thus warrant more vigorous investigations of crisis dynamics and behavior so that all parties can stave off the most dangerous consequences. For over 25 years, the Stimson Center has closely studied the cadence and dynamics of South Asian crises to better inform policymakers in New Delhi, Islamabad, Washington, D.C., and even Beijing. Much of this research has focused on

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6. Nitin A. Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi Way: Pathankot, Surgical Strikes and More* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 37.

7. For a range of assessments, see Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi Way*, 38-52; Sandeep Unnithan, "Why India Didn't Strike Pakistan after 26/11," *India Today*, October 14, 2015; Vipin Narang, "The Lines That Have Been Crossed," *The Hindu*, October 4, 2016; and Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, "Pakistan and India: The Art of Peace," *The Herald*, September 21, 2016.

8. P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 75.

nuclear risk reduction, escalation control, and crisis management measures. These studies have included deep dives into the 1990 Compound crisis, the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis, and the 2008 Mumbai crisis.<sup>9</sup> Given the ominous indicators described above, policymakers would benefit from taking stock of lessons from past crisis episodes distilled by scholars and practitioners. This volume continues that tradition with close empirical study of crisis behavior to better understand the causal processes, patterns, and lessons extracted from previous crises on the subcontinent.

## Book Objectives

In developing this project, we aimed to explore five key themes in unpacking crises on the subcontinent: (1) the prospect for detection of behavioral patterns and early warning of a crisis, (2) the domestic strategies and processes for crisis management, (3) the role of and receptivity toward third-party intervention, (4) the lessons distilled from multiple crises over two decades, and (5) how evolving environments might reshape future crises differently from conventional templates. Each of the chapters in this volume explores at least one of these themes, and most investigated more than one.

The chapters in this volume also uncovered some relatively new or evolving features in contemporary crises in terms of actors, stakes, and disrupters. These included new actors playing a larger role in regional affairs. Certainly China is not a newcomer to South Asia, but its expanded presence through enhanced defense relationships, trade and investment strategies, political influence, and forward military presence has increased its stake and risk exposure in the region, potentially incentivizing it to play a larger role in South Asian crises than it has in the past.<sup>10</sup> This volume explores China's role as not only a third-party mediator but also as a direct participant and even combatant in a future South Asian crisis.

The chapters also factored in new and evolving interests, particularly for the United States, which may opt for a less forward role in future crisis management.<sup>11</sup> Even under the Obama administration, the United States began to decrease its emphasis on nonproliferation and counterterrorism goals – mainstays of U.S. policy in South Asia for almost two decades. Instead the United States prioritized building a partnership with India for New Delhi to play a more active

9. See for example Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2006); and Michael Krepon and Mishi Faruqee, *Conflict Prevention and Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia: The 1990 Crisis*, Occasional Paper no. 17 (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 1994).

10. See Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler, and Shane Mason, *The Lure & Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2016); the special series "Southern (Dis)Comfort" hosted by *War on the Rocks* at <https://warontherocks.com/category/special-series/southern-discomfort>; and the various essays for the Stimson Center Off Ramps Initiative, <https://www.stimson.org/content/off-ramps>.

11. For instance, National Security Advisor General McMaster was quoted saying: "[t]he consensus view has been that engagement overseas is an unmitigated good, regardless of the circumstances... But there are problems that are maybe both intractable and of marginal interest to the American people, that do not justify investments of blood and treasure." See Mark Landler, "Trump, the Insurgent, Breaks with 70 Years of American Foreign Policy," *The New York Times*, December 28, 2017.

This ten-chapter edited volume assesses South Asian crises from 1987-2017 and considers implications for the future of crisis management on the subcontinent.

balancing role on the Eurasian landmass, invariably eroding U.S. willingness and ability to play a credible neutral mediator role in future South Asian crises.

Additionally, this volume paid close attention to new disrupters in South Asian crises. One of these is of course the media (including social media), which has been utilized for disinformation, polarization, hand tying, and potentially also signaling. Other disrupters in this process are new strategic platforms (e.g., sea-based nuclear weapons) and doctrines (e.g., “surgical strikes”) that potentially reshape how crises emerge and escalate (e.g., through accidents or through fears of preemption), and can compress windows for decision-making or intervention – making choices difficult even under ideal circumstances.

This ten-chapter edited volume assesses South Asian crises from 1987-2017 and considers implications for the future of crisis management on the subcontinent. Contributors range from seasoned retired diplomats to journalists and academics. The analysis presented features an eclectic mix of methodologies and data sources that include studies drawing upon new event datasets, Chinese-language strategic journals, scenario planning and net assessment models, interviews with strategic elites, and *de facto* participant observation through policy practitioner reflections on their crisis-management experiences. Harnessing multiple and mixed methodologies reveals a great deal, and we expect this approach to remain useful for future research on South Asian strategic and conflict dynamics.

This illuminates the roles played by third parties, the fourth estate, learning (and non-learning) organizations, arms buildups, institutionalized mechanisms of communication, confidence building measures, non-crises, and emerging disruptive trends. Overall, the chapters express a mix of optimism and pessimism. The pessimism stems from the expectation of future crises and the relative lack of preparedness by all parties, but optimism exists with possible roles for third parties and potential revitalized communication and dialogue mechanisms to mitigate and manage crises.

## Organization of the Volume

As indicated in the title, this collection of essays explores South Asian crises in terms of past lessons, evolving dynamics, and future trajectories by examining all stages from onset to termination as well as prospects for crisis prevention and conflict resolution.

In “Anatomy of a Crisis: Hypotheses on India-Pakistan Crisis Onset,” Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland propose potential conditions under which a state might perceive a particular provocation, distinct from other provocations, as the beginning of a crisis. Their chapter explicates key crisis attributes and generates a series of hypotheses involving abnormality, threat level, or time sensitivity surrounding the provocation that might influence escalation to a crisis. In order to identify some of the correlates of crisis onset, they then proceed to test these hypotheses on a new dataset of interstate provocations between 1998-2016, only some of which escalated into actual “crises.” The authors find that conventional explanations of crises such as lethality, target type, geography, and intentionality are less powerful correlates than commonly thought. Instead, they find that a crisis is ultimately a political choice shaped by certain features of the trigger event like complexity and duration along with surrounding atmospheric conditions of political leadership, media coverage, and ongoing bilateral relations. With a better look at the anatomy of the incipient stages of crises, this chapter offers a “red flag” analysis to help policymakers anticipate crisis onset and control escalation.

Shyam Saran’s chapter, “Organizing for Crisis Management: Evaluating India’s Experience in Three Case Studies,” draws on his personal experience with crisis management at the highest levels of the Indian government, including as Foreign Secretary. Saran lays out three case studies of crises handled by the Indian government — one that was deemed a success (the 2004 Iraq hostage crisis) and two whose handlings were deemed failures (the 2008 Mumbai crisis and 2016 Pathankot attack). In the successful case, the government followed established structures and procedures for crisis management; in the failed cases, the government mishandled the crises by abandoning the in-place crisis management architecture in favor of an *ad hoc* system, likely because those two crises were deemed more politically sensitive. In the future, Saran argues, the Indian government must not stray from established protocols for crisis management and instead should work to improve them through governance reforms, constant evaluation of past and present actions, and a comprehensive whole-of-government national security doctrine.

Riaz Mohammad Khan’s chapter, “Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management: Challenges in Pakistan-India Relations,” makes the case for a more systematized and institutionalized approach to crisis management. Though India and Pakistan have successfully managed crises and avoided major escalation, the

*ad hoc* nature of these high-level bilateral crisis engagements leaves too much room for error or miscalculation, and the dangers of crisis escalation persist. Differing political narratives, intractable territorial disputes, and newly developing strategic doctrines all present great risks to both the normalization of bilateral relations and the containment and prevention of future crises. To contend with these issues, Khan suggests both India and Pakistan should work toward maintaining open and institutionalized channels of communication, strengthening existing confidence-building measures while developing new ones, and reviving a conflict resolution dialogue.

Saikat Datta's chapter, "Intelligence, Strategic Assessment, and Decision Process Deficits: The Absence of Indian Learning from Crisis to Crisis," offers a scathing critique of the organizational pathologies that have continuously hampered the Indian intelligence and national security establishment's management of crises with Pakistan. Failures to obtain or process accurate intelligence, produce strategic assessments for effective responses, and clearly control messages between crisis management actors and domestic and international audiences are vulnerabilities that have not been addressed since the national security breakdowns leading to the 1962 India-China War. The same operational failures that troubled India during the 1999 Kargil War and 2008 Mumbai crisis persisted in the 2016 Uri attack. The Indian government's responses to these re-occurring deficiencies of its security apparatus have been slow and unimaginative. Review committees have clearly offered lessons given their diagnoses of failure, but this learning has not penetrated the strategic establishment, which struggles to implement basic operational measures like a clear delineation of constituent roles. Datta contends that a coordinated process for responding to bilateral crises rests upon implementation of high-level reforms learned from past failures.

Ruhee Neog's chapter, "Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises," offers a timely account of the historic and evolving role that the media plays in bilateral crises. The Indian media, government, and public all interact with each other during crises to form self-referential news cycles; each limits and motivates certain actions from the other while navigating their own unique internal constraints (e.g., profit motives in media and diplomatic concerns in government). In general, however, information dissemination during times of crisis is ultimately dictated by the government and policy elites to the media, which then frame the discussion based on public demands. While the media does not have any direct impact on crisis policymaking, it does have a role in communicating and framing government actions to the general public, in turn shifting the state of democratic politics and civil society to indirectly affect national security policies. In particular, Neog finds that the media will amplify the narratives of nationalistic unified governments while criticizing those of weak and ineffective governments.

Zafar Khan's chapter, "Crisis Management in Nuclear South Asia: A Pakistani Perspective," argues that the introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia has successfully decreased the likelihood of large-scale war between India and Pakistan, as shown during the 1999 Kargil conflict, the 2008 Mumbai crisis, and the 2016 Uri, Pathankot, and Nagrota attacks. However, nuclear weapons have not prevented the outbreak of bilateral crises that arise from the region's most intractable problems (Kashmir and terrorism). Because solutions to these issues are unlikely in the short term, it is imperative that both India and Pakistan continue to improve their crisis management mechanisms in order to mitigate the harm from inevitable future crises. The two countries – in concert with international actors (most importantly the United States and China) – should also work to improve confidence-building measures and begin discussion of a regional arms control regime until the long-standing issues between the two nations can be resolved.

The chapter by Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland, "China and Crisis Management in South Asia," reviews the history of China's interests and involvement in South Asian crises. The unfolding strategic competition in Southern Asia has shifted dynamics of crisis escalation and management on the subcontinent and the broader Indian Ocean region. Today, a deep study of India-Pakistan crises and crisis management requires more substantive attention to the growing role of China. Despite China's long history of engagement on the subcontinent, during severe India-Pakistan crises, it has largely deferred third-party management to the United States and the international community. The authors posit, however, that China's third-party involvement in escalation management of South Asian crises has gradually expanded over time. A growing regional and global presence may increase both risks and incentives for even greater Chinese involvement. In a future India-Pakistan crisis, an enhanced Chinese role could play out in some form of joint third-party management with the United States.

The chapter by Michael Krepon and Liv Dowling, "Crisis Intensity and Nuclear Signaling in South Asia," draws lessons from comparisons of five major "nuclear-tinged" crises in South Asia along several measures of crisis intensity. With this historical context, the authors then examine how evolving nuclear capabilities in Pakistan and India and a shifting international environment will affect crisis management in the future. While the United States will likely remain the pre-eminent actor in South Asian crisis management, China's growing influence in Pakistan and the declining role of the United States in Afghanistan will likely shape future attempts to avoid uncontrolled escalation on the subcontinent.

Iskander Rehman's chapter, "New Horizons, New Risks: A Scenario-based Approach to Thinking about the Future of Crisis Stability in South Asia," projects hypothetical crisis scenarios in South Asia as a thought exercise for policymakers. The first scenario examines the consequences of increased Chinese

involvement and exposure in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and a crisis in which the Chinese military risks being drawn into a militarized conflict (rather than as a mediator as Sun and Haegeland consider) between India and Pakistan. The second scenario looks at the consequences of naval nuclear developments in South Asia, along with ambiguous first-use policies, and projects a crisis that begins at sea. In both scenarios, the nature of the crisis and assumptions traditionally baked into management processes are challenged by the introduction of new and highly consequential variables. These exercises may help analysts extract lessons from creative but plausible scenarios by teasing out potential implications from the interaction of strategic realities and disruptive trends.

In the last chapter in this compilation, “New Challenges for Crisis Management,” Michael Krepon highlights the most likely contingencies for future India-Pakistan crises and identifies indications and warning signs indicative of an impending crisis. He surveys U.S. strategic and regional interests that could be placed at risk in a severe crisis – interests that led the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations to play a very active role in crisis management. He then offers a wide-ranging notional crisis management “playbook” that could be adapted for use if Washington were to adopt an activist role in a future crisis.

## Gaps in Analysis and a Future Research Agenda

Invariably, there are always analysis gaps in an endeavor such as this one, some of which we anticipated and some that we discovered closer to completion of this volume. These gaps reveal scope for future research on how economic consequences, public attitudes, and new technology can shape crisis onset, dynamics, and outcomes.

The economics of crises offers one avenue for further exploration. Conflict is generally costly because it destroys productive infrastructure and human capital or consumes it for unproductive activity. A protracted crisis or tension can deter investment, trigger capital flight, suspend trade, and undermine confidence in markets, all of which have extremely negative impacts on a nation’s economy. Thus, empirically examining losses, opportunity costs, or risk premiums that the subcontinent has suffered during periodic crises and from constant tensions offers an intriguing angle for future research.<sup>12</sup>

Another element of crisis ripe for further systematic analysis would be the role of domestic audiences and pressures. These elements tend to be implicitly or anecdotally a part of most accounts of crises but are rarely assessed for actual impact on decision-making. Neog’s chapter on the role of the media touches upon this subject, but more work is required. There is evidence to suggest that

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12. Sameer Lalwani, “Danger Zone: Posturing Against Pakistan Can Be Costly for India,” *Hindustan Times*, September 23, 2015. An example of this in another dyad is Raymond Fisman, Yasushi Hamano, and Yongxiang Wang, “Nationalism and Economic Exchange: Evidence from Shocks to Sino-Japanese Relations,” *The Review of Financial Studies* 27, no. 9 (2014): 2,626-60.

both the Indian and Pakistani publics are growing increasingly hawkish, attentive to foreign policy, and cavalier about the prospects for conflict or even the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, since economic issues tend to dominate voting behavior in both countries, it is possible that escalation risks or economic costs might mitigate such pressures instead. Understanding the role and directions of South Asian public attitudes in crisis could help policymakers anticipate and potentially manage domestic pressures.

A third area for study is how new technology being incorporated into both militaries will impact crises. Technology is often recognized as disruptive, but we have yet to fully appreciate how new military technologies might create jumps in risk during a crisis. Will the adoption of non-kinetic cyber offensives or cyber disinformation campaigns still provoke crises? This may return us to a period similar to the 1990 Compound crisis when fear, uncertainty, and political weakness were sufficient to spark a crisis without a major kinetic triggering event. As both militaries adopt pieces of the military-technical revolution in the name of modernization, will their strategies and doctrines generally drift toward false optimism that increases their proclivity for crises as well as escalation?<sup>14</sup> Will enhanced speed reduce the space for quality tactical and strategic decision-making? Will enhanced precision and standoff distance increase hubris over escalation control and calibration cutting through the fog and friction of war?<sup>15</sup> The impact of evolving technology on South Asian crisis dynamics and behavior deserves more serious attention.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these gaps, this book offers a rare, wide-angle lens investigating South Asian crises from multiple vantage points, analytical approaches, and data sources. It provides plenty of new empirical evidence and mixed-method analysis for readers to contemplate, policymakers to utilize, and future scholars to build upon. We hope this continues the Stimson tradition of contributing rigorous analysis for pragmatic solutions to some of the world's most intractable problems.

## Acknowledgements

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13. Benjamin A. Valentino and Scott D. Sagan, "Atomic Attraction," *The Indian Express*, June 3, 2016; "Gilani Weekly Poll: Cyberletter, Week 208," *Gallup Pakistan*, February 2-4, 2015, [http://gallup.com.pk/bb\\_old\\_site/News/208.pdf](http://gallup.com.pk/bb_old_site/News/208.pdf); and "Opinion Poll: International, India," *Gallup Pakistan*, Press Release, January 3, 2017, <http://gallup.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/3-January-2017-English-1.pdf>.

14. On elements of the military-technical revolution, see Eliot Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1996): 37-54. On false optimism, see Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1988), 35-56.

15. On fog and friction of war, see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75-89.

16. For assessments of how technological advancements are reshaping potential crisis dynamics in the U.S.-China relationship, see Caitlin Talmadge, "Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (2017): 50-92; and Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security* 41, no. 1 (2016): 7-48.

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Sameer Lalwani  
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# ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

## Explaining Crisis Onset in India-Pakistan Relations

*Sameer Lalwani & Hannah Haegeland*

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In late November 2008, terrorists besieged two luxury hotels in a posh section of India's commercial capital, Mumbai, during a three-day assault that resulted in the deaths of more than 170 people. The attack marked India's 9/11 moment; indeed, the episode was quickly dubbed "26/11." The fact that a Pakistani-based terrorist organization had conducted the complex assault triggered an immediate interstate crisis between India and Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the terrorist group quickly attributed with responsibility for the attack, had close ties to the Pakistan military and intelligence services, raising suspicions that the attack was state-sponsored. Tensions ran high as the Indian government convened national security meetings and considered military response options, including air strikes on LeT's headquarters in the middle of the densely populated Punjab province and air strikes on suspected terrorist staging areas in Pakistan-controlled areas of the disputed Kashmir region. Ultimately the Indian government opted not to conduct a military response – a decision attributed to Indian dysfunctional decision-making, weak-willed leadership, limited military capabilities, a robust Pakistani deterrence posture, and U.S. crisis intervention efforts.<sup>1</sup>

What is striking is that two years earlier, LeT was attributed responsibility for conducting a similar mass casualty attack, but without triggering expectations of a crisis. During evening rush hour on Mumbai's heavily trafficked commuter rail system, seven pressure cooker bombs exploded in tight coordination over an 11-minute span killing over 200 people and injuring over 700.<sup>2</sup> The attack on July 11, 2006, was dubbed India's "7/11." Although blame quickly fell on LeT and Pakistan for the attack, there appeared to have been little discussion of Indian military options against Pakistan, no convening of national security officials to discuss a response to Pakistan, and no serious consideration of a display or use of force. Furthermore, despite higher casualties than 26/11, the

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1. See for example Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management After the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); and Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

2. "Mumbai Bombers 'Will Never Win,'" *BBC News*, July 12, 2006.

Mumbai commuter rail attack is not included in a traditional accounting of major India-Pakistan crises.<sup>3</sup>

This prompts an interesting puzzle – why did one event trigger a crisis while the other did not? The episodes were roughly matched in terms of location, fatalities, the suspected perpetrating group, and type of trigger, yet the 2008 event resulted in a “crisis episode” while the 2006 event was treated merely as a terrorist incident. Eerily similar serial bomb blasts had been set off in Mumbai in 1993 that killed more than 250 and injured over 700. Within days of the bombing, the group responsible was publicly linked to Pakistan, yet no crises ensued.<sup>4</sup>

This is not the first time this empirical puzzle has emerged. This pattern of “non-crises” or “almost-crises” has recurred in the Indian-Pakistan relationship. In 2001, a terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament that only resulted in the loss of a few lives triggered the first part of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis. The crisis involved massive military mobilization on both sides and intensified shows of force including artillery exchanges across the Line of Control (LoC) but stopped short of war. Before this event, however, there was a strikingly similar terrorist attack just a year earlier on another iconic symbol – the historic Red Fort – in the heart of New Delhi.<sup>5</sup> The Parliament attack erupted into a major crisis while the Red Fort attack did not trigger such escalatory pressures and went comparatively unnoticed.

In January 2016, a Pakistan-based terrorist group attacked an Indian airbase in Pathankot, Punjab, killing seven Indian soldiers. Instead of a crisis or India-Pakistan standoff, both countries sought to collaborate on a joint investigation of the attack. By contrast, in September 2016, another cross-border attack on an army installation in Uri, Kashmir, was believed to have violated a red line. This attack triggered a crisis episode for India and Pakistan and eventually resulted in limited cross-border retaliatory strikes by India, which the Indian Army described as “surgical strikes.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to terrorist attacks, military exercises and cross-border incursions appear to also have varying effects on crisis onset. At times, mass military exercises have triggered crisis episodes, like India’s Brasstacks exercise that triggered the 1987 Brasstacks Crisis or Pakistan’s Zarb-e-Momin that precipitated the 1990 Compound crisis. While there has been much consternation over recent Indian military exercises in 2012 and 2015, they have not resulted in crises.<sup>7</sup> An unexpected second major Indian strike corps exercise in one year (2015) offered

3. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 2.; P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); and Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace? South Asia’s Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability,” *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009/10): 38-78.

4. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 28.

5. The Red Fort is no mere artifact. Though no longer in use as a government building, it is the iconic site closely associated with the first major Indian rebellion against the British in 1857 and where every year on India’s independence day the prime minister hoists the Indian flag and delivers a speech to the nation.

6. “Surgical Strikes: Full Text of Indian Army DGMO Lt Gen Ranbir Singh’s Press Conference,” *The Indian Express*, September 29, 2016.

7. Manu Pubby, “Pakistan Seeks Information on Indian Army’s Exercise in Rajasthan,” *The Economic Times*, November 6, 2015.

During the past few decades several potential crisis events have punctuated the India-Pakistan rivalry, but only some of these have escalated to the level of a crisis.

an uncharacteristically low level of information besides pre-notification but did not trigger a crisis in the same manner as in decades prior.<sup>8</sup>

Pakistan's military incursion to take over Loonda Post in 2002 bears striking similarity to its incursion into the Kargil sector in 1999.<sup>9</sup> The latter event triggered an actual limited war between two nuclear powers for only the second time in history.<sup>10</sup> Both incidents began with a quiet Pakistani troop movement to capture Indian-controlled territory in the Kargil heights. In each incursion, India learned of Pakistan's infiltration only after assaults on Indian forces. Both ultimately resulted in an Indian military response and recapture of territory, although only the Kargil incident escalated to the level of crisis. South Asian history is littered with similarly patterned provocations that were prime *candidates* for an international crisis, with only a few actualizing into crisis onset.

In summary, during the past few decades several *potential* crisis events have punctuated the India-Pakistan rivalry, but only some of these have escalated to the level of a crisis. Why then do some events trigger a crisis episode while others do not? This narrow empirical question introduces some broader theoretical questions: What is an international or interstate crisis? What triggers crisis onset? How can scholars, analysts, and policymakers better anticipate these episodes? The essay seeks to address these questions.

India and Pakistan have fought four wars and are the only two states with nuclear weapons that regularly exchange fire. Beyond providing rich data for crisis study, understanding how crises between India and Pakistan are triggered – and which characteristics of a provocation have the most escalatory potential – can have critical “red flag” utility for crisis managers in India and Pakistan and in third-party countries with a high stake in limiting escalation short of the nuclear threshold.<sup>11</sup> Thus far, the literature has made inferences about the causes

8. Ali Ahmed, “The Strange Silence Surrounding an Indian Military Exercise,” *The Diplomat*, November 2, 2015.

9. Praveen Swami, “When Pakistan Took Loonda Post,” *Frontline*, 2002.

10. Peter R. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

11. Traditionally, the United States has played this third-party manager role. In particular, crisis management has been a key priority for the United States since the 1998 nuclear tests added a nuclear tinge to all India-Pakistan crises. In the future, however, China may play a larger role in preventing escalation. For more on this, see the essay in this volume by Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland, “China and Crisis Management in South Asia.”

of crises by studying a handful of the major ones while neglecting minor crises and altogether ignoring the “dogs that do not bark” – that is, the observations of *candidate* crises or provocations that did not actually trigger a crisis episode.

This essay proceeds as follows. First, it offers a definition of an interstate crisis and its essential properties. Second, it details how we approach crisis onset and the importance of studying it specifically in the context of India and Pakistan. Third, it unpacks how a state retains agency to “select” into crises (or not) and proposes a simple model for the stages of crisis onset.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, it briefly describes our research design including data sources and how we identify crises. Fifth, it draws on the literature on international crises and India-Pakistan rivalry to distill some plausible hypotheses to explain crisis onset, as well as ways to operationalize and measure them. Finally, the essay presents some analysis of our initial findings and concludes with suggested future avenues for additional research.

## What is a Crisis?

Every interstate war and conflict starts as a crisis. To better anticipate crises and understand their causes, this essay first seeks clarity on the meaning of crisis and its properties. For this, we turn to the extensive literature on the subject, mostly written during the Cold War, to unpack essential properties and dynamics. Snyder and Diesing describe a crisis as an international conflict episode – a sequence of interactions between two states – lying in an “intermediate zone” between peace and war.<sup>13</sup> Crisis – from the Greek word *krisis*, which means a decision point<sup>14</sup> – involves a “moment of truth” for decision and action and serves as a critical site of bargaining.<sup>15</sup> International crises are distinct from normal decisions affecting interstate relations because of the following perceptions: threats to core interests, abnormal intensity, higher stakes, uncertainty, and time constraints.

The first feature of a crisis is a threat or challenge to existing structure or a state’s vital interests, goals, or values.<sup>16</sup> Without “skin in the game” a state would not be provoked by what otherwise might be considered reckless or dangerous actions. The second feature is a surprising intensification or seemingly sudden deviation from the mean – “a distortion in the type and an increase in the intensity of disruptive interactions between two or more adversaries.”<sup>17</sup> The concern is that

12. James D. Fearon, “Selection Effects and Deterrence,” *International Interactions* 28 (2002): 5-29.

13. Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 10.

14. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 4.

15. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 4.

16. Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 10-11; Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *International Crisis Behavior Project, 1918-2001* (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2003); and Charles F. Herrmann, “Indicators of International Political Crises: Some Initial Steps toward Prediction,” in *Theory and Practices of Events Research: Studies in International Actions and Interactions*, ed. Edward Azar and D. Ben Dak (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1974), 233-43.

17. Brecher and Wilkenfeld, *International Crisis Behavior Project*.

intensification of events and forces “substantially above ‘normal’ (i.e., average) level...increases the likelihood of violence occurring in the system.”<sup>18</sup> Related of course is a third central feature of international crisis interactions, which is “the perception of a dangerously high probability of war.”<sup>19</sup>

A fourth feature is incomplete information and uncertainty. Schelling writes:

The essence of the crisis is its unpredictability. The ‘crisis’ that is confidently believed to involve no danger of things getting out of hand is no crisis; no matter how energetic the activity, as long as things are believed safe there is no crisis. And a ‘crisis’ that is known to entail disaster or large losses or great changes of some sort that are completely foreseeable, is also no crisis; it is over as it begins, there is no suspense. It is the essence of a crisis that the participants are not fully in control of events; they take steps and make decisions that raise or lower the danger, but in a realm of risk and uncertainty.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, a crisis involves a temporal dimension where “policy-makers perceive themselves to be acting under time constraints.”<sup>21</sup> Studies employing simulations or experiments in laboratory-like environments to evaluate which components of a crisis have the most discernible effect on decision processes found that the amount of time available to make a decision was the most impactful variable.<sup>22</sup> Standard information, coordination, and miscalculation problems inherent to state decision-making can be exacerbated under time pressure, intensifying uncertainty and the risk of war.

Based on this analysis, we define an interstate crisis as *a decision point between peace and war in which a state perceives an intensification of a cross-border threat to national interests, heightened uncertainty, and time constraints and at least considers retaliation by force*. We use this definition to evaluate whether empirical events between 1998 and 2016 can be categorized as actual “crises” (as perceived by India).

In the context of South Asia, misperceptions about military exercises or mobilization, fears of pre-emption, gray zone incursions, and cross-border attacks have precipitated crises. In recent years, the most commonly feared and analyzed South Asia crisis scenario arises from an attack by a violent nonstate group.<sup>23</sup> Though India averages three terrorist incidents per day,<sup>24</sup> the Indian government generally considers itself to be in a crisis when it suffers an abnormally significant terrorist

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18. Oran R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 10.

19. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 6.

20. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 97.

21. Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, 12.

22. Charles F. Herrmann, “Threat Time and Surprise: A Simulation of International Crisis,” in *International Crises: Insights from Behavioral Research*, ed. Charles F. Herrmann (New York: Free Press, 1972), 187-211.

23. For example, see Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, *Not War, Not Peace: Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

24. According to the Global Terrorism Database, India had 1,019 terrorist incidents in 2016.

attack, which it often attributes (rightly or wrongly) to Pakistan. Beyond the inherent destruction and loss of life in an attack, major incidents are perceived as breakdowns in immediate and general deterrence that could invite further harm.<sup>25</sup> These events galvanize Indian decision-makers to consider retaliatory responses but are shadowed by uncertainty and the risk of escalation to war between two nuclear powers. Pressure for making rapid decisions emerges from a desire to satiate the domestic audience, avoid crisis interveners, and to effectively communicate to external audiences its retaliation responses to the initial provocation. This particular type of crisis scenario is the subject of this study, though there are other potential crisis scenarios worth examining.

## Why Study Crisis Onset?

A crisis offers a unique window for scholars and practitioners into international relations behavior because it “tends to galvanize, clarify, and concentrate many important elements in international politics, and to reveal the interaction between them more explicitly than in other empirical contexts.”<sup>26</sup> Studying crises also helps practitioners draw lessons on how to manage, intervene, and potentially preempt future crises. If it can be rendered discernible, the threshold of “onset” in a crisis would inherently serve as the very first focal point to reduce risks of escalation.<sup>27</sup>

Scholarship on international crises disaggregates four distinct phases: onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact.<sup>28</sup> While much contemporary work has covered the last three, onset studies appear less frequently, potentially because of their difficulty. The question for governments is knowing when they are in a crisis. Sometimes these events present themselves starkly – such as an attack like 9/11 – but sometimes they present themselves only gradually, such as the slow-moving refugee crisis of 2015 spurred by convulsive violence and collapsing regimes in the Middle East.

Crisis onset was thoroughly studied in the Cold War 1980s and 1990s by scholars trying to identify system effects because any international crisis could have become a flashpoint for great power intervention, competition, and conflict. Even if the United States and the Soviet Union were not the primary actors in a crisis, they still risked being drawn into a shooting war and all the risks of escalation to total nuclear war. Crises nested prior to and within the Korean War offer good examples of where secondary parties to the conflict chose to

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25. Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 62, 67-70.

26. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 5.

27. For more on focal points, see Dan Altman, “Advancing without Attacking: The Strategic Game around the Use of Force,” *Security Studies*, forthcoming.

28. Michael Brecher and Patrick James, “Patterns of Crisis Management,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 3 (1988): 426-456; and Michael Brecher, “Crisis Escalation: Model and Findings,” *International Political Science Review* 17, no. 2 (April 1996): 215-230.

operate in secrecy for escalation control.<sup>29</sup> The superpowers sought to anticipate and prevent the outbreak of major international crises to stave off a more serious confrontation.

In the post–Cold War era, interest in crisis onset decreased, at least for those entities concerned with major power war. The number of conflicts increased, but the risk of such events drawing in nuclear powers in a unipolar world seemed remote. Comparatively less attention is paid to the causes of crisis onset in international security politics than, for instance, the causes of international financial crises. The interests in systemic analysis of international crisis onset shifted to early warning and predictions of civil war onset,<sup>30</sup> potentially for humanitarian concerns such as the U.S.-sponsored Political Instability Taskforce.

Today, the study of interstate crisis explores dynamics like escalation, crisis bargaining, management, coercion outcomes, and consequences but tends to treat the crisis itself as exogenous. Crises seem to emerge from the vicissitudes of international politics, and the work that does seek to explain onset tends to look for immediate triggers specific to individual cases rather than more systematic approaches. Thus, this essay seeks to account for crisis onset by examining the conditions under which seemingly inert military-political events transform into crises.

### *India-Pakistan Crises*

In addition to analytical and conceptual value, there is a more practical application for unpacking crisis onset. The risks of escalation in nuclearized South Asia are severe. The United States has been involved in de-escalating and defusing nearly every major India-Pakistan crisis over the past 30 years.<sup>31</sup> In fact, some scholars have argued that triggering U.S. involvement in a crisis is inherently part of Pakistan's strategic deterrent posture.<sup>32</sup>

The region's history of close calls coupled with the stakes of nuclear-tinged crises provides sound justification to reexamine crisis onset, specifically in the dyad of India and Pakistan. While attempts at crisis prediction may be a fraught exercise, scholars and policymakers would profit from a closer understanding of why crises erupt in South Asia. Now that the prospect for nuclear-tinged crises are (re)emerging in other dyads like the United States and Russia and the United States and China, the findings from South Asia might yield useful mechanisms and process insights applicable to other regions anticipating crises.

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29. Austin Carson, "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War," *International Organization* 70, no. 1 (2016): 103-31.

30. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

31. See Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*; and Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*.

32. Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 57-76.

## The Subjectivity of Crisis: Perceptions and Political Incentives

India's divergent reactions to the 26/11 and 7/11 attacks described earlier in the essay suggest a degree of subjectivity and agency in identifying a crisis. In fact, perception (and misperception) conditions all these components of a crisis and therefore constitutes an essential, if obvious, intervening variable between a provocation and crisis. Snyder and Diesing term this intervening stage a "precipitant," which is when a state perceives an "intolerable situation" or an "especially provocative act" brought upon by an adversary.<sup>33</sup>

The sense of tension within a crisis is subjectively felt within states even if it derives from some objective conditions or events.<sup>34</sup> There is an inherent subjectivity in that the precipitant functions as a convenient legitimizer and only a proximate cause. Snyder and Diesing observe:

When McGeorge Bundy was asked about the importance of the Communist raid on the Pleiku base triggering the start of U.S. bombing of north Vietnam, he replied "Pleikus are like streetcars" – one will come along eventually if you wait long enough.<sup>35</sup>

Different parties to a crisis can maintain different perceptions of the timing and intensity of it, or whether there was even a crisis to begin with.<sup>36</sup> For instance, some scholars and practitioners cast doubt on whether India and Pakistan were really concerned during the 1990 Compound crisis, while the United States perceived it as very serious and containing nuclear risks.<sup>37</sup> In other words, a provocative incident may not be perceived as abnormal or threaten national interests or values equally. Moreover, the sense of urgency for a decision or the beliefs about the degree of unpredictability or risk of war may vary tremendously.

India and Pakistan routinely engage in a choreography of cross-border fire across the disputed LoC without triggering a crisis. The thousands of incidents of annual cross-border fire between 1998 and 2002 slowed to a trickle after the 2003 ceasefire agreement. That agreement slowly eroded and over the past five years annual incidents have climbed again into the hundreds. Nevertheless, it is unclear if any India-Pakistan interstate crisis has erupted because of this cross-border firing activity, whereas on nearly any other border, this might constitute an act of war.

Some provocations might undeniably thrust a state into crisis, such as a militarized surprise attack like Japan's on Pearl Harbor or Pakistan's incursion into the Indian-controlled Kargil region in 1999. Other provocations might have no

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33. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 11.

34. *Ibid.*, 9.

35. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

36. *Ibid.*, 17.

37. Chari, Cheema, Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 80-117 and Karthika Sasikumar, "Crisis and Opportunity: The 1990 Nuclear Crisis in South Asia" *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur (New York: Routledge, 2009), 76-99.

If a state does not perceive any or all elements central to a crisis, it may not be “alarmed.” This would render the candidate triggering event “inert” and indistinguishable from routine international interactions.

risk of generating a crisis, such as the routine incursion of animals across the Indian and Pakistani border, which are sometimes suspected by local police of espionage.<sup>38</sup> But between these extremes, a wide range of agency exists to select into a crisis, both due to varying perceptions of seriousness as well as varying political incentive structures.

Perception is a critical yet capricious variable that affords agency to one or more of the states in the strategic interaction of a potential international crisis. If a state does not perceive any or all elements central to a crisis, it may not be “alarmed.” This would render the candidate triggering event “inert” and indistinguishable from routine international interactions.

In addition to subjective perceptions, rational political logic may treat events and episodes like a crisis. For instance, if a provocation is public and galvanizes a domestic audience, states may have incentives to signal to their public they are taking the challenge seriously and at least deliberating over a response, if not executing some retaliatory actions.

By contrast, if a state subject to a provocation believes any reaction would generate a high probability of war and certain defeat because the other side possesses escalation dominance, it might sublimate its normative concerns about sovereignty and strategically choose not to acknowledge or select into a crisis so as not to incur the international reputation and domestic audience costs of “backing down.” Weaker actors may do this on a regular basis in response to aggressive moves by more powerful actors. Though the 2007 Israeli airstrike on Syria’s Al Kibar nuclear facility could have sparked a crisis, the Syrian government’s conspicuously muted response might have been based on a calculation that it had nothing to gain and much to lose from an aggressive retaliatory response.<sup>39</sup>

Knowing that perception and strategic calculations can mediate the identification

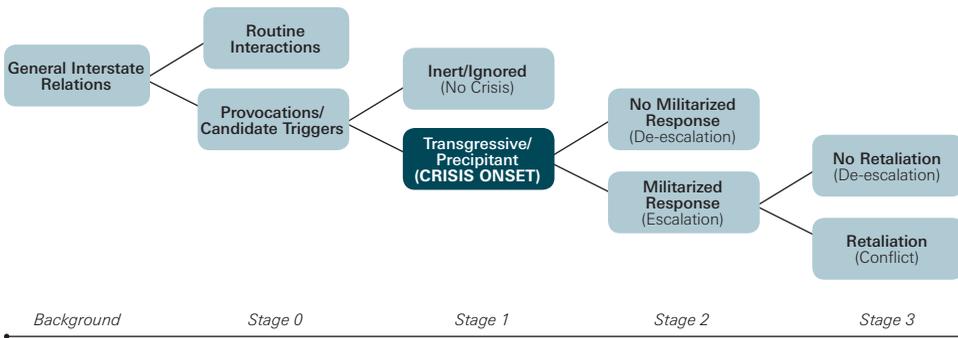
38. Elizabeth Frock, “Pakistan ‘Arrests’ Monkey for Crossing India Border,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2011; and “‘Spy Pigeon’ Detained in India After Crossing Border from Pakistan,” *Dawn*, May 29, 2015.

39. Avner Cohen and Leonard Spector, “Israel’s Airstrike on Syria’s Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime,” *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2008.

or selection into a “crisis,” the question that follows is: When might a candidate crisis become an actual crisis? The puzzle described in the beginning of the essay suggests both South Asian states, but particularly India, have exercised a degree of agency in selecting into crises.

To explain this, a decision tree (*Figure 1*) attempts to map the entire process of how a crisis might unfold. What is generally treated as an exogenous condition can actually be conceived as a choice that states “enter into” by deeming an event transgressive. Triggers are treated by the literature as self-evident *ex ante* when in fact episodes like the anecdotes in the introduction suggest this is not the case. States may choose – whether publicly or privately – to identify events or actions as transgressive, potentially based on a strategic or political calculus. It is this first choice or first move that constitutes crisis onset. If and when the other party (or parties) acknowledges this first move, the states enter into a crisis.

**Figure 1: Stages of Pre-Crisis, Crisis Onset, and Escalation**



By examining a wide range of provocations or candidate trigger events – some of which result in crisis onset and some of which remain dormant – this essay (and larger project) aims to identify what features of a provocation correlate to crisis onset. With this finding we hope to unpack the political or strategic logics at work.

## Research Design

The dependent variable this essay seeks to investigate is the well-studied event of an interstate crisis and, specifically, interstate crises between India and Pakistan. Many studies of interstate crises treat the crisis itself as an independent variable to explain other phenomena in international politics like interstate war,<sup>40</sup> as a

40. Brecher, *Crisis Escalation*.

All precipitants involve provocations, but not all provocations precipitate crises. We are interested in understanding what types or under what conditions provocations precipitate crises and when provocations remain dormant.

unit of analysis to explain phenomena like crisis bargaining or compellence,<sup>41</sup> or focus on explaining the dynamics of historical crises.<sup>42</sup> This study follows the third strain and specifically seeks to explain the onset of an interstate crisis. While most rich qualitative studies of historic crises generate a number of plausible explanations for crisis onset, dynamics, and termination, they tend to focus on what are widely regarded as crises in retrospect. The purposeful probing of known crises reveals a lot about the dynamics within crises but not much about their origins.<sup>43</sup> To study crisis onset, we examined what we identify as a prior stage, the “provocation,” which may or may not become what Snyder and Diesing term a “precipitant” – a country’s active response to a provocation that then generates a crisis. The provocation serves as the unit of analysis for this study. All precipitants involve provocations, but not all provocations precipitate crises. We are interested in understanding what types or under what conditions provocations precipitate crises and when provocations remain dormant.

### *Data*

In an ideal world, this study would examine the correlates of precipitants that yield crises but also evaluate how they stack up against all the “dogs that do not bark” – episodes similar in most ways to crisis-yielding events that do not become crises. However, while such an approach would be methodologically sound, it is empirically very difficult as it would require uncovering a vast range of events like diplomatic spats and routine military exercises that are generally kept secret or remain unobservable for data collection.

Consequently, we bound the observations in our dataset to a set of cross-border provocations, mostly by violent nonstate actors, because of their conspicuousness.

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41. Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

42. Lebow, *Between Peace and War*.

43. This is commonly referred to in social science as “selection on the dependent variable.” See Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 129-37.

We generated a list of 51 observable provocations based on actions perpetrated against Indian targets from 1998-2016 by militant organizations with distinctly cross-border origins and links.<sup>44</sup> Even though domestic organizations like the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or United Liberation Front of Assam perpetrate terrorist attacks that certainly serve as provocations to the Indian state, they are not international provocations that generate the risk of an interstate crisis. In the dataset generated, all but one of the observations were attacks perpetrated by nonstate groups believed by India to be operating with material support from the Pakistani state; thus, they all bore the potential for generating an India-Pakistan interstate crisis.<sup>45</sup>

### *Identifying India-Pakistan “Crisis”*

While this study treats “provocation” as the unit of analysis, the dependent variable of interest is interstate “crisis.” To identify specific instances of crisis (at least from India’s vantage point) from this broad set of provocations, we looked for event details that met our criteria for a crisis described above – that is, perceptions of a challenge or threat, abnormal intensity, anxiety about the chance of violence or war, and time and information constraints. Crisis onset is meant to be distinct from crisis intensity, which derives in part from the choice for and type of retaliation.<sup>46</sup>

An event was coded as a case of “crisis” if it met two objective criteria.<sup>47</sup> First, it was either previously coded as a crisis by the International Crisis Behavior dataset (ICB),<sup>48</sup> previously coded as a crisis by reputable South Asian security

44. These include the Haqqani Network, Harkat ul-Ansar, Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami (HUJI), Harkut-ul-Mujahideen, Indian Mujahideen (IM), Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). It is important to clarify why we consider a number of observations where IM was believed to be the perpetrator of the attack as “cross-border.” There is some debate over whether IM is an affiliate of LeT, interlinked, or one and the same. (Praveen Swami, “The Indian Mujahidin and Lashkar-i-Tayyiba’s Transnational Networks,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 6, June 2009.) At times IM was acting at the behest of LeT, at other times, they acted semi-autonomously. (Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 143.) What is clear is that Indian intelligence (and consequently Indian media) either portrays them as intertwined or simply attributes all provocations by IM to LeT, especially in the immediate aftermath of an attack. (C. Christine Fair, “Students Islamic Movement of India and the Indian Mujahideen: An Assessment,” *Asia Policy*, no. 9 (2010): 101-19.) Even if in retrospect, these groups have been re-identified as distinct, the treatment and perception in the immediate aftermath of a provocation is what is most relevant, because it is that period that can easily trigger crisis onset. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 IM attacks in Jaipur, Ahmedabad, and Bangalore, these were publicly considered by Indian Intelligence Bureau officers to be jointly planned by LeT and HUJI and executed by IM. (Vicky Nanjappa, “How the Indian Mujahideen Was Formed,” *Rediff News*, July 29, 2008.) IM is considered “the Indian arm of the Lashkar-e-Taiba.” (Diana George, ed., “Yasin Bhatkal Allegedly Behind These Deadly Attacks in India,” *NDTV*, August 30, 2013.) This is because Indian intelligence believed it had uncovered evidence of the “Karachi Project,” in which groups of Indian nationals like IM were conducting attacks on Indian urban centers, essentially as arms of LeT. (Animesh Roul, “After Pune, Details Emerge on the Karachi Project and its Threat to India,” *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 4, April 2010.) Even if they considered IM an independent organization, another reason Indian intelligence officials believed these were cross-border attacks was that they suspected the IM leadership had been trained by Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence at LeT camps (“Yasin Bhatkal Trained by Lashkar in Pakistan,” *The New Indian Express*, September 1, 2013.), and because the perpetrators immediately fled to Pakistan after the attacks. (Nanjappa, “How the Indian Mujahideen Was Formed.”)

45. Attribution is a difficult factor to determine with complete confidence and several provocations in our dataset are still disputed or being tried in Indian courts. For the purpose of this study, however, the Indian government’s belief in probable attribution in the immediate aftermath of a crisis is the salient factor. One former U.S. official commented to us that at some point the Indian government stopped worrying about the attribution problem because it believed “as a matter of faith” the attacks stemmed from Pakistan. That makes all these incidents like enough units to be included in a single dataset.

46. Thus crisis intensity is the subject of Krepon and Dowling’s essay in this volume.

47. We believe these two criteria to have inter-coder reliability.

48. Michael Brecher, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Kyle Beardsley, Patrick James, and David Quinn, *International Crisis Behavior Project*, version 12 (Durham and Los Angeles: Duke University and University of Southern California, 2016), <https://sites.duke.edu/icbdata/data-collections>.

scholarship,<sup>49</sup> or intuitively met our definition of crisis delineated above. Second, India's national security principals were convened through an unplanned Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting within a week of the event. (from which we infer a *consideration* of retaliation by force). (See *Table 1*)

**Table 1: Observations of India-Pakistan Interstate Crisis, 1998-2016**

Crisis Event	Meets "Crisis" DEFINITION	International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Database	Coded "Crisis" In Past Analysis	Crisis-Triggered Cabinet Committee On Security (CCS) Meeting Date*	Sources For CCS Meeting
1. Nuclear tests	✓	✓	Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, 2007, 19.	5/11/98	<i>India Today</i> , May 25, 1998
2. Kargil crisis	✓	✓	Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, 2007, 2.	5/25/99	<i>The Times of India</i> , May 27, 1999
3. IC 814 hijacking	✓		Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, 2007, 152-53; Dulat, <i>Kashmir</i> , 36-39.	12/29/99	<i>The Times of India</i> , May 27, 1999
4. Red Fort attack	✓		Ganguly and Kapur (eds), 2008, 148.	12/23/00	<i>Frontline</i> , January 6, 2010
5. Kashmir Provincial Assembly attack	✓		Krepon and Nayak, 2006, 49.	10/1/2001**	<i>The Independent</i> , October 2, 2001
6. Indian Parliament attack	✓	✓	Krepon and Nayak, 2006, 10; Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, 2007, 149-53.	12/13/01	<i>The Times of India</i> , December 16, 2001
7. Kaluchak massacre	✓	✓	Krepon and Nayak, 2006, 54; Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, 2007, 169.	5/18/02	<i>The Times of India</i> , May 19, 2002
8. Jaipur bombings	✓		--	5/14/2008**	<i>The Times of India</i> , May 20, 2008
9. "26/11" Mumbai attack	✓		Krepon and Nayak, 2012, vii.	11/27/08	<i>Hindustan Times</i> , November 28, 2008
10. Pune Bakery bombing	✓		--	2/15/10	<i>Rediff</i> , February 15, 2010; <i>Indo-Asian News Service</i> , February 15, 2010; <i>The Times of India</i> , February 16, 2010
11. Varanasi bombing of Sheela Ghat	✓		--	12/10/10	<i>The Indian Express</i> , December 8, 2010
12. Uri Indian Army base attack	✓	NA***	Curtis, 2016.	9/21/16	<i>Mint</i> , September 21, 2016; <i>Financial Express</i> , September 30, 2016

\*Only includes first CCS that occurred after attack; \*\*Estimated based on media reports; \*\*\* Database ends in 2015

For the second criteria, a key indicator that India perceived a crisis seems to be the emergency convening of a CCS meeting. Analysts and former military officials confirm the CCS to be “the apex body responsible for all matters impinging on India’s security...”<sup>50</sup> Some have likened this to convenings of principals in the White House Situation Room on sensitive crisis decision-making. The CCS is the locus of consideration for retaliation or response, whether through the use of force or through other means. Though imperfect, the CCS may be the best public indicator that crisis decision-making is in the offing. Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal writes,

49. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*; Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*; and Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*.

50. Gurmeet Kanwal, “Command and Control of Nuclear Weapons in India,” *Strategic Analysis* 23, no. 10 (2000): 1,719.

During the May-August 1999 Kargil conflict the CCS was reported to have met quite often. It is not known how often the NSC was convened. It could justifiably be deduced that in practice, the CCS is now discharging the functions of political guidance and oversight in the higher direction of war.<sup>51</sup>

A CCS meeting was therefore a plausible indicator of the *consideration* of punitive or coercive action – e.g., the use of force – that could escalate to war, and the public revelation of a CCS meeting suggests India’s intention to signal to international audiences. Certainly, a CCS meeting is not an infallible indicator of India’s perception of a crisis, but for the sake of this study, we make the assumption it was (and remains) a necessary one.

These criteria were used to generate a list of 12 crises from our initial set of 51 provocations. Several of these were high-profile crises but others have heretofore gone unrecognized by previous studies or cross-national datasets. Some instances like the post-1998 nuclear tests neatly fit the definition of a crisis and are recognized by datasets like the ICB, while others like the 1999 India Airlines hijacking or 2000 attack on the Red Fort are recognized by practitioners and scholars but not closely studied for their escalatory potential.<sup>52</sup>

The final step in our analysis was to code each provocation for a host of properties to identify which, if any, correlated with the provocations that actually became crises. In the following sections, we review a set of hypotheses generated from the literature on South Asian crises. We also describe how we operationalized these hypotheses with proximate measures of each concept. Because the number of observations is too small for regression analysis, we perform a series of cross-tabulations of different potential explanatory variables as well as Pearson chi-squared tests to identify if there appears to be any relationship between the various correlates of provocations (independent variables) and crisis onset (dependent variable).<sup>53</sup>

## Hypotheses on Crisis Onset

Analysis of crises in South Asia tends to focus on the anatomy of already full-blown crises and on how Indian and Pakistani leaders, as well as third parties like the United States, subsequently manage them.<sup>54</sup> Qualitative overviews that contextualize crises in their historical and geopolitical climates have provided valuable contributions to understanding conflict dynamics, but they often

51. Ibid., 1,720.

52. A.S. Dulat, *Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years* (Noida: Harper Collins India, 2015), 36-39; and Praveen Swami, “A War to End a War: The Causes and Outcomes of the 2001-2 India-Pakistan Crisis,” *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, (New York: Routledge, 2009) 148.

53. Pearson chi-squared tests are essentially tests of independence. Their purpose is to evaluate whether the null hypothesis (that the pair of variables is totally independent, with no relationship) can be falsified. For a more detailed explanation, see our Results section.

54. See for example: Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*; Ganguly and Kapur, *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*; Michael Krepon and Nathaniel Cohn, *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2011); and Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2006).

employ implicit hypotheses of crisis triggers that become conflated.<sup>55</sup> To explain crisis onset, we studied international relations and South Asia conflict literature for candidate explanations on how crises begin. Finding these to be limited in scope and underdeveloped, we also sought accounts by journalists, government officials, and retired government practitioners. Writing on South Asian crises generally fails to account for the empirical puzzle that motivated our research. When asked what causes crisis onset, most regional experts believed the question's answer was straightforward and proceeded to offer a host of different – and sometimes conflicting – explanations.

The diversity of explanations underscored the need for a more systematic approach to understanding onset. Below we try to distill, make explicit, and unpack the underlying logic of 10 of the more prevalent of these formal and informal hypotheses. We evaluate which ones might offer the greatest explanatory power as to when, why, and – recognizing there are a host of contingent historical and contextual features – how provocations might precipitate crises. From a review of the components of a crisis and the variables at play, we distill three families of hypotheses that explain when a provocation or candidate “trigger” is more likely to escalate into a crisis. Each family of hypotheses explores variables that affect perceptions of one of three particular features of a crisis: its abnormality, threat intensity, or time sensitivity.

Each of the hypotheses starts from the assumption that a provocation involves or threatens kinetic violence. There are certainly a range of potential other non-violent triggers, but because of the sheer difficulty evaluating nonviolent candidate triggers like economic or diplomatic aggression, we make this simplifying assumption. First, we posit that the perception of abnormality might vary by the provocation's choice of target, the level of casualties, the complexity of tactics, and/or the duration of the provocation episode. Second, threat perceptions might vary on the geography of the threat, the perceived degree of the initiator state's intentionality, and/or the initiator state's regime type. Finally, perceptions of time sensitivity and risk might vary based on the intensity of media coverage, the type of government, and the type of leader. In the subsections that follow, we describe 10 hypotheses that roughly fit into one of these three aspects of crises.<sup>56</sup>

### *Abnormality/Deviance*

Because terrorism and insurgency are frequent phenomenon in South Asia's political landscape, the use or threat of political violence must be clearly abnormal

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55. See, for example, Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*; chapters in Zachary S. Davis, ed., *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff: Crisis and Escalation in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Devin T. Hagerty, “Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The 1990 Indo-Pakistani Crisis,” *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1995): 79-114; and V.R. Raghavan, *Siachen: Conflict without End*. (New Delhi: Viking, 2002), 33-57.

56. Ultimately, these are tests of correlation, not causation. Moreover, these variables are not unrelated; indeed, they may interact, and their combined impact on decision-makers may vary. In treating media coverage as a variable shaping a state's perception of time sensitivity and risk, for example, we recognize that media coverage itself is contingent on other variables surrounding the provocation and how “spectacular” it is – duration, target, fatality levels, etc. Any correlation between high media coverage and crisis onset may be more of a red flag indicator of crisis rather than an independent cause. Future multivariate regression analysis can help to disentangle these effects. We thank Arzan Tarapore for this insight.

– the word “spectacular” is often applied<sup>57</sup> – to trigger a crisis. We measure the abnormality or deviance of a crisis provocation by the following variables: casualty levels, target type, complexity of tactics, and the duration of the provocation.

**Fatalities.** A first potential contributor to a provocation’s abnormality is the number of fatalities in a *single incident*. This last aspect is important for unpacking why concentrated loss of life can have a greater effect. After all, car accidents dispersed over time and area kill over a million people annually, but a concentrated event like a natural disaster that kills a few hundred people tends to elicit a crisis atmosphere and strong reactions. It is intuitive to then expect that a high level of fatalities in a provocation would constitute an aberration or deviation from the norm. It is important, however, to understand that terrorist incidents are a frequent occurrence in India. From 2011-15, the Global Terrorism Database estimates India annually averaged 738 terror incidents and 370 non-militant fatalities.<sup>58</sup> Thus, deviation from the mean would require a departure from this baseline of two terror incidents and one terror fatality daily.

Countless accounts by journalists, former government officials, and analysts use deviance in casualty levels to explain past India-Pakistan crises and implicitly suggest that in future provocations, a high death toll will automatically trigger a crisis.<sup>59</sup> For example, one scholar contends the 2001 Parliament attack was “a lot less provocative than Mumbai” because “that attack failed” and “about five people died.”<sup>60</sup> By contrast, the scholar contended there was “a lot of pressure domestically for the government to act in a forceful way” after Mumbai because “this attack killed almost 200 people, wounded hundreds more, lasted almost three days and targeted the financial hub of India.” Because of the attack’s lethality, he argued, “[t]here’s going to be a lot of pressure domestically for the government to act in a forceful way.”<sup>61</sup>

The provocativeness of high fatality levels seems intuitive yet merits closer examination given anecdotal inconsistencies. A number of widely reported, high-fatality events in India occurred in the early 2000s without triggering a crisis. Among these “almost crisis events” are the above-cited example of the 2006 Mumbai train bombings, which resulted in more civilian casualties than the infamous 2008 Mumbai attack on November 26 that sparked a crisis.

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57. Daniel Markey, *No Exit from Pakistan: America’s Tortured Relationship with Islamabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46, 101; Steve Coll, “The Stand Off,” *The New Yorker*, February 16, 2006; Somini Sengupta, “Crisis May Shift India’s Political Landscape,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2008; and Michael Krepon, “The Myth of Deterrence Stability Between Nuclear-Armed Rivals,” in *Deterrence Instability and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon, Joshua T. White, Julia Thompson, Shane Mason (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2015), 26-27.

58. Most scholars of South Asian political violence believe this systematically undercounts the level of nonstate actor violence, and other datasets like the South Asia Terrorism Portal estimate higher annual averages.

59. See for example, Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, “Is a Pakistan-India War Just One Terrorist Attack Away?” *Herald*, January 23, 2017.

60. S. Paul Kapur quoted in Adam Gorlick, “Q&A: South Asia Security Expert Discusses Terrorist Attacks in Mumbai,” *Stanford Report*, December 4, 2008, <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2008/december3/kapur-010709.html>.

61. Gorlick, “Q&A: South Asia Security Expert Discusses Terrorist Attacks in Mumbai”

***Hypothesis 1: A provocation resulting in high fatalities should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation resulting in low fatalities.***

All the variables for this study were treated in dichotomous terms. Lethality was measured to be “high” with 10 or more nonmilitant fatalities and “low” with under 10 nonmilitant fatalities.

**Target Type.** While some targets of provocations are considered “fair play,” such as the choreographed exchange of fire along the LoC, other targets might be perceived as exacting an unacceptable cost and result in escalation toward a crisis. One would anticipate provocations like militant attacks that target civilians or soft targets to be more deviant compared to violence against hardened or military targets.<sup>62</sup> Many analysts have argued that the reason provocations in 2001, 2002, and 2008 escalated into the 2001-2 Twin Peaks and 2008 Mumbai crises is because targeting a civilian government installation, military families, and tourists in a luxury hotel were beyond the pale. One veteran reporter explains:

Indian investigators had traced the Pakistani hand in both the March 1993 Mumbai serial blasts and the July 2006 suburban train bombings. These attacks had killed more people –257 and 187 respectively. But 26/11 was different. It was the first attack carried out by Pakistani nationals who hit civilian targets and foreign nationals with calculated brutality.<sup>63</sup>

We apply a dichotomous measure of whether a provocation’s target was a civilian or a military/security force target to assess whether this factor is associated with escalation to crisis.

***Hypothesis 2a: A provocation that targets civilians should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation that targets military or security forces.***

Another variant of targeting creating a sense of abnormality is if an iconic feature of the country is targeted. In such a case, even an attack lacking in other potentially escalatory attributes might prove immensely provocative. Attacks on iconic national targets can challenge the very bulwark of the country and the state. The 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament is said to have been “the most audacious and most alarming act of terrorism” on India in over two decades<sup>64</sup> because it constituted “an assault upon the very foundations of Indian democracy.”<sup>65</sup> Regarding the similar symbolic importance of the 2008 Mumbai attack, Riedel argues, “Mumbai is the symbol of India’s economic and cultural life. Mumbai is as valuable a target as Washington, London or Berlin and has been a target on many occasions. Foreigners, diplomats and financial entrepreneurs were the targets.”<sup>66</sup> Some analysts have even argued that provocations that

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62. See for example, Dalton and Perkovich, “Is a Pakistan-India War Just One Terrorist Attack Away?”

63. Sandeep Unnithan, “Why India Didn’t Strike Pakistan after 26/11,” *India Today*, October 14, 2015.

64. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 16.

65. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 151.

66. “Terror Expert and Obama Advisor Bruce Riedel: ‘A Nightmare We Cannot Afford in the 21st Century,’” *Spiegel*, December 8, 2008.

threaten or destroy core national military assets (like combat aircraft) constitute much greater deviance from the mean.<sup>67</sup>

***Hypothesis 2b: A provocation that targets iconic sites or symbols of the nation should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation targeting other sites.***

Target types were measured in two ways – attacks that hit soft civilian rather than security force targets (military and police) and those that targeted iconic rather than non-iconic targets in India.

**Geography.** The location of a provocation – whether it strikes peripheral or core territory – can impact the probability of a crisis. International relations and civil war scholarship finds geography to be a core determinant of threat perception.<sup>68</sup> Some interstate crisis scholarship has found geographic distance, measured as “close to home” versus “more distant,” strongly influenced states’ crisis proneness.<sup>69</sup>

The 2001 and 2008 attacks were particularly impactful because they attacked India’s core rather than its periphery. Krepon explains:

The Twin Peaks and 2008 crises differed from the 1990 and Kargil crises in that the triggering events occurred far from the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, the flashpoints for these two crises were mass-casualty assaults directed against high-profile targets in New Delhi and Mumbai that represented India’s political integration, economic advancement and connectivity to the globe.<sup>70</sup>

Part of the reason attacks on core geography are so incendiary is the number of people they can affect and the erosion of trust in the state. One scholar writes:

The loud message was that a small group of individuals could turn a megalopolis of almost 15 million inhabitants into a battlefield for at least a day. All the time, the intention is to terrorise the largest number of people, eroding the ordinary man’s confidence in the ability of the authorities to protect him, and, in the long run, persuading a majority of the people, who just want to live their lives, to trade their freedom for the security that the terrorist promises in his utopia.<sup>71</sup>

Some Indian observers have given serious thought to how the geographic location of a provocation might influence the perception of crisis and dictate India’s

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67. Shashank Joshi and Praveen Swami independently suggest that Pathankot was not a crisis like Kulchak because the militants didn’t hit major assets (like combat aircraft) or kill civilians like family of military personnel. See Shashank Joshi, “Pathankot Attack: India-Pakistan Peace Talks Derailed?” *BBC News*, January 7, 2016; and Deeptiman Tiwary, Sagnik Chowdhury, Pranav Kulkarni, and Praveen Swami, “Probing Pathankot Terrorist Attack: How Wires Got Crossed in Delhi,” *The Indian Express*, January 9, 2016.

68. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Sameer Lalwani, “Selective Leviathans: Explaining State Strategies of Counterinsurgency and Consolidation” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014).

69. Michael Brecher, “Crisis Escalation: Model and Findings,” *International Political Science Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 215-30.

70. Krepon and Cohn, *Crisis in South Asia*, 5.

71. Amir Taheri, “Mumbai Attacks: The Terrorists’ Tactics,” *The Telegraph*, November 27, 2008.

response.<sup>72</sup> Some research suggests that Indian territory can be divided into spaces of order and disorder: core areas where violence is more costly and scary, and peripheral areas where it is expected and discounted.<sup>73</sup> Contested regions of India like the Kashmir Valley or volatile Northeast India regularly exhibit disorder and violent contestation, while areas in the mainland of India or the metropolitan zones might be considered safe spaces. These perceptions might give rise to a belief that attacks on ordered spaces will be particularly provocative while those in disordered spaces will not.<sup>74</sup>

***Hypothesis 3: A provocation on core geography should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation on peripheral geography.***

Provocations in peripheral, contested geography were measured as attacks in Jammu & Kashmir or India's Northeast<sup>75</sup> while provocations in core geography included major urban centers and much of the Indian heartland and Hindi belt.

**Provocation Type.** Aside from location, targeting, and lethality, provocations may precipitate crises due to their style or type. Specifically, complex, coordinated militant assaults require significant communication, training, planning, organization, and resources. These attacks are much harder to carry out than bombings and therefore much more abnormal and threatening than a single shooter or a car bombing.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, a complex gray zone infiltration will be much more provocative than a single mortar round fired across a border because it signals a distinct capability.

There is a growing body of literature supporting the idea that diverse and complex tactics are more effective and perceived by a state as more challenging and threatening.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the 2008 Mumbai attack (26/11) involving a complex assault with five sets of two-man teams coordinated by an operations cell is roundly perceived as much more abnormal than the June 2006 Mumbai train bombings (7/11) that killed nearly as many people. Veteran intelligence analyst Bruce Riedel explained the reason the 2008 Mumbai attack was so provocative was because of its complexity. "This kind of attack does not appear to be the work of amateurs," he said in an interview soon after the attack. "The sophistication of the use of multiple teams of very well-trained killers, as well as the choice of

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72. Ranjan Roy, "Where's the Battle Cry?: Terrifying Pacifism; Does our government suffer from passive transient reactivism?" *Times of India*, November 6, 2005, 12.

73. Paul Staniland, "States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 243–64; and Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

74. Between 2012 and 2015, 12.4 percent (378 of 3,047) of the terror attacks in India recorded by the Global Terrorism Database took place in Jammu and Kashmir. Other concentrations were in the northeast, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. In 2015, only 14 attacks took place in Punjab. Gurdaspur and Pathankot, the locations for two of the most recent cross-border attacks in 2015 and 2016, are in Punjab but right on the border of Jammu and Kashmir. See "Global Terrorism Database," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2016.

75. There were no observations from the Northeast, but this is identified for the sake of clarity.

76. See for example comparative analysis of attack types and tactics, Brian J. Phillips, "This Is Why the Paris Attacks Have Gotten More Coverage Than Other Attacks," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2015.

77. Michael C. Horowitz, Evan Perkoski, Philip B. K. Potter, "Tactical Diversity in Militant Violence," *International Organization* 72, no. 1 (2018).

targets – Americans, Brits, Israelis – has all the hallmarks of the global jihad...”<sup>78</sup>

In addition to signaling sophisticated planning and organization, the complexity of an attack can augment fear. A review of terrorist attacks in India between 1998 and 2004 found that, on average, armed assaults resulted in higher fatalities than other tactics, including bombings and imposed higher social loss.<sup>79</sup> Because of the level of fear and potential social impacts a complex attack can generate (such as depressing social interactions and public gatherings, which can negatively impact economic activity), a state might expect that complex attacks are qualitatively different and more provocative regardless of the actual body count. Another analyst explained that Mumbai differed from bombings or suicide attacks because, “[t]his time...the approach was ‘symphonic,’ in the sense that it involved different types of operations blended together. Involved in the operations were men who had placed explosives at selected points. But there were also gunmen operating in classic military style by seizing control of territory at symbolically significant locations along with hostages.”<sup>80</sup>

***Hypothesis 4: A complex provocation should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a simple provocation.***

Complex provocations involved multiple assailants engaged in coordinated, small-unit assault tactics, while simple provocations included remote bombings, single shooters, and suicide bombers.

**Duration.** Closely related to the complexity hypothesis is one related to the duration of a provocation. Scholars of interstate crises argue that the longer the duration of a crisis the more likely it is to get out of control.<sup>81</sup> Following from this, one can also expect that the longer a provocation the higher the prospect that it transforms into a crisis. The longer a provocation, the greater the conspicuousness of the event and the more likely a wider domestic audience will observe it and contribute to escalatory pressures from fear, outrage, or embarrassment.

One of the most salient and distinct features of the Mumbai attack was its length. Noting the difference in duration between the 2006 and 2008 attacks, former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon noted, “[o]ver three days [LeT] killed 166 people and wounded at least 308” whereas “seven bomb that exploded in eleven minutes on Mumbai suburban trains...had killed 209 and injured more than 650 people.”<sup>82</sup> One Washington D.C.-based South Asia analyst observed that “it wasn’t a surprise that there was an attack...but the length and extent – [that] was all surprising.”<sup>83</sup>

78. “Terror Expert and Obama Advisor Bruce Riedel.”

79. Vani K. Borooh, “Terrorist Incidents in India, 1998-2004: A Quantitative Analysis of Fatality Rates,” *Terrorism & Political Violence* 21, no. 3 (2009): 476-98.

80. Taheri, “Mumbai Attacks.”

81. Snyder and Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations*, 492.

82. Menon, *Choices*, 60-61.

83. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 7.

26/11 unfolded on live television over 60 hours of what one journalist described as a “slow-motion nightmare of methodical and remorseless violence.”<sup>84</sup> The crisis’ length raised public and international attention, frustration, anger, and even pressure. It also served as a “major embarrassment for India’s security establishment” and the Indian state because its ham-handed and dysfunctional response were televised to both the general public and, worse, to Indian adversaries.<sup>85</sup> While all terrorist attacks expose state vulnerabilities and intelligence breakdowns, a longer provocation heightens general public alarm and generates both fear and outrage at the inadequacy of the government response.

Duration might be closely correlated with complexity, but it need not always be. Complexity captures something about the provocation alone, while duration is a dyadic product that results not only from the instigator but also the target’s ability to respond. Quick, effective responses to complex provocations can reduce duration. In a way, duration can also correlate with the level of embarrassment of the host government, adding further fuel to the potential for a crisis.

*Hypothesis 5: A provocation of long duration should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation of short duration.*

Duration was measured as “long” if the provocation lasted longer than an hour and “short” if less than an hour. To be clear, duration was only capturing the length of the provocation itself, distinct from the potential crisis that may have followed.

*Threat to National Values*

A second feature of a crisis is whether or not it constitutes a threat to national values. The key variables that can shape threat perceptions are assessments of the provocateur’s intentions based on their level of control or regime type, as well as the relative hawkishness of the Indian government and its leadership.

**Intentionality via Control.** A key factor in a potential crisis’ threat to national values is whether the provocation was perceived as deliberate and intentional. States are often aware of one of the most dangerous risks of misperception where an action is seen as “more centralized, disciplined, and coordinated than it is”<sup>86</sup> and may discount provocations if they believe them to be inadvertent or stemming from a potential principal-agent problem.

The distinction may be between actions and entities that can be directly attributed to the state and those that are plausibly deniable. For instance, a deliberate probe of a border by regular military units might create pressures for a state to confront and retaliate against the incursion, but an irregular unit that patrols aggressively and happens to cross a border by accident or because

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84. David Randall, “Mumbai: Sixty Hours of Terror and Chaos,” *The Independent*, November 30, 2008.

85. Erika Kinetz, “India Executes Surviving Gunman of 2008 Terrorist Attacks,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 21, 2012.

86. Robert Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” *World Politics* 20, no. 3 (1968): 454-79.

of a hotheaded platoon commander might precipitate a stern rebuke but not a full crisis.

There is always a level of uncertainty in the attribution of intent or principal control, but states often rely on certain cues from their intelligence to assess the deliberateness of a provocation. States must maintain a tricky balance of maintaining awareness of salami slicing tactics by an adversary that are intentionally designed to look too small, accidental, or benign to warrant action; however, they also cannot overreact to every incident. Overreactions are costly and can lead to a “boy who cried wolf” syndrome that desensitizes domestic and international audiences.

While there has always remained a question about the degree of influence Pakistan wields with respect to various militant groups that operate from its soil, many analysts tend to believe the Pakistan strategic establishment maintains “reasonably tight control” over LeT.<sup>87</sup> Even former members acknowledge that LeT is “tamed by the ISI [Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence]” and thus functions as the closest thing to a direct instrument of policy because it was built and trained by the Pakistan military.<sup>88</sup> Other groups, while patronized by Pakistan, operate with greater distance and autonomy (like the arguably local Hizbul Mujahideen) or have been known to go rogue and even turn on the state – like Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). For instance, the displeasure signaled by the ISI after JeM’s 2001 Parliament attack (inferred from the high degree of signals traffic) as well as assassination attempts on Gen. Pervez Musharraf, then the Pakistan Army chief and president, suggested that the Pakistani state wielded less control over those groups than expected.<sup>89</sup>

Indian strategists in particular tend to consider the Pakistan state responsible for actions perpetrated by LeT. While U.S. analysts and intelligence officials cautioned that LeT involvement and Pakistan’s direct responsibility were distinct, India perceived direct control by the Pakistan Army. During the Mumbai attack, Indian officials suggested the “close relationship between the Lashkar and the ISI” implied “clear and incontrovertible proof” that the provocation was planned and directed by the Pakistan government.<sup>90</sup> After the 2008 LeT attack, Home Secretary G.K. Pillai alleged that Pakistan directly controlled LeT’s actions: “It was not just a peripheral role... They [the ISI] were literally controlling and coordinating it from the beginning till the end.”<sup>91</sup> Consequently, National Security Advisor Menon called for “immediate visible retaliation of some sort, either against the LeT in Muridke, in Pakistan’s Punjab province, or their camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, or against the ISI,” implying the LeT and ISI were equivalent.<sup>92</sup>

87. C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 251.

88. Tankel, *Storming the World Stage*, 2013, 55-61, 265. (quotation from 265.)

89. Fair, *Fighting to the End*, 252.

90. Emily Wax and Rama Lakshmi, “Indian Official Says Pakistan’s ISI Trained, Supported Mumbai Attackers,” *The Washington Post*, December 6, 2008; and Adam Gorlick, “Q&A.”

91. “Pakistan ISI Behind Mumbai Attacks: Indian Official,” *Reuters*, July 14, 2010.

92. Menon, *Choices*, 61

***Hypothesis 6a: A provocation by a group perceived to be directly controlled by the Pakistani state should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a group that is not perceived to be directly controlled by the Pakistani state.***

Control was measured as high if the *perception* of LeT's involvement in an attack was observed.

**Intentionality via Regime Type.** A second way that threat to national interest might be measured and intentionality inferred is whether the perceived initiator of the provocation is a democracy or autocracy. Hewitt finds that like with the study of militarized interstate disputes, the nature of the two regimes has a statistically significant effect on the onset of an international crisis. Two democratic regimes are less likely to enter into a crisis with each other.<sup>93</sup> States might have more faith in the intentions of democracies and be more inclined to treat provocations as arising from a lack of control or accident.

In the case of South Asia, Indian democracy has been a constant, but scholars have long described the vacillation between Pakistan's explicitly and overtly military authoritarian regimes and periods when the Pakistani state is divided between nominally civilian governments with the military operating as the deep state. In the latter periods, civilians still exercise some power but without full control.

A prevailing theory is that authoritarian regimes – especially personalist regimes – are more prone to conflict initiation, because they face fewer constraints than democratic regimes with large coalitions.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, military-led governments may also lean toward conflict initiation due to the beliefs, incentives, and routines that make militaries inherently prefer offensive strategies.<sup>95</sup>

Consequently, India may have treated provocations more seriously when Pakistan was under military rule because it may have anticipated perverse incentives in its adversary to intensify and escalate a conflict. This may have accounted for the escalation in 2001 where the Indian government felt the need to show the military-led Pakistan government it would not be bullied.

The Indian government might discount culpability for a provocation that occurs during civilian rule in Pakistan, judging that the aggression was unauthorized by the civilian government and perpetrated by the military to undermine civilian leadership. Under such circumstances, the Indian state might calculate that a crisis and a potential military engagement would further harm the civil-military imbalance in Pakistan in favor of the military, potentially increasing risks to Indian interests. By the 2008 Mumbai attack, the civilian government in Pakistan was so new that one

93. J. Joseph Hewitt, "Dyadic Processes and International Crises," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47, no. 5 (October 2003): 669-92.

94. Mark Peceny and Christopher K. Butler, "The Conflict Behavior of Authoritarian Regimes," *International Politics* 41, no. 4 (2004): 565-81; Jessica Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 326-47.

95. Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Brian Lai and Dan Slater, "Institutions of the Offensive: Domestic Sources of Dispute Initiation in Authoritarian Regimes, 1950-1992," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 1 (2006): 113-26.

of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s advisors suggested that India had a vested interest in not weakening an already weak civilian government in Pakistan that had just emerged from a significant struggle with the military two months before the attack.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the Indian state might be less prone to react to potential provocations when facing a civilian government, but more inclined to escalate a provocation into a crisis when confronting an overtly military government.

*Hypothesis 6b: A provocation during a Pakistani military regime should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation during a Pakistani civilian regime.*

To measure intentionality via regime type, we use a dichotomous variable of whether the military regime or an elected civilian government was *de jure* in charge of the Pakistani government at the time of a provocation.

**Domestic Politics.** There are two features of domestic politics that may have a direct effect on a state’s perception of the threat level posed by a provocation: the political leaning of the government in power (right or left) and the leader (in India, the prime minister).

For the purpose of our coding, we associate right-leaning governments with more hawkish behavior and left-leaning governments as having more dovish tendencies. Though historically, the Congress party has led during major Indian military offensives – including invasions or annexations of Hyderabad (1948), Goa (1961), and East Pakistan (1971), as well as India’s “peacekeeping” deployment to Sri Lanka (1987-89) – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is generally recognized to have an “oppositional nationalist” ideology leaning toward a more aggressive and hawkish national security platform.<sup>97</sup> We hypothesize that provocations arising during a BJP regime may be more likely to precipitate a crisis due to the way in which they interpret such actions through a nationalist lens or pressures from their domestic audiences.

*Hypothesis 7a: A provocation during a hawkish government should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation during a dovish government.*

The hawkishness of the Indian government was proxied by whether the BJP was at the reins of India’s coalition government at the time of the provocation.

Another level of variation may exist with the party leaders that rise to helm the government as prime minister and their varying worldviews, risk-thresholds, and aggressive temperaments. Menon writes, “[p]ersonalities matter.

96. Taking punitive military action would only have served to weaken the new civilian government in Pakistan that Singh had worked so hard with to develop trust and cooperation. See Menon, *Choices*, 63.

97. Vipin Narang, “Pride and Prejudice and Prithvis: Strategic Weapons Behavior in South Asia,” *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, ed. Scott D. Sagan, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 138; and P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 1990* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 75.

With a different mix of people at the helm, it is quite possible that India would have chosen differently. In fact, if India is forced to make a similar choice in the future, I am sure it will respond differently.”<sup>98</sup> Over the past two decades, India has had three heads of government: Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP) from 1998-2003, who was seen as a pragmatic realist; Manmohan Singh (Congress) from 2004-13, who was seen as a slightly dovish idealist; and Narendra Modi (BJP) from 2014-present, a Hindu nationalist who has cultivated an image of toughness.<sup>99</sup> Modi in particular has been identified as a “risk taker” possessing “strong nationalist credentials” and feeling the need to “[act] tough.”<sup>100</sup>

*Hypothesis 7b: A provocation during a Modi-led government should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation during a Vajpayee-led government or a Singh-led government.*

Measurement for head of government was straightforward with dichotomous variables assigned to the periods when the Indian government was headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2003), Manmohan Singh (2004-13), and Narendra Modi (2014-16).

### *Time Sensitivity of the Provocation Context*

The temporal pressure a government feels contributes to a sense of being within a crisis. This time sensitivity can be shaped by contextual factors of a provocation like pressure from media coverage, pressure from accumulating provocations, and/or countervailing pressure and the potential loss (opportunity costs) of structured, ongoing negotiations or dialogue if the response is delayed.

**Media Coverage.** One measurement of the psychological impact of a provocation is media attention, which has particular saliency in a large democracy like India. Media coverage can shape the perceived severity of the provocation and the probability of precipitating a crisis. Thus, even before crisis onset, media coverage can hype an event and possibly apply temporal domestic political pressure for a decisive reaction. The core assumption underlying considerations of media coverage as a factor in crisis onset is whether and how media impacts decision-makers.<sup>101</sup>

Some analysts speculate that pressure may have mounted after the 2008 Mumbai attack because it was perhaps “the most well-documented terror

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98. Menon, *Choices*, 81.

99. Manoj Joshi, “Tough India More Likely under NaMo, Says Manoj Joshi,” *India Today*, April 2, 2014.

100. Nitin A. Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi Way: Pathankot, Surgical Strikes and More* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 4, 32, 135.

101. For a detailed analysis of this question, see the essay by Ruhee Neog in this volume, “Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises.”

attack anywhere”<sup>102</sup> and turned into a “television spectacle.”<sup>103</sup> Riedel explains, “[t]hese attacks dominated global news for 72 hours non-stop. Achieving that amount of media coverage is exactly what the terrorists wanted. With the exception of Sept. 11, we have never really seen such global coverage.”<sup>104</sup> Both the 1999 Kargil crisis and the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis also elicited “extensive television coverage,” which was believed to have “fueled the public’s anger over the attack” and intensified pressure on the government to contemplate the use of force.<sup>105</sup> Recent analysis suggests the Modi government felt pressure from television as well as social media to treat the 2016 Uri attack as a crisis.<sup>106</sup>

Past anecdotal analysis ascribes the media a definitive role in the shaping of public opinion.<sup>107</sup> One study utilizes limited quantitative data to support this claim. It concludes that assertive Indian press coverage of the crisis in 2001-2 may have “strengthened India’s policy of compellence, as the putative threat to initiate a war with Pakistan was made more credible by intense and widespread press coverage.”<sup>108</sup> Even in Pakistan, public opinion “as reflected in media discourse” is a significant factor in foreign policymaking.<sup>109</sup>

***Hypothesis 8: A provocation that receives high media coverage should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation that receives low media coverage.***

To assess the impact of media coverage as a factor in converting a trigger into a crisis, we sought to measure whether the first week of coverage of the event in India’s most well-known English daily, *The Times of India*, totaled more than 100 articles and was greater than 5 percent of total news articles. Those events that met both criteria were coded as high media coverage while those that did not were coded as low media coverage.<sup>110</sup>

102. Vikas Bajaj and Lydia Polgreen, “Suspect Stirs Mumbai Court by Confessing,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2009.

103. Menon, *Choices*, 61.

104. “Terror Expert and Obama Advisor Bruce Riedel.”

105. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 154.

106. Authors’ off-the-record interviews with analysts and practitioners in New Delhi, India, December 2016; Lisa Curtis, “After Attack on Indian Army, U.S. Response to Crisis Must Focus on Pakistani Support of Terror,” Heritage Foundation, Issue Brief, no. 4612, September 21, 2016; and Paul Staniland, “India and Pakistan Clashed Again in Kashmir,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2016.

107. See for example, Saeed Shafqat, “The Kargil Conflict’s Impact on Pakistani Politics and Society,” in *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia*, 280-307. Shafqat asserts that by the 1999 Kargil crisis, “the print media had become an important barometer of public opinion and also an effective instrument used to influence public opinion on specific issues,” 284.

108. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 187.

109. Huma Yusuf, “Conspiracy Fever: The US, Pakistan and Its Media,” *Survival* 4, no. 53 (2011): 95-118, 96.

110. Coverage of each provocation was measured by the approximate number of articles discussing it in the first week after a provocation (event day plus seven days). We drew upon *The Times of India* collections of two databases, Proquest Historical Newspapers (for events that occurred prior to and during 2008), and Proquest Global Newsstream (for events that occurred after 2008). Types of articles counted included Proquest’s news databank categories of editorials, letters to the editor, military and war news, front-page news stories, and news articles.

**Cumulative Effect.** Crises can be the product of a cumulative effect of rising tensions. The Middle East refugee or migrant crisis,<sup>111</sup> for example, did not stem from any abrupt incident but rather the sudden realization of a gradual accumulation of pressure that spilled over into a full-blown crisis. In the case of South Asia, one theory is that repeated attacks will generate growing public demand, and/or pressure within the government, for a strong punitive response as a pressure release valve. This belief underpins various explanations of crises in South Asia.<sup>112</sup>

The October 2001 attack in Srinagar on the Kashmir Parliament building is believed to have precipitated a small crisis because of the cumulative pressure of multiple prior attacks. After the attack, Prime Minister Vajpayee sent a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush in which he identified the mounting and cumulative frustration from such high-profile attacks and “noted that Pakistan must understand that there was a limit to the patience of the people of India.”<sup>113</sup> Krepon and Nayak note that this ramp up of accumulating provocations helped build momentum for the major crisis that evolved in the aftermath of the December 2001 Parliament attack.<sup>114</sup>

At work here is a psychological sense of acceleration. Few studies, however, evaluate public responses to series of similar terrorist attacks with more than anecdotal evidence. A 2016 psychological study in the United States found that trajectory (increase or decrease in frequency) is a more salient factor than frequency (in this study, the number of attacks per week).<sup>115</sup> In varying the trajectory of successive terror attacks, “respondents experience more negative affect, greater risk perception, and are more likely to engage in avoidance behavior if the number of similar attacks increases over time than if the number of attacks decreases over time.”<sup>116</sup> In the context of South Asia, analysts have pointed out that the 2016 Uri attack felt like a last straw after pressure accumulated from a series of attacks in Gurdaspur, Pathankot, and Pampore, so this may explain why Uri resulted in crisis onset.<sup>117</sup>

111. “Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Seven Chairs,” *BBC News*, March 4, 2016.

112. In a recent example, Paul Staniland credited India’s “surgical strike” response to this cumulative factor of escalation: “Modi’s government attempted an opening to Pakistan’s civilian leaders, but the combination of Pathankot and Uri has led Indian policymakers to abandon a policy of conciliation toward Pakistan and instead to combine simultaneous military, economic, and diplomatic coercion.” See Staniland, “India and Pakistan Clashed Again in Kashmir.” Referencing data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal, Praveen Swami’s analysis of the 2001-2 crisis highlights that “both the scale and the frequency of *fidayeen* targets rose steadily in the build-up to the near-war.” Swami, “A War to End a War,” 148.

113. Chidanand Rajghatta, “Pak Must Back Off, PM Warns in Letter to Bush,” *The Times of India*, October 3, 2001.

114. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 19-23.

115. Jinshu Cui, Heather Rosoff, and Richard S. John, “Cumulative Response to Sequences of Terror Attacks Varying in Frequency and Trajectory,” *Risk Analysis* 36, no. 12 (2016): 2,272-84, 2,281. The authors recognize that this study does not account for variation in the rate of change in risk over time, the degree of severity of attacks, or the level of coordination between attacks (2,283). Evolving risk environments have particular salience in South Asia where both India and Pakistan continue to produce fissile material and nuclear-capable delivery systems.

116. Cui, Rosoff, and John, “Cumulative Response,” 2,283.

117. “Uri, Pathankot, Pampore: 35 Soldiers Killed, over 1,740 Injured in Attacks on Indian Army in 2016,” *Firstpost*, September 19, 2016; and “Uri Attack: The Last Straw That Broke the Camel’s Back,” *The New Delhi Times*, October 7, 2016.

*Hypothesis 9: A provocation that follows soon after a previous provocation(s) should be associated with a higher risk of crisis than a provocation that is not preceded by prior incident(s).*

To measure cumulative effects on a candidate crisis, we identified whether a provocation occurred within 30 days of a prior provocation.

**Shadow of the Future.** A final hypothesis maintains that in the event of a provocation, a background condition of ongoing diplomatic engagement increases the opportunity costs of a crisis and therefore reduces the probability of one arising. A provocation that could easily turn into a crisis might be purposefully downplayed by one or both parties so as not to derail a larger diplomatic agenda with higher stakes. The ongoing dialogue effectively extends the “shadow of the future” such that both sides care more about expected payoffs from continuing diplomatic engagement than the immediate gains or losses presented by a provocation, reducing the pressure to treat it as a crisis.<sup>118</sup>

Some researchers allege that this dynamic was at work in January 2016 when the seizure of a U.S. naval vessel by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps resulted in a curiously muted U.S. response, likely because of a desire to avoid derauling the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal with Iran that was set to go into effect that week.<sup>119</sup> Secretary of State John Kerry noted the unique diplomatic context within which this provocation arose and was defused, stating, “I think we can all imagine how a similar situation might have played out three or four years ago, and the fact that today this kind of issue can be resolved peacefully and efficiently is a testament to the critical role diplomacy plays.”<sup>120</sup>

A cursory look at our dataset suggests India suffered multiple major attacks between 2003-7, and yet none of these escalated into crises, potentially because of the ongoing Composite Dialogue. This dampening effect may have also played out in India on a number of occasions. The LeT attack on India’s Red Fort in December 2000, a full year before the Parliament attack, gets considerably less attention despite having been a complex attack on an iconic target. However, some analysts note that the attack occurred just a month after the Vajpayee government ceasefire to facilitate a Kashmir peace process, and overreacting to the event would have been costly both politically and to the policy agenda.<sup>121</sup>

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118. We draw on the international institutionalists’ logic as summarized by James D. Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (1998): 270.

119. Bozorgmehr Sharafedin and Phil Stewart, “Iran Frees U.S. Sailors with Start of Nuclear Deal in Sight,” *Reuters*, January 13, 2016; and Carlos Munoz, “Navy Commander Surrendered to Iran to Protect Obama’s Nuclear Deal,” *The Washington Times*, June 30, 2016.

120. Sharafedin and Stewart, “Iran Frees U.S. Sailors.”

121. Swami, “A War to End a War,” 148.

***Hypothesis 10: A provocation that occurs during a period of significant bilateral dialogue should be associated with a lower risk of crisis than a provocation that occurs without such a background.***

To measure whether India might have felt a reprieve from ordinary time sensitivity after a provocation, we identified periods of significant ongoing dialogue, notably the Composite Dialogue from October 2003 to August 2008 (when Musharraf resigned) and the Comprehensive Dialogue between December 2015 and April 2016.<sup>122</sup>

There are certainly other variables we could consider in a future study, but they have been bracketed for the sake of manageability.<sup>123</sup>

## **Preliminary Quantitative Findings**

This essay offers a new dataset on candidate crisis provocations between India and Pakistan as perceived by India to probe the various hypotheses outlined above. Below we review the data and detail preliminary findings.<sup>124</sup>

After compiling the dataset of 51 provocations – 12 of which resulted in crisis onset – from 1998 through 2016 (nearly all of which are attacks by violent nonstate actors on Indian targets with perceived support from Pakistan), we coded the variables based on the measurements described above, tabulated the results, and then analyzed the predictions of our 10 hypotheses. Since the dataset as currently constituted was not large enough for multivariate regression analysis, in our first cut at statistical analysis of the data, we cross-tabulate each hypothesized independent variable (e.g., high vs. low lethality) with the dependent variable (crisis onset or not) and then conduct a Pearson chi-squared test.

A Pearson chi-squared test is useful for measuring association between categorical data; it evaluates a null hypothesis that the two variables are independent. If the probability of independence is below a designated threshold (say 5 percent or 10 percent), then the variable is identified as statistically significant and the null hypothesis can be considered incorrect. In other words, the probability of independence is low and the likelihood of association between the two variables is high. The test cannot specify the nature of association – neither degree nor causal direction – but these “sniff tests” can be useful in developing a theory of crisis onset. In the case of India, we found a number of traditionally cited variables did not even pass this first sniff test. The results are presented as cross-tabulations in *Table 2* on the following page.

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122. Ankit Panda, “Back to Square One: Pakistan Calls Off Peace Talks with India,” *The Diplomat*, April 9, 2016.

123. Additional variables we hope to examine in a future study include: the domestic political environment (e.g., upcoming elections); India’s response toolkit (e.g., state of military readiness or doctrine); Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent and doctrine; perceptions of a spoiler attempt on planned bilateral engagements; foreign judgments of the provocation; and epochal shifts (post-9/11 and/or post 26/11).

124. It might be possible to conduct a similar analysis on provocation and crisis onset as perceived by Pakistan, but this adds an additional layer of complexity, particularly when trying to collect observations of inert provocations (i.e. dogs that don’t bark). Furthermore, since official statements reveal the United States tends to tilt towards Indian perceptions of South Asian crises (rightly or wrongly), we have started with India’s vantage point.

**Table 2: Results of Cross-Tabs and Pearson Chi-Squared Tests**

<b>LETHALITY</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.815	
	High Fatal	6	21	27	22%		
	Low Fatal	6	18	24	25%		
<b>TARGET</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.915	
	Civilian	10	33	43	23%		
	Military	2	6	8	25%		
		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.360	
Iconic	4	8	12	33%			
Not Iconic	8	31	39	21%			
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.478	
	Core Territory	6	24	30	20%		
	Non-Core	6	15	21	29%		
<b>COMPLEXITY</b>		<b>Crisis</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.086*	
	Complex	8	15	23	35%		
	Simple	4	24	28	14%		
<b>DURATION</b>		<b>Crisis</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.026**	
	Long	8	12	20	40%		
	Short	4	27	31	13%		
<b>INTENTIONALITY</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.276	
	Control	Lashkar-e-Taiba	4	20	24		17%
	Other	8	19	27	30%		
<b>Regime</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.696	
	No Democracy (Pakistan)	6	22	28	21%		
	Democracy (Pakistan)	6	17	23	26%		
<b>DOMESTIC POLITICS</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.120	
	Government	Bharatiya Janata Party	8	16	24		33%
	Congress Party	4	23	27	15%		
<b>Leader</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.011**	
	Vajpayee	7	6	13	54%		
	Singh	4	23	27	15%		
	Modi	1	10	11	9%		
	Just Singh and Modi			11	9%	p=.636	
<b>MEDIA COVERAGE</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.036**	
	Either 100 or 5 percent	7	10	17	41%		
	Neither 100 nor 5 percent	5	29	34	15%		
<b>CUMULATIVE EFFECT</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.055*	
	Within 90 days	4	4	8	50%		
	Not within 90 days	8	35	43	19%		
<b>SHADOW OF FUTURE</b>		<b>Crises</b>	<b>Non-Crises</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	p=.036**	
	Ongoing Dialogue	1	16	17	6%		
	No Dialogue	11	23	34	32%		

\*p < .10; \*\*p < .05

We find that many of the hypotheses and variables posited in fact appeared to have no association when evaluated against the dogs that did not bark – that is, the provocations that did not escalate into a crisis. Based on this data, lethality, target type, geography, adversary control, adversary regime type, and government/party type do not appear to have a correlation with India-Pakistan crises. This is surprising and noteworthy considering these have been some of the most common explanations as to why crises begin and escalate.

Employing a conventional p-value cutoff of .05 ( $p < .05$ ), the only variables that seem to pass the test of independence are duration, domestic political leader, media coverage, and the shadow of the future shaped by the presence/absence of ongoing dialogue. The small number of observations in this test might warrant a more relaxed p-value threshold of  $p < .10$ , in which case the other variables that survive the chi-squared test of independence are complexity and cumulative effects.

These findings suggest that certain properties of the provocation (namely duration and complexity) as well as perceptions filtered by the media, decision-making by leadership, and political context shaped by prior incidents or opportunity costs of dialogue shape a state's political choice to opt into a crisis after a provocation occurs. That said, the findings for leadership, cumulative effects, and media are still thin.

It is intuitive that leaders and their dispositions play a central role in the treatment or labeling of an event as a crisis, and on the surface, this seems validated by the chi-squared tests. However, the findings of the leader variable do not quite conform to predictions. Instead of Modi's leadership resulting in a higher risk of crisis, it is in fact the realist pragmatist Vajpayee who was associated with a much higher rate of crises. This may have something to do with the fact that most of these crises are clustered around the time of India and Pakistan moving from a recessed to an overt nuclear deterrent and the adjustments of “nuclear learning” to the risks and uncertainty of this environment.<sup>125</sup> Excluding the Vajpayee years from the analysis makes the result go away. When just looking at the Modi and Singh years, the chi-squared value is statistically insignificant and the null hypothesis of independence between leadership and crisis onset cannot be rejected.

Cumulative effects did not pass the chi-squared tests when operationalized at a 60-day threshold and while they did at a 30-day threshold, this result seems inappropriate because there were no provocations within 30 days of a previous provocation that resulted in a crisis.

High levels of media attention on an incident might press a government into treating the provocation as a crisis.<sup>126</sup> However, it is equally plausible the reverse

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125. Feroz Khan, Ryan Jacobs, and Emily Burke, eds., *Nuclear Learning in South Asia: The Next Decade* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2014).

126. The correlation between media coverage and crisis onset remains statistically significant at the .05 level regardless of how it is operationalized – as a 100 article threshold (.045), as 5 percent of coverage (.026), as either (.036), and as both (.025).

Thus, a violent act alone or fatalities may not be enough to cross red lines, but if the provocation employs certain terror-inducing qualities and lasts long enough to attract substantial attention, it might generate pressure for the government to treat it as a crisis, even if the government has no ability to respond.

occurs where the onset of a crisis generates intensive media coverage and thus the coverage is an indicator more than a driver of crisis onset. (It is worth noting that in previous studies, media coverage of major India-Pakistan crisis peaked not in the first week but instead later in the crisis, sometimes several weeks into it.<sup>127</sup>)

An ongoing and robust political dialogue with Pakistan might help mitigate the pressures of the incident and raise the costs of entering into a state of crisis. A leader or government invested in bilateral dialogue and conflict resolution might attempt to firewall relations from the vicissitudes of inevitable friction or even provocations by spoilers. This on its own does not necessarily impute normative value on such dialogue, but its potentially mitigating effects on a crisis atmosphere should be factored into cost/benefit assessments of dialogue.<sup>128</sup>

Though complexity and duration are slightly positively correlated with each other (with a correlation coefficient of .55), the presence of these variables is more likely to draw domestic audience attention and galvanize public concern. Such public engagement can generate pressure on the government to treat a provocation seriously due to the humiliation of the incident, fear induced by government lapses in protecting its citizens, or anger due to the transgressive nature of the provocation. Thus, a violent act alone or fatalities may not be enough to cross red lines, but if the provocation employs certain terror-inducing qualities and lasts long enough to attract substantial attention, it might generate pressure for the government to treat it as a crisis, even if the government has no ability to respond.

## Conclusion

The contribution of this essay is two-fold. First, in addition to summarizing the mainstream strategic studies literature defining and detailing crises, the

127. See graphs in Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 65, 114, 146, 180.

128. Ashley J. Tellis, *Are Peace Talks Worth a Damn?* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017).

essay has introduced a novel approach to the agency of a state in “selecting” into a crisis. Crisis onset then is not simply a function of specific conditions, exact variables, or distinct thresholds. Instead, it is a subjective position clearly influenced by political considerations of context or leadership. Second, the essay helps to distill and theoretically ground a set of hypotheses trying to explain the conditions under which a crisis emerges.

The results are extremely preliminary at this point and ought to be taken with several grains of salt, but they suggest some support for the political rather than the structural or material correlates of crisis onset.<sup>129</sup> To the extent that variables of abnormality – duration and complexity – have an impact on crisis onset, states can start to think about ways to counter them. Aside from the discussion of deterrence or compulsion by punishment, these variables may suggest that deterrence by denial as well as by resilience, might be useful strategies to consider.

From a policy standpoint, effective denial and greater resilience would demand investing in personnel skills and organizational tools to raise the barriers to entry for nonstate actors and to rapidly mitigate the costs if they did manage to conduct an attack. This would place a premium on better intelligence to pre-empt or quickly disrupt complex attacks that require substantial national security reforms to enable higher quality analysis, communication, and organizational efficacy.

The essay also helps to set an agenda for future research on South Asian crises. The same set of structural, material, and political lenses might be directed to examine India-China or Afghanistan-Pakistan crises. Further study can also begin to tease out more precise statistical relationships between the variables identified in this essay, ideally with a larger dataset, but also to evaluate additional factors in crisis onset not yet considered. Other hypotheses that have been suggested for consideration include the gruesomeness of an attack, international attention paid to it, and other contextual features such as the domestic political timing (proximity to elections), temporal proximity to planned bilateral meetings, and the state of conventional deterrence (based on the range of military options and concepts evolving within India and/or Pakistan). Finally, rich and detailed insider accounts starting to emerge as well as interviews can help scholars trace decision-making in crisis episodes and tease out which variables are ultimately most salient in the minds of leaders.<sup>130</sup>

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129. A broader study is underway to expand upon these preliminary findings. This study utilizes a larger dataset of provocations and codes for a range of additional independent variables or properties of a provocation.

130. Dulat, *Kashmir*; Menon, *Choices*; Gokhale, *Securing India the Modi Way*; Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017); and Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk nor a Dove: An Insider's Account of Pakistan's Foreign Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).



# ORGANIZING FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

## Evaluating India's Experience in Three Case Studies

*Shyam Saran*

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States are increasingly confronted with various unexpected emergencies that affect the welfare of their citizens. In liberal democracies such as India, the added challenge of intense media scrutiny often complicates the handling of crisis situations. Therefore, it is prudent to have institutional mechanisms such as a crisis management group in place to respond promptly and efficiently to crises and remain engaged until tensions recede to more manageable levels. Such mechanisms need well-rehearsed drills that can be implemented without delay and with designated officials and agencies preassigned their respective responsibilities. Additional officials/agencies may be brought in as needed. Having such mechanisms in place also ensures constant evaluation and learning. The absence of such mechanisms or bypassing them when situations arise may negatively impact appropriate crisis handling. It has also been seen that an overarching national security doctrine that could provide a template for a whole-of-government approach — something modern crises demand — is a fundamental prerequisite. This approach has so far been missing in India, leading to a pervasive reliance upon ad hoc means for dealing with crises.

This essay first unpacks India's systems and institutions of crisis management and then evaluates their role in three cases from India, one of crisis management success and two of crisis management failures. India successfully handled a hostage situation involving three Indian truck drivers in Iraq in August 2004 but employed incoherent and uncoordinated responses toward two other crises — one involving a major terrorist attack on India's commercial capital Mumbai in November 2008 and a later attack in January 2016 on an Indian Air Force base in Pathankot. The author selected these cases because he was personally involved in the first as India's foreign secretary and was a close witness during the Mumbai incident as part of the Prime Minister's Office. For this reason, there is substantial information provided for the first case, less for the second, and only anecdotal details in the third, as the author witnessed it from outside the government decision-making process. The essay distills several important shortcomings related to personnel, priorities, and governance revealed in the cases that need to be addressed. Finally, the essay reflects on the importance of

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transparent evaluative assessments like the *Kargil Review Committee Report* and its continued relevance today for more effective Indian crisis management in the future.

## **Crisis Management System in the Indian State**

The Indian state has a well-established crisis management system both at the central and state levels. At the center, there is a Crisis Management Group (CMG) headed by the Cabinet secretary, the senior-most civil servant in the country. The CMG has a standing membership that includes senior officials of key ministries, intelligence agencies, and armed and paramilitary forces. As foreign secretary, the author was invited to participate whenever there was an external dimension to an emerging threat or a crisis that unexpectedly erupted. Similar CMGs exist at the state level, where it is the chief secretary — the senior-most civil servant at the state level — who heads the group and where to all key government functionaries are represented. In both cases, there may be additional functionaries or other senior officials from different ministries and agencies of the government that may get co-opted depending upon the nature of the crisis. For example, in case of an epidemic the head of the Directorate General of Health Services may be invited; if there is a hijacking situation, the head of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation may be called upon to assist the CMG. The state chief secretary or his representative may be invited to attend the center-level CMG if the crisis takes place in a particular state or involves residents of that state. In addition, depending upon the specific situation, a specific ministry or agency may set up its own CMG on an ad hoc basis under a senior official to help coordinate responses to a crisis at its own level. For example, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) does this quite often when evacuating its citizens from theatres in the Persian Gulf affected by violence.

In turn, the Cabinet secretary remains in close touch with the Prime Minister's Office, particularly the national security advisor (NSA) and the principal secretary to the prime minister. The Cabinet secretary will also directly brief the prime minister on the unfolding situation.

There is also a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which is headed by the prime minister but includes the external affairs minister, the defense minister, the home minister, and the finance minister as permanent members. Other ministers may be invited depending upon the nature of the crisis or emergency. The Cabinet secretary is the secretary of the CCS. The NSA also attends the CCS meetings. If necessary, the CCS may ask the heads of the intelligence agencies and the chiefs of the three armed forces to brief its members. The CCS meets to consider, at the apex political level, any serious threat to national security. The inputs from the CMG then feed into the deliberations of the CCS. CCS decisions are Cabinet decisions, and the Cabinet secretary will issue them as formal documents of the Cabinet.

It is important to note that the Cabinet secretary does not need any permission from any other authority to convene the CMG and may convene it whenever the situation demands it. However, he would apprise the prime minister and the NSA that he has done so and work in close consultation with them. The NSA may attend the CMG meetings as an invitee, but decisions taken at the CMG are with the authority of the Cabinet secretary. These decisions are executed promptly since all heads of key executing agencies are represented in the group. This also ensures the assignment of accountability in case of any lapse.

The Cabinet Secretariat headed by the Cabinet secretary maintains an up-to-date directory of all key functionaries of the government, including their telephone numbers, mobile numbers, and official and residential addresses. The same is repeated at the state level where the chief secretary's office will maintain similar directories. Therefore, it is easy to contact all members of the CMG and any special invitees whenever it must be convened.

The Cabinet Secretariat is a repository of the minutes of all its previous meetings and standard drills, which may have evolved to deal with particular categories of crises. For example, an anti-hijacking drill drawn up after very extensive and detailed deliberations provides considerable detail on how the state apparatus should respond in case of the hijacking of an Indian aircraft. The importance of having such drills — meant to be regularly updated to reflect recent events, developments in technology, and experiences in other countries — is that most operational issues do not require ad hoc decisions when an emergency arises. The NSA and the political leadership are then free to deal with larger issues that go beyond the handling of the crisis itself.

The management of media coverage of a rapidly evolving situation — accounting for the highly competitive and constant TV reporting in a country with a very assertive free press — is an essential part of crisis management. There are certain standard procedures that have already been implemented. For example, locations of terrorist attacks or any other calamity are required to be cordoned off by local police immediately, and the press is kept at the outer perimeter at all times. Press statements are made only by designated press spokesmen both at the central and state level and the CMG usually collectively decides the content of such statements. In cases with an external dimension, the MEA will normally take on the responsibility of conducting such briefings. In addition, there may be off-the-record briefings given to senior editors and journalists to confidentially provide them background on a particular situation.

India's crisis management system is a well-established institutional structure with carefully crafted protocols and procedures. It is designed to deal with emergent security threats and crises once they erupt. The operational drills permit immediate responses so that senior security and the political leadership can then deal with larger issues and focus on elements for which existing drills

may be inadequate. In theory, executing agencies know their respective responsibilities, reducing to a minimum turf battles and the scope for ad hoc and sometimes ill-considered actions. The detailed meeting records of the CMG and the CCS permit careful evaluation and learning for the future and become the basis for modifying and improving existing drills. However, these drills are not always followed and discretionary actions are more often the rule rather than the exception despite having these mechanisms in place.

## Indian Crisis Management across Three Cases

Three cases — the 2004 Iraq hostage crisis, the 2008 Mumbai crisis, and the 2016 Pathankot attack — reveal how Indian policymakers have both opted and neglected to use established crisis management institutional architecture and the resulting consequences.

### *Case One: Iraq Hostage Crisis*

On July 21, 2004, news emerged from the Indian Embassy in Kuwait that an Iraqi militant group calling itself the Holders of the Black Banners had taken hostage three Indian nationals employed by a Kuwaiti transport company, Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Co. (KGL). Along with the Indian drivers, the militants also held three Kenyans and one Egyptian. The group called upon the countries to which the drivers belonged to withdraw their nationals working for the “American occupation forces” in Iraq and to provide compensation to Iraqi families who had suffered loss of lives and property in U.S. operations in Fallujah.<sup>1</sup>

The crisis lasted 42 days. The drivers were finally released on Sept. 3 and were back to their homes on Sept. 5. The crisis was successfully handled with the safety of the three Indian citizens involved safeguarded. It could have ended otherwise. Around the same time, another Iraqi militant group brutally executed 12 Nepali drivers who were taken hostage.

How was this hostage crisis dealt with? As soon as the crisis erupted a CMG was set up in the MEA for day-to-day handling of the situation. It was led by the Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahmed, who possessed an extensive network of political, social, and business contacts in the Persian Gulf. From the outset, the minister worked the phones throughout the day, seeking information as well as assistance both from regional governments as well as business contacts. He was assisted by a team of senior officials. One team member was in constant touch with the families of the drivers in the state of Himachal Pradesh, keeping them apprised of efforts to obtain the release of their loved ones and reassuring them as much as possible. The official selected for this spoke Punjabi, the language of the families.

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1. For reporting on the 2004 hostage crisis, see Raj Chengappa, “Blind Man’s Bluff,” *India Today*, August 23, 2004; “India Sets Up Crisis Management Group on Iraq,” *The Times of India*, July 24, 2004; and V. Sudarshan, *Anatomy of an Abduction: How the Indian Hostages in Iraq Were Freed* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books India, 2008).

Another official kept in constant touch with Indian electronic and print media. In the initial stages, there was some disquiet over some TV channels interviewing the drivers' family members in the villages and asking leading questions like "[d]on't you think the government is doing nothing to get them released?" These TV broadcasts created an emotional and often ugly mood among the families and the wider community. Officials addressed this situation by adopting two measures.

First, the foreign secretary-designate convened a meeting of all senior TV producers and print media editors to impress upon them the need to undertake responsible reporting to avoid affecting the safety and survival of the hostages. It was also decided that the press spokesman of the ministry would always be available to answer any queries and the minister of state would make a statement on the hostage situation daily, providing regular updates once in the morning and once in the evening. In turn, the media would always check with MEA before breaking any story they may have come across from any other source. In the ensuing days, the Indian media generally cooperated except one instance when a premature announcement of the release of hostages was made erroneously by the Kenyan foreign minister and was immediately carried by all TV channels without cross-checking with the MEA. However, having the CMG in place helped handle this unfortunate incident expeditiously and contained any resulting damage to a minimum.

Second, the state and district authorities where the families of the hostages resided were advised to discourage TV crews from contacting the families to avoid communicating any untoward and negative signals to the hostage takers. They had already reacted angrily to being described in some reports as "terrorists." Managing the media was crucial to maintaining a relatively calm atmosphere within which authorities could deal with the crisis.

The senior official heading the division in the ministry handling the Persian Gulf countries assisted the minister of state by conveying regularly gathered information from Indian diplomatic missions in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar. In Baghdad, Indian diplomats were regularly in touch with tribal leaders, clergy, and other influential personages to establish contact with the kidnappers and to persuade them to release the hostages unharmed. In Kuwait, the Indian Embassy communicated with the top executives of the KGL company, urging them to own responsibility for securing the release of their employees. Specifically, the Indian government could not be involved in any ransom payment for the release of the drivers, unlike KGL. The MEA's CMG constantly collated and analyzed all these inputs to enable further measures as required.

The MEA-level CMG also shared its inputs with the national-level CMG headed by the Cabinet secretary, the senior most civil servant in the Indian government.

In this case, the national CMG also met at regular intervals and received updates on the latest developments from the foreign secretary.

In the Iraq hostage crisis, the intelligence agencies shared their inputs, which were organized together with information gathered by the MEA and its diplomatic missions in the Persian Gulf. The national CMG decided to dispatch a special team to Baghdad to establish direct contact with the kidnappers and/or intermediaries to seek the release of the drivers. A senior Arabic-speaking diplomat and another Arabic-speaking officer familiar with Iraq and the region in general led the team. The national-level CMG worked discreetly and drew upon the goodwill India generally enjoyed among the Iraqis. The kidnappers had assigned a tribal leader, Hisham Ad-Dulaimi, to negotiate the ransom terms with KGL representatives. The Indian Embassy in Kuwait and the special team in Baghdad worked behind the scenes to promote a deal.

There were setbacks, and at times the negotiations seemed to break down. However, despite the delay perseverance began to pay off. During this time, the families in India were encouraged to remain patient, the media was kept at bay, and great care was taken in statements made on behalf of government functionaries. It was agreed at the national CMG that it would be only the minister of state in the MEA and the official MEA Spokesman who would have the authority to make statements on behalf of the government. Maintaining this discipline was difficult, but discordant voices were largely avoided during the several weeks over which the crisis unfolded.

On Aug. 31, it seemed as if a deal had been struck between KGL and the tribal representative Dulaimi that represented the kidnappers. However, there was a last-minute hitch. The Indian special team then had to work urgently to get the negotiations back on track. It took another two days to secure the actual release.

Once the crisis was over, the MEA undertook a comprehensive and detailed study of how the crisis unfolded over the 42 days and the manner in which it was handled. The lessons drawn from this experience have become a template for future crises. The detailed meeting records of the national CMG are an especially valuable tool that the government can use to develop institutional memory to prevent mistakes and ensure key lessons are incorporated into drills and other management mechanisms for future crises.

### *Case Two: The 2008 Mumbai Crisis*

The terrorist attack against Mumbai on Nov. 26, 2008, resulted in the deaths of at least 172 people, including several foreigners. The terror attacks unfolded over 60 hours at multiple locations in India's commercial capital. The 10 well-trained terrorists, split into four groups, were affiliated with the Pakistan based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, whose senior functionaries were in touch with the attackers throughout the attack — boosting their morale, giving directions, and urging them to kill as many

targets as possible. Since the details are well-known, they are not covered in detail in this case study.<sup>2</sup> The purpose here is to focus on institutional shortcomings and gaps which led to a fragmented and often incoherent response.<sup>3</sup>

### *Case Three: Terrorist Attack against the Indian Air Force Base at Pathankot*

The latest terrorist attack on the Pathankot Air Force Station on Jan. 2, 2016, confirmed fears that authorities failed to learn lessons from the Mumbai attack. This was visible both in the failure to harden the security perimeter around the base and in the ad hoc and uncoordinated response to the attack. Despite its proximity to the Line of Control, this key Air Force base obviously had gaps in its security perimeter that allowed the armed terrorists, probably six in number, to enter the base undetected and hide for several hours before launching their murderous attack. The attackers kept Indian security forces tied down for almost three days.<sup>4</sup>

## **Crisis Management Lessons and Shortcoming Reforms**

### *Key Takeaways from the Cases Reviewed*

From the postmortem analyses carried out with respect to the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks, several shortcomings are apparent in the state's response to the terrorist attacks at both the central and state levels. These inadequacies include a preference for ad hoc responses, poor media management, and limited coordination and communication among actors both within and outside of the central government.

In both Mumbai and Pathankot, the Indian government favored ad hoc procedures over the established crisis management mechanisms, which were either not mobilized when most needed or failed to deliver on their mandate when deployed. In the Mumbai case, this may have been because the national security advisor took on the crisis management role but without recourse to the institutional resources available to the state or because the CMG, when it met apparently a day later, preferred a devolution of responsibility for managing the crisis elsewhere. There also does not appear to have been any meaningful coordination between the central government and the Maharashtra state government.

One particular instance underscores the perils of ad hoc-ism. It was reported that the National Security Guard (NSG) contingent — specifically trained to

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2. For examples, see Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Seth G. Jones et al., *The Lessons of Mumbai* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); and B. Raman, *Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2012).

3. Shyam Saran, "Lessons of 26/11 Must Not Go Unaddressed," *Hindustan Times*, November 26, 2013.

4. "Punjab's Pathankot Air Base Attacked: How it Happened," *Hindustan Times*, January 2, 2016; "Details of Chargesheet Filed by The NIA in Pathankot Terror Attack," *Times Now News*, December 19, 2016; and Shyam Saran, "Pathankot-like Security Challenges," *Hindustan Times*, January 6, 2016.

**In both Mumbai and Pathankot, the Indian government favored ad hoc procedures over the established crisis management mechanisms, which were either not mobilized when most needed or failed to deliver on their mandate when deployed.**

deal with hostage situations — could not be moved from their base in Delhi to Mumbai until a day later because no air transport was available. Worse, on arrival at the Mumbai airport, no ground transport was immediately available either. Had the CMG met more urgently and functioned properly, it would have asked the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to immediately commandeer any available civil aircraft for the NSG's needs. The Maharashtra state government would have been ordered to provide transportation to the NSG commandos on their arrival in Mumbai.

Poor media management posed another shortcoming of the ad hoc approach, as no institution took responsibility for this task. The free-wheeling TV coverage from very close to the scenes of action became a valuable guide to the terrorists and their handlers to adapt their actions in response. It also gifted to the terrorist group and its sponsors within Pakistan wide international exposure and broadcasted the vulnerability and incompetence of New Delhi in handling terrorist attacks. Some agencies involved in the rescue operations appeared more interested in getting their five minutes of fame on television than in carrying out their duties professionally.<sup>5</sup> It has been alleged that some agencies were guilty of leaking sensitive operational information to the media, which was then relayed to the attackers through their handlers. Fortunately, in the Pathankot case there was better media management, but here too a carefully formulated communication strategy was absent, which led to a premature announcement that the combing operations at the base had been concluded.

Limited coordination and communication posed additional challenges. When the Mumbai terrorist attack began, there was also considerable confusion at the state level in Maharashtra. No state-level CMG met when the crisis broke. There was no single operational headquarters set up to coordinate the response to the attacks and to function as the single interface with the central government, and

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5. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*, February 23, 2000, available at the Nuclear Weapon Archive, <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/KargilRCB.html>.

contradictory instructions passed back and forth between multiple central and state agencies without a nexus of coordination.

In the case of Pathankot, limited coordination and poor flow of information similarly hurt the effectiveness of crisis management. There was initial confusion over what had happened. Authorities neither knew how many terrorists had managed to infiltrate nor the point (or points) of ingress. There was failure, initially, to link the crisis with an earlier incident involving a senior Punjab state police officer, which may have been linked to a cross-border smuggling racket. It appears that the terrorists crossed the heavily fortified border by taking advantage of routes used for drug smuggling, sometimes with the complicity of border guarding personnel and the state law and order machinery. The initial antiterrorist operations were carried out by the air force itself, but then the National Intelligence Agency was brought in. There was confusion as to which agency should lead the antiterrorist operations, and media reports suggested behind-the-scenes turf battles. Active operations inside the base stretched over three days and combing operations across the sprawling base took even longer.

Upon closer evaluation, the Indian government's responses to the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks were incoherent, uncoordinated, and ineffective mainly because it decided to bypass its own well-established institutional setup and failed to follow established drills. There was a wholesale devotion to ad hoc responses that could not keep up with very rapidly changing situations. There continues to be a penchant for ad hoc responses, rather than building upon well-established institutional mechanisms and fully tested drills. Well-established crisis response drills, drawn up after detailed deliberations and constantly reviewed and updated, often remain solely on paper. Such detailed drills and standard procedures, involving multiple agencies, were drafted for the CMG after the 1999 Kandahar hostage crisis, which was spurred by an aircraft hijacking incident. However, one wonders whether officials will adhere to the drill during an actual future hijacking incident.

The value of relying upon a well-established institutional structure — with unambiguous lines of authority where each arm of the state understands its role — cannot be overstated. No individual functionary or multiplicity of functionaries acting in an ad hoc and uncoordinated fashion can deal effectively with a crisis. Neither in the case of Mumbai nor Pathankot was there any mention of the CMG. The Cabinet secretary appears to have been a bystander. If the CMG has been set aside, has a more efficient institutional structure been put in its place? Are there explicit drills for well-trained personnel at clearly designated agencies to respond to specific crises? Were these in action at Pathankot? Available evidence shows that the answer is negative. The deployment of security personnel such as the NSG or the army appears to have been ad hoc, reactive, and mostly uncoordinated.

### *Necessary Reforms: Personnel, Priorities, and Governance*

There are other significant deficiencies for which Indian authorities ought to pursue urgent reforms, especially involving personnel, priorities, and governance.

**Personnel.** There is a failure to appreciate that any security system is ultimately only as effective as its junior-most foot soldier. The best superstructure remains a house built on sand unless it is supported by highly trained and highly motivated personnel at the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Law and order is a state subject, as opposed to a national subject. Most of the recruitment of police personnel at these levels is subject to political patronage and corruption. Once recruited, these personnel are rarely provided even basic training. Some recruits, being virtually illiterate, are not even trainable in any sense. Their working and living conditions are often pathetic, and unsurprisingly, they are highly susceptible to corruption. Moreover, most state governments are guilty of allowing large vacancies in their police forces. India has one of the lowest police-to-population ratios at 125 officers per 100,000 people. Therefore, at the ground level there is virtually no policing of the kind that might have apprehended the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists as they landed on the beach outside Mumbai. That there is regular smuggling from across the sea is an open secret. The Mumbai terrorists likely slipped into India using these smuggling routes and relied upon local smuggling networks that may have paid off the local police. Additional bureaucratic layers added to an already top-heavy system will not likely make any difference unless the reality at the local level is addressed.

**Priorities.** There is inordinate emphasis on the personal security of political personages and senior officials at the expense of public security, and this focus is continuing to rise at a staggering rate. Against the previously mentioned miserable numbers of police personnel per the overall population, there are three security personnel, on an average, for every “very important person” (VIP). The highest 120 VIPs command details of 30-40 NSG each.<sup>6</sup> Some political leaders are protected by as many as 100 or more security guards at the Indian state’s expense. This is anachronistic in a democratic society, but it also adversely impacts the state’s ability to ensure public security and law and order, without which authorities cannot address terrorist threats.

**Governance.** Finally, there is an overarching challenge of governance itself. Over the years, an extensive “arbitrage economy” has risen in India thanks to administrative and differential pricing of key resources, commodities, and services. For example, kerosene is subsidized because it is ostensibly used by the poorest sections in the country, but more than 40 percent of all subsidized kerosene sold is diverted to the black market where it is resold for adulterating other more expensive fuels. This has criminalized large sectors of the economy controlled by powerful mafias with links to politicians. These market distortions create

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6. Rajesh Ahuja, “Staggering Rise in Number of People Receiving VIP Protection; Goes Up to 454,” *Hindustan Times*, May 30, 2016.

opportunities for exploitation by terrorists and criminals. The Modi government is partially addressing this problem through a gradual replacement of subsidies with direct transfer of welfare benefits using the biometric-based unique identity system known locally as *Aadhar*. This initiative will shrink the scope for arbitrage as will the gradual spread of digital transactions. However, some weaknesses remain unaddressed.

In addition, the January 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot saw terrorists likely entering into Indian territory by taking advantage of the several smuggling routes, in particular those used for drug trafficking. The connivance of elements in our border security forces that have been compromised because of large payoffs is widely known. There is a similar situation along the India-Myanmar border. Large shipments of contraband goods, including drugs, make their way into Manipur across the border, which is controlled by a powerful trade mafia. Elements in the local administration, border guarding forces, and border revenue are often compromised. Should it be surprising that terrorist elements are also able to enter without hindrance like contraband smugglers to then attack targets in the country? Even if authorities were to harden the India-Pakistan border, would the terrorists not move their operations to another stretch of India's porous borders? The legalization and regulation of cross-border trade would provide one important means of reducing this threat.

A strong agency at the national level and the best gadgetry in the world will not meet the challenge of cross-border terrorism if these long-standing governance infirmities remain unaddressed. Unless there is political will to undertake urgent structural reforms, India will continue to be vulnerable to such security challenges.

## **Evaluation, Transparency, and Implementing Reform**

To learn lessons from policy failure, states must conduct internal autopsies and audits of procedures to determine what went wrong. In the aftermath of the crisis management failures in Mumbai and in Pathankot, the government avoided objective and public evaluation into reasons for its mismanagement. This contrasts the open and transparent investigation and evaluation carried out by an independent body of highly respected experts after the 1999 Kargil War, chaired by K. Subrahmanyam, a well-known security analyst and former senior official in the Ministry of Defence. Since two of the cases relate to cross-border terrorism involving Pakistan, it would be worthwhile to recall the assessment made by the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) on the security gaps that allowed the Pakistani intrusion and its key recommendations for strengthening the country's security. Furthermore, the report was released as a public document that

could be debated openly.<sup>7</sup> This ensured a degree of public accountability, which is very important in a democracy.

### *The Kargil Review Committee Report*

The Kargil War unfolded over May-July 1999 along a 200-kilometer trans-Himalayan front when Pakistani troops occupied the heights across the Line of Control — undetected by Indian security forces — and threatened the key highway linking the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh. When the war ended with the ousting of the Pakistani troops from most of the heights they had occupied and the withdrawal of the rest under U.S. pressure, attention in India shifted to assessing what allowed the intrusion to go undetected and lessons to draw from the experience. It was on July 24, 1999, that the Cabinet decided to constitute a committee of independent experts with a mandate “to analyze whether the kind of Pakistani aggression that took place could have been assessed from the available intelligence inputs and if so, what were the shortcomings and failures which led to the nation being caught by surprise.”<sup>8</sup> Since the Mumbai and Pathankot cases considered in this essay are Pakistan-related, it may be worth recalling the KRC report’s identification of the Indian side shortcomings and recommendations on how to avoid a future Kargil-type situation.

A Group of Ministers (GOM) was set up in April 2000 to consider the recommendations and ensure their implementation. It included the central ministers of home, defense, external affairs, and finance, with the national security advisor included as a special invitee. The GOM in turn set up four task forces to deal with specific subjects: intelligence apparatus, internal security, border management, and defense management. The reports of the task force were submitted to the GOM on Sept. 30, 2000, and the GOM itself submitted its recommendations to the Cabinet in February 2001. The CCS considered these recommendations and approved all for implementation in a decision adopted on May 11, 2001.

A number of the KRC recommendations are worth revisiting because they were not fully implemented in deed or spirit and continue to shape crisis management failures in India. The KRC recommended the following points.

**Full-time National Security Advisor.** The NSA should be a full-time position and not a part-time responsibility with some other senior governmental position. The position became full-time only when there was a change of government in 2004. Initially the responsibilities of the principal secretary to the prime minister and NSA were vested in the same person.

**Revived Defence Intelligence Agency.** There should be an efficiently functioning Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) comprised of the army, navy, and air force

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7. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

8. *Ibid.*

that undertakes defense-related intelligence gathering and assessment as a parallel intelligence track to the Research and Analysis Wing (in charge of external intelligence) and the Intelligence Bureau (in charge of internal security and counterintelligence). Although the DIA was set up in 2002, its current capabilities and functionality are neither publicly known nor well understood.

**Defined Roles for Army, Paramilitaries, and Police.** The army should not take on internal or counterinsurgency duties, as this detracts from its normal role of defending the country's borders. Police forces must address internal security duties, and properly trained and equipped paramilitary forces should address counterinsurgency. There has been partial implementation of this recommendation. While the Central Reserve Police Force has been assigned this role, its training and equipment leaves much to be desired, and police forces, which are under state jurisdiction, are not adequate. Their working conditions are poor, recruitment is influenced by political patronage, and their equipment is outdated. To date, the army has continued to engage in counterinsurgency duties, particularly when there are major incidents.

**Border Management Overhaul.** A major recommendation was for a complete renovation of India's border management. The committee found that India's long land borders remained porous, allowing the relatively free flow of narcotics, illegal immigrants, terrorists, and weapons. It recommended that each border be assigned to one paramilitary force so that over time each can become familiar with the terrain, its particular challenges, and threats. These forces would also develop improved infrastructure, surveillance and interdiction capabilities, and local intelligence. This recommendation has been implemented with the Border Security Force assigned to the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police assigned to the Chinese border, the Seema Suraksha Bal (a newly created paramilitary force) assigned to the Nepal and Bhutan borders, and the Assam Rifles assigned to the Myanmar border. These forces are all under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which has a Department of Border Management to administer them. However, experience over the past few years has revealed that important weaknesses remain, including the lack of manpower, inadequacy of training and equipment, and poor intelligence gathering capabilities.

**Promoting Important Areas of Study.** The Kargil Committee made some overall observations and recommendations that are relevant not only for the specific challenge posed by a hostile Pakistan but also for the overall management of national security. For example, concerning intelligence, the committee said "[a] generalist administration culture would appear to permeate the intelligence field."<sup>9</sup> It called for the promotion of specialized studies, tasking think tanks and universities to undertake specific studies and encouraged area specialization.

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9. Ibid.

It also emphasized the need for language studies on a much wider scale than currently available. In recent years, there has been a mushrooming of foreign policy and security-related think tanks in India, and some universities have expanded their area studies programs. However, the quality of their output is patchy and still lacks regular and institutionalized engagement between governmental decision-making personnel and academic institutions. Such engagement as exists is only episodic.

**Improved Information and Media Management.** The KRC drew specific attention to the importance of strategic communications and media management in crisis situations. It was imperative that the state provides citizens with authentic up-to-date information in such situations, as rumors and speculations complicate crisis management. This has become even more important in the emerging world of Facebook and Twitter. To create an informed public opinion on key issues of national security, the KRC recommended a white paper on India's nuclear weapons program. It further highlighted the lack of official public policy documentation on the Kashmir dispute and authoritative official histories of the armed conflicts that had threatened India's security such as the 1948-49 India-Pakistan War over Kashmir, the 1965 Rann of Kutch War, the 1971 India-Pakistan War, and the latest conflict over Kargil. This documentation, it said, should be authentic and include comprehensive politico-military references to which public opinion could refer. These recommendations remain unimplemented.

**Formulating a Comprehensive Strategy.** While the committee pointed to specific security gaps and recommended corrective measures, it recognized that these had to be located in a comprehensive security policy that reflected the changing threat scenario:

An effective and appropriate national security planning and decision-making structure for India in the nuclear age is overdue, taking account of the revolution in military affairs and threats of proxy war and terrorism and the imperative of modernising the Armed Forces. An objective assessment of the last 52 years will show that the country is lucky to have scraped through various national security threats without too much damage, except in 1962. The country can no longer afford such ad hoc functioning.<sup>10</sup>

No follow-up steps were taken on this critical recommendation, and ad hocism has continued to characterize the state's response to crises, even with the creation of standard drills for a more informed response.

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10. Ibid.

The Indian government does not lack proper diagnostics or awareness of the means to remedy gaps in security, but these efforts are inhibited by perverse political incentives and the absence of an overarching, clarifying, and organizing statement of national security strategy.

### *Task Force on National Security*

A follow-up effort to the KRC revealed the limits of such evaluative bodies if recommendations remain non-transparent and reforms are not implemented. On June 21, 2011, the Task Force on National Security was established under the chairmanship of former Cabinet Secretary Naresh Chandra to examine India's security challenges in some detail, especially regarding how much follow-up had taken place on the earlier KRC recommendations.<sup>11</sup> It presented its report in May 2012. However, unlike the Kargil Committee Report, whose contents were made public, only some sparse details of the National Task Force's report are available publicly.

The task force reiterated several of the observations of the decade-earlier KRC. Despite the KRC emphasis on coordination among intelligence agencies, the Mumbai terrorist attack had starkly exposed the lack of intelligence sharing, expert analysis, and regular intelligence briefing of decision-making levels in government. The task force endorsed remedial steps, such as the setting up of the National Intelligence Agency and the proposal to set up a counterterrorism unit with branches in states (this is as yet unimplemented).

The task force made several other recommendations related to different dimensions of national security. These included the creation of a special operations command within the armed forces to tackle new asymmetric threats, an aerospace command to integrate India's considerable space capabilities into its national security system, a cyber command for an integrated management of cybersecurity, an advanced projects agency for promoting defense technology and innovation, and a national defense university.

But the most important recommendation made by the task force stressed the necessity for India to formulate and publicly articulate a national security doctrine and a national security strategy, which could enable comprehensive, coherent,

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11. Nitin Gokhale, "Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security: An Appraisal," Vivekananda International Foundation, July 16, 2012, <http://www.vifindia.org/article/2012/july/16/naresh-chandra-task-force-s-report-on-national-security-an-appraisal>.

and coordinated policymaking. This strongly reiterates the point made by the KRC that there needs to be an approved template that guides different government agencies to respond to different crises on the basis of a shared national security doctrine and a strategy.

## Conclusion

Deliberate political choices, not ignorance, have weakened the effectiveness of crisis management in India. The Indian government does not lack proper diagnostics or awareness of the means to remedy gaps in security, but these efforts are inhibited by perverse political incentives and the absence of an overarching, clarifying, and organizing statement of national security strategy. As we have seen, there are effective drills in place to meet different types of crisis situations. Some have even been rehearsed through simulated exercises. However, when a crisis erupts, these drills are mostly set aside in favor of ad hoc responses that then invariably lead to suboptimal results. The question is why, despite repeated reviews and recommendations by experienced experts, do we not see much change in this regard? How is it that in the Iraq hostage crisis, the established drill was allowed to work without interference but in the case of Mumbai and Pathankot it was not?

In my view, the Iraq hostage crisis was politically less serious than the Mumbai terrorist attack and the Pathankot attack. In the latter cases, the level of political sensitivity was much higher and, therefore, there was an attempt to control the political narrative, which eventually proved futile and even counterproductive. The desire to remain in charge almost invariably ended in having no control whatsoever over fast-moving events that encompass all crises. There is a failure to recognize that by precisely following carefully crafted security drills it might be possible to remain in relative control of the narrative.

Furthermore, political sensitivity and the desire not to be held responsible for failure also limit transparency. Crisis management can only improve through constant lesson learning from past experiences. In the case of Kargil, we have an example of a government opening itself to scrutiny and investigation by experts outside of the governmental system. In the other two cases, we see an attempt to avoid transparent accounting, which reduces the likelihood of learning important lessons from how authorities handled these crises. Those guilty of mismanagement are unlikely to make an honest assessment of their own failings or suggest changes, which may come at the cost of their personal or organizational vested interests. Thus, such investigation and accounting must be institutionalized, as opposed to being left to the discretion of the political leadership.

Another reason for ad hoc-ism is India's lack of a national security doctrine or even a more limited national security strategy. Without such a doctrine/strategy, it is difficult to have a whole-of-government response to any crisis. Most

crises require a coordinated response from several agencies of the state and may even involve nonstate entities like the media. Both the Kargil Committee and the later Task Force on National Security underlined the urgent necessity for a national security doctrine and strategy, but successive governments have not adopted one even though there have been efforts to undertake this exercise, including in the National Security Advisory Board under the National Security Council. Therefore, while the specific recommendations of these two very important expert bodies are extremely valuable, they need to be pursued as part and parcel of a larger national security strategy that in turn must be rooted in a national security doctrine. Such a doctrine must have a clear vision for India's future, the kind of a country and society the country wishes to become over the medium and long term, alternative trajectories that are available to achieve national objectives, and likely challenges and threats. This cannot be a one-time exercise but instead requires constant review as circumstances change. It needs to be based on a broad political consensus, particularly in a democracy like India, and become a guide for policymaking not only across all levels of government but also broader society. Without these steps, ad hoc-ism invariably becomes the default response to crises to India's detriment.



# CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

## Challenges in Pakistan-India Relations

*Riaz Mohammad Khan*

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Relations between Pakistan and India are largely a story of rivalry, conflict, and a failure to address disputes, yet there are bright spots where the leadership of the two countries have demonstrated good sense by containing a crisis or conflict or successfully resolving issues of such seminal importance as the sharing of rivers. On several occasions in the past, the two countries have shown the capacity to *manage*, if not prevent, crises. More than ever before there is a need to institutionalize this capacity. These two neighbors with expanding nuclear arsenals can no longer afford the risk of an all-out mutually destructive war. From this perspective, I examine lessons learned from past crises and look at what can be done to minimize the risk of conflict in terms of crisis management, counterterrorism, and stable normalized bilateral relations.

Paradoxically, the unremitting hostility between the two countries, which is partly rooted in the traumatic circumstances of their independence, exists alongside a reservoir of centuries of common experience and cultural overlap that made plausible such acts of native diplomacy as former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's participation in the inaugural ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 and the latter's surprise detour to Lahore in December 2015 to attend his Pakistani counterpart's granddaughter's wedding. But in early 2016, attacks by a handful of militants on the Pathankot and Uri bases against the backdrop of sustained youth agitation in the Kashmir Valley have erased the impact, if any, of the two reciprocal gestures. As long as the two countries are unable to resolve their current and recurring disputes and conflicts, they will continue to sow seeds of crises that can spiral unexpectedly to the existential threat of all-out conflict.

There is no dearth of potential communication channels between the two sides. A much larger number of people in both countries favor normalization of the bilateral relationship than believe that Pakistan and India are in a permanent quasi-ideological deadlock. However, these promising sentiments cannot always

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**India and Pakistan need permanent and reliable institutional mechanisms for diplomatic and political contacts to prevent or handle crises.**

restrain a developing crisis or substitute for formal mechanisms and active communication channels to prevent or defuse a conflict situation. Over the decades, the two countries have resorted to formal and informal mechanisms, including international, regional, bilateral, and third-party mediations that have been largely ad hoc and dependent on the evolving crisis situation. This pattern is inadequate for two nuclear armed neighbors. India and Pakistan need permanent and reliable institutional mechanisms for diplomatic and political contacts to prevent or handle crises.

Section one of this essay considers the background and nature of past India-Pakistan crises and conflicts, while section two reviews the existing confidence-building measure (CBM) regime. Section three lays out several proposals for achieving lasting normalcy in bilateral relations and improving counterterrorism efforts and crisis management mechanisms. It concludes with specific proposals for improving crisis management, including backchannel communications, bilateral summits, and doctrinal shifts.

## **Crisis Anatomy: Lessons from Past Conflicts and Crises**

### *The Background of Conflict in South Asia: Kashmir*

The Kashmir dispute lies at the heart of Pakistan-India tensions and conflict. Pakistan regards Kashmir as an unfinished agenda of the partition of British India and emphasizes the Kashmiris' right to choose between the two successor states. India anchors its position in a controversial accession document.<sup>1</sup> Immediately after independence, when fighting broke out over Kashmir, India took the matter to the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) which called for a ceasefire and plebiscite, followed by several U.N. Commission for India and Pakistan resolutions to sort out differences on procedure and conditions.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the question of withdrawing troops as well as Pakistan-backed tribesmen from the state territory proved insurmountable. Later, India demurred on the resolutions

1. Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 84-85.

2. Of particular importance are U.N. Security Council Resolution 47 of April 21, 1948 and Resolution 98 of December 23, 1952, as well as U.N. Commission for India and Pakistan Resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949.

and invoked circumstantial changes following Pakistan's membership in U.S.-sponsored alliances in the mid-1950s.<sup>3</sup> During the intermittent negotiations over the years, India insisted on formalizing the status quo.

Kashmir stirs deep emotions in Pakistan as a large segment of the population in eastern Punjab shares common ethnicity in addition to centuries old cultural links. On the other hand, India regards the part of Kashmir under its control as a symbol of India's multi-religious and multicultural democratic persona.

Efforts to resolve Kashmir gradually shifted from the UNSC-recommended plebiscite to focus on subregions of the erstwhile princely state, as evident in the 1950 Owen Dixon plan.<sup>4</sup> This subregional approach — echoed five decades later in the four-point formula — evolved through back channel diplomacy initiated by President Pervez Musharaf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.<sup>5</sup> The subregional approach implicitly concedes that a new political dispensation is required for areas of large Kashmiri demographics, especially the valley where political alienation and agitation is chronic and exerts constant pressure on New Delhi to look for an acceptable settlement.<sup>6</sup>

The 1948 and 1965 India-Pakistan Wars were centered on Kashmir and ended in a ceasefire through active UNSC intercession. The 1965 war prompted an extraregional mediation effort by the Soviet Union resulting in the 1966 Tashkent Declaration. The third ceasefire, formalized under UNSC Resolution 307, came in December 1971 when India took advantage of a civil war situation to intervene militarily to break up Pakistan. The episode was unrelated to Kashmir, but the cessation of hostilities on the western front established a new Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir and led to the bilaterally negotiated Simla Agreement, which is among the foundational documents meant to govern post-1971 relations between the two countries.

### *Other Disputes, Conflicts, and Crises*

The background of other disputes provides the necessary context for how conflicts and crises developed and were managed in the past and what lessons can be gleaned from their successful management and de-escalation.

**The Rann of Kutch War and Sir Creek.** A mini-war broke out in December 1964 along the border of the Pakistani province of Sindh and the Indian state of Gujarat. Each side had differing historical claims relating to the boundary demarcation going back to the British decision to separate Sindh province from the Bombay Confederacy in the early 20th century. Skirmishes continued until

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3. A.G. Noorani, *The Kashmir Dispute 1947-2012*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Tulik Books, 2013), 25-27.

4. For a history on the Dixon plan, see A.G. Noorani, "The Dixon Plan," *Frontline* 19, no. 21, October 2002. For a quick review of various Kashmir peace plans, see Muzamil Jaleel, "A Guide to Kashmir Peace Plans," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2002.

5. Kashmir Study Group, *Kashmir: A Way Forward* (Larchmont: Kashmir Study Group, 2005).

6. See Sameer Lalwani, "Valley of the Brawls: Tensions Rise in Kashmir," *Foreign Affairs*, February 11, 2016. Also see March 2016 comments on the recent rift between Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party in India-administered Kashmir.

May 1965 when, as a result of British mediation, the two countries agreed to a ceasefire and to refer the dispute to an international tribunal. The Rann of Kutch award settled the boundary except for its westernmost extremity of Sir Creek for want of survey. Pakistan claims the boundary lies on the eastern bank of the creek, as indicated on a hand-drawn map of 1914 delineating the southern boundary of Sindh. India invokes the Thalweg principle of international law.<sup>7</sup> To make matters more complicated, over the century the topography of the creek and adjoining area have changed considerably. The differing claims are quantifiable to an area of about 74 square kilometers of the creek surface and over a thousand square kilometers of exclusive economic zone. The issue is essentially technical. Under a period of improved relations in 2006, there was a minor diplomatic breakthrough for a survey of the area.<sup>8</sup> However, even this bilateral progress required both an innovative approach and significant political push despite good India-Pakistan relations that year.

**Siachen.** Since the 1972 Simla Agreement, military hostilities have been a frequent occurrence along the LoC and have shaped two significant conflicts aimed at territorial acquisition. In the 1984 Siachen dispute, India launched Operation Meghdoot to push its military presence over the Siachen Glacier, which today is the highest battlefield in the world and where more lives have been lost on account of severe weather conditions than as a result of exchange of fire. If military presence and activities are contributing to the melting of the glacier, the conflict is no less than a monumental ecological disaster in the making for the entire region.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan regards the Indian ingress to be a violation of the Simla Agreement understanding, which proscribed change of the ground (territorial) realties in Kashmir through use of force.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, India invokes the 1949 Karachi Agreement to delimit the erstwhile ceasefire line in Kashmir, which was demarcated up to point NJ9842 and suggests vaguely that beyond this point it should run “thence north to the glaciers.”<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, following its provisional boundary agreement with China, Pakistan assumed an imaginary line linking NJ9842 with the Karakoram Pass to be the extended LoC. Efforts to address this low intensity but simmering conflict have been almost exclusively bilateral. India effectively conducted a *fait accompli* at Siachen, which the

7. For more on the Thalweg doctrine, see “Rule of the Thalweg,” Oxford Reference, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803103515186>.

8. The two sides had agreed on the need to survey the creek for depths. But progress remained stalled as they could not agree on the mouth of the estuary. In 2005, an innovative approach was agreed to survey an area enclosing the creek within a parallelogram of arbitrarily selected coordinates without prejudice to the positions of the two sides. The selection took more than six months which pushed the survey to winter 2007 when the political environment started unraveling.

9. Debarati Mukherjee, “Environmental Impact of Siachen Conflict,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 1, 2010.

10. Article 4 (ii) in Simla Agreement of July 2, 1972 states “[i]n Jammu and Kashmir, the line of control resulting from the ceasefire of December 17, 1971, shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognized position of either side. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this line.” See Ministry of External Affairs (India), “Simla Agreement July 2, 1972,” July 2, 1972, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5541/Simla+Agreement>.

11. “Agreement between Military Representatives of India and Pakistan Regarding the Establishment of a Cease-fire Line in the State of Jammu and Kashmir,” July 29, 1949, available at U.N. Peacemaker, [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN%20PK\\_490729\\_%20Karachi%20Agreement.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN%20PK_490729_%20Karachi%20Agreement.pdf).

Pakistan Army challenged and attempted to dislodge unsuccessfully multiple times. Left unaddressed, this enduring friction point has the potential to feed into future crises.

**Operation Brasstacks.** The Brasstacks crisis from November 1986 to February 1987 is atypical and therefore merits mention. It was the product of both Pakistan and India misreading each other's intentions. The newly appointed Indian Army Chief Gen. Krishnaswamy Sunderji planned and initiated a massive military exercise in the Rajasthan desert close to a vulnerable point of the Pakistani border where the main communication arteries connect the southern and northern parts of Pakistan. The exercise mobilized over half a million Indian troops and even included amphibious assault groups. This caused deep concern in Islamabad.<sup>12</sup> As a precaution and countermeasure, Pakistan redeployed one armored corps with elements closer to the Indian Punjab, stirring deep anxiety in New Delhi because of the large number of Indian troops shifted from the Indian Punjab to take part in the exercise. The resulting tension obliged Pakistan President Zia ul Haq to dispatch Foreign Secretary Abdul Sattar to Delhi. Subtle signals were reportedly conveyed that in case of attack Pakistan was capable of inflicting "unacceptable" damage. By February 1987, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ordered a winding down of the exercise — now part of case studies taught at Pakistan military war colleges. High-level political engagement was critical to Pakistan's management strategy for controlling escalation during the Brasstacks crisis.

**Kargil.** The second major LoC-related conflict in 1999 around the Kargil heights (which Pakistan had lost in 1971) triggered a large crisis in part because it was an incomplete *fait accompli* and was fought under the nuclear shadow. Kargil took place on the heels of the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998, which established a cycle of overt nuclear deterrence — a most consequential development for relations between the two countries and for strategic balance in the region. With this backdrop, a local Pakistani army command initiated a recapture of the heights during the winter months — when Indian troops traditionally vacated forward posts in the area — which spiraled into full blown hostilities in May 1999. For Pakistan, the move was a mirror image of the Indian ingress in Siachen and on a smaller scale in the Qamar and Chorbatala sectors along the LoC. For India, it was a flagrant violation of the Simla Agreement.

A number of factors contributed to stable management and de-escalation of the Kargil conflict — most notably open communications, India's calculated choice *not* to expand the theater of conflict,<sup>13</sup> Pakistan's consistent call for

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12. According to Aziz Ahmed Khan, Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner in Delhi at the time, the Pakistani High Commission had started plans for evacuation in case of a conflict.

13. Jaswant Singh, "Kargil and Beyond" (speech by Jaswant Singh at India International Center, New Delhi, July 20, 1999), <http://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?18995/Kargil+and+Beyond+Talk+by+Jaswant+Singh+EAM+July+20+1999>.

de-escalation, and a face-saving exit from international interest. Importantly, while insisting that Pakistan vacate the occupied heights in Kargil before any discussion, India did not shut off contacts, even those made at the prime minister level and through an informal backchannel. India agreed to receive Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, only to repeat the same message.<sup>14</sup> Pakistani political leadership, caught unprepared, embarrassed, and under international pressure, needed a face-saving way to implement its decision to withdraw. This was finally provided by a joint Pakistan-U.S. statement issued when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif traveled to Washington on July 4, 1999. The joint statement included a promise of “personal interest” by President Bill Clinton in encouraging the resumption of the dialogue process set out by the Lahore Summit to address all issues including Kashmir.

**Twin Peaks.** Like the 1999 Kargil conflict, the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis caused by the December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament and the June 2002 attack on an Indian army camp at Kaluchak took place under the nuclear umbrella. India blamed elements of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) for the attacks. These, and the later November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, offer important case studies for dealing with future challenges. They also provide insight into behavioral patterns of the two countries during crisis situations within the nuclear overhang. After the December 2001 attack, India reacted with Operation Parakram, involving large-scale military mobilization. Pakistan responded with its own military mobilization. As a result, nearly one million troops were in an eye-ball-to-eye-ball confrontation for over one year. But Pakistan also kept emphasizing the need for de-escalation. As international concern heightened, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited the region in May and June 2002 to defuse tensions.<sup>15</sup> The standoff eased in late 2002. To pave the way for the scheduled South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Islamabad, Musharaf declared a unilateral ceasefire along the LoC in October 2003. Unexpectedly, the 2002-3 period of tension was followed by five years of relative peace and sustained negotiations to address a range of issues and witnessed the most substantive effort ever undertaken bilaterally to address Kashmir.

**2006-7.** While India’s reaction to the Mumbai attacks of November 2008 (26/11) has been forceful and continues to have an effect on efforts to restart dialogue, its response to two preceding incidents, the 2006 Mumbai train bombings and the 2007 Samjhauta Express bombings, were muted. After the 2006 Mumbai train blasts, India stalled the ongoing dialogue, resuming it after a short

14. Sartaj Aziz, *Between Dreams and Realities: Some Milestones in Pakistan’s History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 269-70.

15. Secretary of State Colin Powell had earlier travelled to Islamabad and Delhi in January 2002 immediately after the attack on India’s Parliament. In June 2002, on the margins of the Asian Security Forum Summit at Almaty, President Vladimir Putin and President Jiang Zemin separately met Indian and Pakistani leaders to bring down tension. The same concern was expressed by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in their contacts with Islamabad and Delhi.

suspension and following an agreement between the two countries to set up an antiterrorism mechanism. There was no evidence of Pakistan-based operatives behind these blasts. The Indians reacted when it emerged that one of the suspects had fled to Karachi and then onward to the Persian Gulf. The Samjhauta Express bombings clearly had the qualities of local terrorists who wanted to target Pakistanis travelling from Delhi to Lahore. One Indian Army officer who allegedly belonged to an extremist Hindu group, Lt. Col. Purohit, was arrested, but the investigation and court proceedings remain inconclusive.

**The Mumbai Attacks.** The 2008 Mumbai attacks shocked India as the carnage perpetrated by 10 members of the defunct Pakistan-based LeT played out on TV screens for three days and left more than 160 people dead. Powerful voices within the official Indian circles called for military action targeting LeT or any other similar group to retaliate and assuage inflamed public sentiment. As detailed by former Indian Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon in his book *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy*, the Indian leadership — having evaluated all options — decided against military or kinetic action.<sup>16</sup> Instead, India reacted with strong official and public indignation, launching a forceful media and international campaign demanding action by Pakistan against suspected Pakistan-based accomplices in the attacks and the perceived terrorist sanctuaries inside the country. The purpose was to highlight India as a victim of cross-border terrorism and to put Pakistan on the defensive internationally. This decision was largely responsible for restraining the crisis. The 2008 Mumbai crisis did not lead to military escalation.

From a Pakistani perspective, management mechanisms for the 2008 Mumbai crisis centered on demonstrating good will and supporting prosecution of the guilty parties. The Pakistan government condemned the attacks. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who happened to be in Delhi for talks at the time of the attacks, promised cooperation in any investigation. Pakistan later detained suspects, including alleged mastermind Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi. But the court trial remained inconclusive for technical/legal reasons such as inaccessibility to eyewitnesses and to the principal accused, who was arrested by the Indian authorities and later executed in 2012. The Indians dismissed these procedural legal requirements as pretext for prevarication on bringing culprits to justice. They blamed the Pakistan intelligence agency of complicity. India suspended bilateral dialogue with Pakistan and moved terrorism to the center of its concerns. The Mumbai attacks continue to cast a bleak shadow over bilateral relations, inhibiting dialogue and positive movement. Broadly, 26/11 appears to have deeply wounded the Indian psyche.

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16. Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 2016) 92-103.

**Pathankot and Uri Incidents.** In January 2016 an Indian Air Force base came under attack, resulting in the death of three Indian military personnel and four militants that India suspected of belonging to defunct Pakistan-based JeM. India avoided accusing Pakistan but demanded action. Pakistan's crisis management strategy mirrored its approach to the 26/11 incident. Pakistan detained some JeM members, placed the group's leader under house custody, and agreed to cooperate with investigations. Meanwhile, the resumed foreign secretary-level talks in March — where Pakistan expected the revival of comprehensive dialogue — failed to reach any agreement. India insisted that first there should be talks on cooperation on counterterrorism and progress on prosecution of the Pathankot suspects. The Pakistan side could not agree because it was already stung by strong domestic criticism for an unprecedented omission of Kashmir in a bilateral joint communiqué with India issued on the sidelines of the Ufa Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in July 2015. The communiqué had focused on counterterrorism. The joint investigation stalled when a Pakistani investigation team visiting Pathankot averred that the attack incident could have been staged by India to derail talks.

An attack on the Uri military base near the LoC occurred in September 2016. Nineteen security personnel and four militants were killed. India reacted by claiming that it conducted a “surgical strike” against militant camps on the Pakistan side of the LoC and vowed to isolate Pakistan internationally. Pakistan denied any Indian military strike inside its territory. Controversy over the surgical strike aside, the Uri incident snuffed out already fragile hopes for a resumption of bilateral dialogue.

It is also important to note that both the Pathankot and Uri incidents took place against the backdrop of a simmering youth uprising across the valley that intensified with the killing of Kashmiri youth leader Burhan Wani of the Hizbul Mujahideen in July 2016. Since 2015, there have been increased violations of the LoC resulting in both military and civilian casualties and exchange of accusations. Occasional flag-staff meetings are the only active mechanism to locally address and restrain these hostilities. Any other contacts thus far have remained on hold.

The above review of India-Pakistan crises and conflicts shows the wide range of modalities that were utilized by the two countries to address disputes and arrest crises with often questionable success. The most successful methods appear to have been channels of high-level communication and engagement with third-party mediators. However, recent lower-level crises reveal these channels have atrophied and third parties are less engaged. Clearly, the two countries lack established procedures, institutionalized dialogues, or agreed approaches to handle crises. This deficiency is particularly risky since the two countries have crossed the nuclear threshold and are declared nuclear weapon states.

## Differing Narratives, Existing CBMs, and Dangerous Strategies

A number of existing India-Pakistan CBMs have proven effective in past crises. The potential utility of these CBMs in preventing and managing future crises, however, is limited because (1) they are vulnerable to competing narratives and domestic pressures, (2) they have not been institutionalized, and (3) they have not evolved alongside shifting military doctrines and capabilities or kept pace with crisis management needs in a changing threat environment.

### *Differing Narratives*

To understand the complexities of Pakistan-India relations and why peace efforts remained short of substantive progress, we need to appreciate the different and often conflicting narratives and perceptions on important issues.

These narratives sharpen under stress, focusing on selective concerns. The ubiquitous media further reinforces polarization of positions. While Mumbai looms large in Indian minds, Pakistanis speak of killings in Gujarat and Kashmir. India points to nonstate actors in Kashmir as terrorists, while Pakistan perceives these actors as freedom fighters. India accuses Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence of complicity in terrorist acts committed inside India; Pakistan charges India's Research and Analysis Wing of supporting subversive and militant elements inside Pakistan. India rejects Pakistan's contention that given the nature of extremist militancy and the phenomenon of nonstate actors, terrorist acts cannot be completely prevented and they must not be allowed to stall dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan seeks international intercession/mediation, but India is wary of intervention except on terrorism.

On terrorism, Pakistan's thinking has evolved. Having been pulled into a conflict with historical roots in the region and the greater Middle East, Pakistan views itself pitted against a wider extremist and sectarian threat and expects the world to appreciate its sacrifices and the much larger challenge it faces. In operations spread over nearly a decade, Pakistan has lost more soldiers than in all wars with India. Pakistan's own military bases have come under attack, and there is strong suspicion of foreign instigation. Also, Pakistan argues that its counterterrorism efforts must be sensitive to possible right-wing reaction. India, on the other hand, accuses Pakistan of being selective and that it targets only those militants who are a direct threat to Pakistan. Internationally, the Indian stance on terrorism finds resonance. This combined with rising Hindu nationalism in India has stiffened the Indian attitude toward Pakistan. Such divergences have clouded the mindset of the two sides over the years, impeding the mutual accommodation needed for progress in almost every area of prospective cooperation.

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17. See the joint statement issued at the end of President Musharraf's visit to New Delhi on April 18, 2005: "They determined that the peace process is now irreversible" [paragraph 5]. The two leaders pledged that they would not allow terrorism "to impede the peace process" [paragraph 8]. "Joint Statement, India-Pakistan," Ministry of External Affairs (India), April 18, 2005, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6588/Joint+Statement+IndiaPakistan>.

### *Existing CBMs*

There are many CBMs currently in place that have sometimes proved useful in past crises, but they are not institutionalized, are vulnerable to domestic pressures, and are not designed to stave off major crises. These CBMs are entirely inadequate for managing crises in a changing environment with evolving military doctrines and capabilities.

Over decades, mainly through bilateral exchanges and intermittent dialogue, the two countries have developed a body of security-related CBMs largely to address the flare up of tensions along the border and the LoC and to check misunderstanding in case of nuclear or missile accidents. These include field commander-level flag-staff meetings, hotlines at military and diplomatic levels, formal agreements for exchange of information in case of nuclear or missile accidents, accidents at sea, advance notification on missile tests, an arrangement for annual exchange of information on location coordinates of nuclear sites as part of a commitment not to target these sites,<sup>18</sup> an agreement on prevention of air-space violations, an agreement on advance notice on military exercises, maneuvers, and troop movements, and an agreement between the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency and the Indian Coast Guard.

These measures essentially aim at risk reduction in a peacetime environment. For example, under a 1988 agreement both sides routinely exchange lists of nuclear sites on every first day of the calendar year. Similarly, they notify each other of missile tests a couple of days in advance,<sup>19</sup> which is also international practice. Flag-staff meetings and military contact at the level of director general (military operations) are of an ad hoc character, which also serve as ready mechanisms to de-escalate tension, especially along the LoC and the Working Boundary.<sup>20</sup>

The two countries have yet to develop regular and permanent political-level mechanisms, such as was partly the intent of the composite dialogue which was instituted in 1997 to address a range of principal bilateral issues. Regular international and regional conferences and events provide important occasions for leaders to meet on the sidelines to push for forward movement. Yet these meetings do not necessarily take place and become the casualty of the vicissitudes of the prevalent political environment. Prime Ministers Modi and Sharif avoided a formal meeting even though the occasion was provided by the June 2017 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Astana.

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18. For recent analysis on this agreement and the potential for it to be modernized and expanded, see Toby Dalton, "Modernize the South Asia Nuclear Facility 'Non-Attack' Agreement," Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, June 28, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/modernize-south-asia-nuclear-facility-non-attack-agreement>.

19. For analysis on this notification regime and how it might be bolstered, see Frank O'Donnell, "Launching an Expanded Missile Flight-Test Notification Regime," Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, March 23, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/launching-expanded-missile-flight-test-notification-regime>.

20. For a list of confidence building measures, see Michael Krepon, "South Asia Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) Timeline," Stimson Center, April 14, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/south-asia-confidence-building-measures-cbm-timeline>.

### *New Dangerous Strategies and Doctrines*

A recent set of doctrinal and strategic developments introduce new risks into the regional environment and thus heighten the need for better CBMs and crisis management options. By introducing elements of speed and integration for rapid, decisive military actions, existing CBMs and crisis management mechanisms (like third-party intervention) will no longer have the same capacity to shape events and incentivize restraint.

Since the early 1970s, several attempts to negotiate a serious CBM — namely a nonaggression or no-war pact — have faltered because Pakistan insisted on a mechanism for the resolution of Kashmir, whereas India demanded a commitment by Pakistan not to stir or abet insurgency in Kashmir using nonstate actors. The Indian concern increased as Kashmir was gripped with widespread uprising and protests beginning the late 1980s. The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 and the subsequent year-and-half-long military escalation influenced Indian military strategists to conceive of better preparedness for a quick punitive strike in case of a major terrorist act linked to Pakistan. This was the genesis of India's Cold Start doctrine. The Mumbai attacks further sharpened doctrinal approaches for strategic response and counter-response in the event of similar attacks in the future, including possible ingression into Pakistani territory. Given the conventional imbalance, Pakistani riposte was unconventional and contingent upon justifying the development and use of tactical nuclear weapons to stave off the humiliation of losing territory. This theoretical reprisal, often loosely played out in wargame exercises, led to an assertion by the Indian side that use of any kind of nuclear weapon against Indian military forces anywhere, even if they were to be inside Pakistan, would be regarded as a nuclear attack against India warranting a full nuclear strike.

These doctrines are predicated on conventional and non-conventional measures that can inexorably spiral toward a nuclear exchange. They are not theoretical musings but are instead wedged into the complex matrix of tangible concerns over Kashmir, terrorism, and expanding nuclear capabilities. Despite being fraught with extreme risk, these doctrines are advocated in earnest. This is an apocalyptic scenario regardless of whether or not the doctrines enjoy political blessing. It mimics the worst of Cold War strategies and can arise under the miasma of distrust, rivalry, and hostility between the two countries.

India's Cold Start doctrine and the equally questionable Pakistani response need cool scrutiny. Punitive action to humiliate and destroy a nuclear-armed military by use of force is as reckless and unacceptable as the prospect of the use of nuclear weapons, however limited in scale, purpose, or intent. The premise that a subconventional (terrorist) act should provoke a massive conventional retaliation, which in turn must be countered by an unconventional (limited

nuclear) response, is deeply flawed. The key assumptions underlying this spiral of escalation must be questioned.

These precepts are too dangerous for hardball or wargaming by those steeped in a military culture of suspicion and strategies of action-counteraction. Any scenario inexorably leading to a nuclear exchange or based on a gamble as to who will blink first is insane in the extreme. Such a trajectory should be considered only to develop mutually agreed intercepts, wire trips, and mechanisms. Diplomacy and dialogue must intervene at every point of the trajectory to avert a catastrophe. Resort to international intercession and mechanisms must not be ruled out.

If and when there is requisite political willingness, perhaps motivated by third parties or in the aftermath of the next crisis, there are a litany of new CBM ideas that could be implemented. I propose several in the next section, but many other pragmatic measures have been put forth in recent scholarship, by both seasoned analysts and fresh voices.<sup>21</sup>

## What Needs to Be Done?

Three questions arise from the above discussion and analysis. First, what is needed for enduring normalcy in bilateral relations? Second, what must be done to prevent as far as possible incidences of terrorism that have the potential to set off escalation? Third, what is required to manage and arrest a crisis situation from spinning out of control? The first objective may require a longer-term approach, but the other two have urgency. However, none of them will be feasible without serious and sustained dialogue. The international community wants to see such a dialogue initiated not just because it is desirable but also because it is imperative due to the nuclear dimension.

### *Normalized Relations*

An enduring normalization of relations between the two countries depends on the resolution of outstanding issues, Kashmir in particular. As long as Kashmir festers, there will be acts of violence that India will link with elements in Pakistan. India downplays the indigenous alienation that erupts in prolonged protests and agitation, especially in the Kashmir Valley, which represents nearly 54 percent of the population of Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>22</sup> There, India has failed in its attempts over the years to manage Kashmiri disaffection and conflict.<sup>23</sup>

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21. For example, see Arka Biswas, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: Focusing on the Sub-Conventional," *South Asian Voices*, May 16, 2016; Tanvi Kulkarni, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: A New Approach," *South Asian Voices*, May 19, 2016; Sitara Noor, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: Addressing Mutual Concerns," *South Asian Voices*, May 17, 2016; and Sobia Paracha, "India-Pakistan Nuclear CBMs: Internal Dialogue as Catalyst for Peace?" *South Asian Voices*, May 18, 2016. Also, see Toby Dalton's commentary on this series, "What's the Future of CBMs in South Asia?" *South Asian Voices*, May 26, 2016; Robert Einhorn and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, *The Strategic Chain: Linking Pakistan, India, China, and the United States*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2017); and Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, September 5, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/off-ramps>.

22. Kashmir Study Group, Kashmir.

23. Happymon Jacob, *Kashmiri Uprising and India-Pakistan Relations: A Need for Conflict Resolution, Not Management* (Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, 2016).

India needs to understand that Kashmiri alienation does not solely stem from Pakistani instigation and that Pakistan gains little by random acts of terrorism that only draw universal opprobrium. Terrorism and extremism are a complex phenomenon. At the government and military levels, Pakistan is showing a commitment to address the challenge. Also, there are better options to bring pressure on Pakistan than trying surgical strikes or, even worse, a blitzkrieg against a nuclear-armed neighbor. On the other hand, Pakistan must establish credibility in dealing with extremist militant groups without distinguishing between their purported objectives. Clearly, it has not been enough to ban LeT and JeM. Stronger measures and proactive policy are required to restrain and discourage these groups whose actions only misrepresent Kashmiri sentiment and distort Pakistan's position on Kashmir.

The backchannel discussions on the so-called four-point formula on Kashmir had been a substantive effort. Spreading over 2005-6, these discussions focused on the concepts of self-governance within subregions of the territory, softening the LoC for intra-Kashmir travel and commerce, de-militarization, and a joint mechanism to safeguard essential interests of the two countries linked to Kashmir. The purpose was to work out an interim arrangement to bring maximum benefit to the Kashmiris, enabling them to be the masters of their own affairs in their respective subregions. The effort stalled following the 2007 judicial crisis in Pakistan and then the Mumbai terrorist attack in November 2008. The two sides have thus far been unable to resume regular dialogue — a necessary step to establish the confidence needed to revive the peace effort. Barring an unforeseeable change of circumstance, if ever there is a political solution it will be along the lines of the four-point formula.<sup>24</sup>

The Siachen dispute is the other issue that, if resolved, can have a significant positive impact on bilateral relations. For Pakistan's military, Siachen has become a litmus test for India's willingness to abide by any long-term understandings reached on other political issues. In 1984, the Indian army outsmarted the Pakistani army and captured the glacier and northern ridge of the Saltoro Range. Efforts to resolve this problem go back to 1989, when Prime Minister Gandhi had indicated Indian willingness to vacate the glacier to establish a demilitarized zone. In 1992 and then in 2005, serious proposals were placed on the table to establish a jointly monitored zone of disengagement. Indian concern for demarcation of the present Line of Actual Control was accommodated by making a schedule of disengagement an integral part of the formal agreement. Despite Prime Minister Singh's publicly expressed support for turning the glacier in a "zone of peace," it soon became apparent that the Indian defense establishment and the Indian top brass were opposed to vacating the glacier.<sup>25</sup> In his

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24. See Riaz Mohammad Khan, "Kashmir Talks: Reality and Myth," *Dawn*, September 11, 2017.

25. See Sanjaran Baru, "The Accidental Prime Minister," *The Times of India*, April 12, 2014. Baru was a former top aide to the Indian prime minister and blames the Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony and Army Chief J.J. Singh for scuttling the initiative.

book *How India Sees the World*, former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran opined that this was a missed opportunity.<sup>26</sup> Pakistan was ready to accept any monitoring arrangement to assuage Indian anxiety about the Pakistan Army taking advantage of the disengagement process. Besides this, any military move by Pakistan across the Salto Ridge made no military sense.

Following the 2011 Gayari avalanche in which over 140 Pakistani soldiers lost their lives, the Pakistan Army became more insistent on addressing the issue. Progress at this juncture could have had a positive psychological impact on bilateral relations, but India was only prepared to discuss the issue along with Kashmir. Thus, Kashmir and Siachen appear to have become binary problems to be resolved together, if and when addressed. Given its ecological dimension, Siachen is more than a simple territorial issue. If a jointly monitored and managed disengagement zone is established, Siachen can transform from a point of conflict to an arena of cooperation for the preservation of the glacier and the surrounding ecologically sensitive topography. This can be a path-breaking cooperative enterprise. Sir Creek lends itself to technically innovative solutions, including the possibility of turning it into a sanctuary and a jointly managed zone. But, it is comparatively less important and is unlikely to generate enthusiasm for resolution as a standalone issue.

Pakistani thinking often places emphasis on the final resolution of political disputes as the key to normalization of bilateral relations. Before the current demand on first addressing terrorism, Indian thinking had long advocated gradualist, incremental confidence building, opening trade and transit routes as well as cultural exchanges, and building a better environment conducive to resolving disputes. Experience shows that trade relaxation and increased cultural exchanges have proved to be fragile underpinnings for progress toward normalization. Take for example trade. Each time there is a spike in tension, negotiations on trade are interrupted and remain inconclusive. There were positive developments in 2013-14, with a substantive increase in exportable commodities and agreements on rationalizing tariffs, customs facilitation, and establishing banking facilities. The Pathankot and Uri incidents derailed everything. A free trade arrangement envisaged under SAARC and agreements for visa relaxation are in limbo. Travel and commerce across the LoC as worked out in 2005-6 have steadily declined. The relations are accident prone. One terrorist act, a flurry of ceasefire violations, agitation in Kashmir, or even a change of government can reverse progress.

There is no profit in saying that a peace constituency will grow and the danger of war will recede if trade, communications, and energy corridors are developed to link India with Central and West Asia through Pakistan. So far, the prospects

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26. Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut, 2017); Karan Thapar, "When History Failed to Turn: Shyam Saran's Book 'How India Sees the World' Identifies Two 'Missed Moments,'" *Business Standard*, September 5, 2017.

of such development appear distant. Past experiences suggest that unless the central concerns of each side are addressed, progress on soft issues will remain fragile. In fact, water disputes carry ominous portents and can pose a serious challenge in the future even though at present Kashmir alone is described as a nuclear flash point.<sup>27</sup>

### *Counterterrorism*

The fear that a major terrorist act inside India, linked to Kashmir or Pakistan, could cause an action-reaction escalation pushing the two countries toward the nuclear abyss requires that we focus on what can be reasonably done to prevent acts of terrorism.

First, the fact that Mumbai-like attacks serve no conceivable interest of Pakistan, including those linked to Kashmir, must sink into the minds of policymakers and opinion creators on both sides. Extremist militant groups often resort to sensational acts of violence to demonstrate their relevance and viability. Most countries in the region are potential targets. The pace and strategies necessary to counter the danger depend on each country's circumstances. In this context, the challenge faced by Pakistan is the most complex.

Understandably, Pakistan cannot provide guarantees that there will never be an act of terrorism against India inspired or planned from its territory. The amorphous nature of violent extremism makes it unrealistic to place such a demand when Pakistan itself is a target of terrorist acts. On the other hand, India justifiably expects Pakistan to prosecute suspects involved in the 2008 Mumbai crisis and the recent Pathankot attacks. Pakistan may not be able to meet Indian expectations because of legal complexities, equally important populist sentiment ruffled by ongoing Kashmiri youth agitation, and being perceived as acting under Indian diktat. But Pakistan must do all it can to prevent such acts originating from its territory. Pakistan's response has now become more an issue of credibility of its commitment than of what the country is able to do within the limitations of its circumstances.

A downward slide began in bilateral relations with the Pathankot attack in the first week of January 2016 and hit the lowest point in September with the Uri attack. A chronology of events during this unfortunate year may help draw some conclusions:

- 1. January 1-3, 2016** — The Pathankot attack; India alleged JeM complicity and demanded action. Pakistan agreed to cooperate with investigation, placed JeM chief under house custody, and detained some JeM members.

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27. For commentary on U.S. Secretary of State Powell's visit to the region in January 2002, see "The Kashmir Flashpoint," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2002. Also, see Timothy D. Hoyt, "Politics, Proximity and Paranoia: The Evolution of Kashmir as a Nuclear Flash Point," in *The Kashmir Question, Retrospect and Prospect*, Sumit Ganguly, ed., (Milton Park: Cass and Company Limited, 2003).

The fear that a major terrorist act inside India, linked to Kashmir or Pakistan, could cause an action-reaction escalation pushing the two countries toward the nuclear abyss requires that we focus on what can be reasonably done to prevent acts of terrorism.

2. **March 3** — Pakistan arrested former Indian Naval Officer Jadhav Kulbhushan in Baluchistan, accused him of carrying out espionage and subversion. He was later put on trial by a military court. Islamabad claimed the arrest of operatives resulting from information provided by Kulbhushan. Pakistan denied India access to Kulbhushan, and media debates were heated on both sides.
3. **March 8** — The Pakistan national security advisor alerted his Indian counterpart of possible infiltration by militants in Gujarat, and follow-up action resulted in some arrests. Indian media raised questions about Pakistani motivation underlying this unprecedented step by a Pakistani national security advisor.
4. **March 28** — A Pakistan investigation team arrived in Pathankot and complained about limited access.
5. **April 26** — Foreign secretaries of the two sides met under tensions caused by the Kulbhushan incident, and India complained of foot dragging by Pakistan on the Pathankot investigation. The talks ended without any agreement on further continuation.
6. **June 26** — Pakistan considered allowing the Indian investigation team to visit Pakistan.
7. **July 16** — Burhan Wani, a Kashmiri rebel youth leader, was killed by Indian security forces, intensifying the ongoing agitation and protests in Kashmir ignited by the Bharatiya Janata Party government's attempt to change special status of Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.
8. **August 3** — The Indian interior minister visited Islamabad for a SAARC meeting and was unable to have a customary bilateral meeting with his Pakistani counterpart.

**9. September 16** — Uri attack; India froze all contact with Pakistan, declaring that “talks and terror cannot go together.”<sup>28</sup> Two subsequent visits by the Pakistani adviser on foreign affairs in the context of Afghanistan-related meetings in Amritsar and Delhi in December 2016 and April 2017 went by without any bilateral contact.

Two events in particular appear to have vitiated the political atmosphere and killed the fledgling promise of counterterrorism cooperation that had emerged following the Pathankot attacks. First was the arrest — allegedly in Baluchistan — on March 3 of former Indian naval officer Jadhav Kulbhushan, who was operating under the false identity of a Muslim name and with an Iranian passport. According to Pakistani investigators and a televised confessional statement, Kulbhushan was engaged in acts of sabotage in Karachi, which was long suffering from sectarian and ethnic violence. Kulbhushan’s trial in a military court, his later conviction, and Pakistan’s refusal to provide access to him by Indian officials served to further aggravate matters. The second event was the killing by the Indian security forces on July 16 of Burhan Wani, a Kashmiri militant youth leader. His death intensified the youth uprising in Kashmir that was simmering since early 2016 following the break-up of the Bharatiya Janata Party–Kashmiri Peoples Democratic Party electoral alliance over changing the constitutional special status of Kashmir.

Meanwhile, the foreign secretary-level talks on April 26 failed to agree on the start of comprehensive dialogue. The hardened attitudes were reflected by the lack of bilateral meetings when the Indian interior minister visited Pakistan in August in the context of SAARC and when the Pakistani adviser on foreign affairs visited India in December 2016 and later in April 2017 in the context of Afghanistan related conferences. Absence of dialogue only serves to reinforce hardline positions on both sides.

A minor development in March 2016 merits attention. As reported in the media, the Pakistan national security advisor called his Indian counterpart to alert him that a group of extremist militants may try to enter India. Despite the successful follow-up action by the Indian security forces, some Indian commentators suspected the Pakistani motivation for this unprecedented sharing of information. Nonetheless, the initiative by the Pakistani national security advisor is a model for what bilateral counterterrorism cooperation could entail moving forward.

### *Crisis Management*

Within a span of little over one and a half decades since the nuclear tests and the establishment of overt deterrence, the two countries have experienced limited

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28. “India Ready to Resolve Issues with Pakistan, but Talks and Terror Can’t Go Together: Sushma Swaraj,” *The Times of India*, June 5, 2017.

conflict in Kargil, military escalation in 2002, and terrorist attacks in Mumbai and more recently in Pathankot and Uri. At least two of these incidents did not lead to military mobilization. Following the Uri attack, India's claim of having conducted a surgical strike is dubious. Seen in sequence, the behavioral pattern and responses on each occasion show some awareness on the part of both countries that an all-out war is not an option. Active international concern and interest during each of these crises have also been important factors promoting restraint. The apparent "positive learning curve" from Kargil to Pathankot, however, should not be a reason for complacency.<sup>29</sup> It only reinforces the need for improved crisis management between the two countries.

In light of the above analysis, to stave off a crisis situation the following security-specific recommendations need consideration. Under present circumstances, these six recommended measures may not be feasible in the immediate context, but as two responsible nuclear neighbors, India and Pakistan cannot afford to hold back on them for long.

**Revive Dialogue.** Revive and maintain a regular comprehensive and inclusive dialogue similar to the erstwhile Composite Dialogue. It cannot be a "one-point agenda" dialogue. The format will have to include Kashmir, security, and terrorism along with other issues, although the modality for consideration of each of these issues can be flexible.

**Expand Dialogue Process.** India and Pakistan must consider expanding and reinforcing the dialogue process. Besides being part of the formal composite dialogue, Kashmir and other disputes were pursued through the modality of a low-key backchannel. At the leadership level, a fresh decision is needed to revive it. An alternative would be using the national security advisor level by expanding its current mandate, which focuses on terrorism. National security advisors can have an overt agenda addressing security and terrorism and a covert agenda to explore possibilities to address other issues. Similarly, flag-staff and director general (military operations) meetings can or should be strengthened for maintaining calm along the LoC and as a CBM. While regular annual interaction at the national security advisor level is advisable, a similar unpublicized annual exchange between intelligence chiefs — of both Inter-Services Intelligence and the Research and Analysis Wing — will be helpful. Institutionalized military contact at a high level can mitigate risk of miscalculation and distrust.

**Improve Existing CBMs.** Additions to existing nuclear- and missile-related CBMs and hotlines could be added to existing CBMs on accidents at sea and expanded to include additional categories on missile tests such as Pakistan's Hatf (Nasr) missiles and India's BrahMos. Existing arrangements for avoiding and

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29. This expression was used by retired Lt. Gen. Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, former director general of the Strategic Plans Division. Khalid Ahmed Kidwai (remarks given at roundtable organized by Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, March 25, 2016). He made the point that each successive tension period was responded to by increasingly greater restraint with both sides remaining conscious of their respective nuclear capabilities.

preventing ceasefire violations and arresting localized problems along the LoC and the Working Boundary should be strengthened. The diplomatic and security-level dialogue should focus on better exchange of terrorism information and on handling the aftermath of terrorist acts. This should include coordination for investigation and prosecution. An important dimension is managing the media to keep tempers down in the public arena. The Pathankot attacks suggest that discrete official advisories help in both countries.

**Eliminate Nuclear Exchange Possibility.** The two countries must ensure that the possibility of a nuclear exchange is eliminated and that nuclear deterrence remains an integral part of their security and assurance of defense. In addition to readiness for handling a possible crisis, this also requires efforts to minimize misunderstandings and miscalculations by avoiding military moves in periods of tension and toning down hawkish narratives and strategies fraught with excessive risk.

There is need to revisit the Cold Start doctrine and Pakistan's claim to pursue full spectrum nuclear deterrence that includes miniaturization. For countries in such close proximity, heightened readiness limits the time needed for crisis management mechanisms to work. Cold Start is premised on a quick and surprise attack,<sup>30</sup> which is even inconsistent with the requirement of first establishing official complicity on the part of the Pakistan establishment in instigating a terrorist attack. On the other hand, Pakistan's assertion of pursuing a full-spectrum nuclear deterrence is both unnecessary and provocative. The two countries should return to espousing minimum credible deterrence, which at least is nonrhetorical and circumspect in intent.

**Avoid Communications Breakdown.** The two nuclear-armed neighbors cannot afford a breakdown in communication. Regular summitry is important regardless of political tensions and the state of bilateral relations. The two countries should institute regular summit-level bilateral contact at least once every two or three years. If agreed upon, this arrangement will allow the prime ministers of the two countries to meet at least twice during the course of their normal elected tenures to discuss and review in a focused manner issues of bilateral concern. Meetings on the sidelines of U.N. General Assembly or other forums such as SAARC and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation provide opportunities to discuss mutual concerns, but these instances are often tentative in terms of timing, format, and preparedness. Regular bilateral summits, even once in three years, would invariably be better prepared, better structured, and free of the uncertainty and speculation that precedes meetings on the sidelines of international forums. Such bilateral summits can help instill confidence, defuse tension, and develop mechanisms to prevent and manage crises.

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30. According to some reports, the Cold Start doctrine is based on mobilization and strike within 36 to 48 hours.

Despite existing communication channels and some will for improving the relationship, the prevailing norm of bilateral deadlock ensures a persistent and dangerous risk of new crises and future conflicts.

**Acknowledging Both States' Nuclear Statuses.** Major powers can contribute to nuclear stability and security in the region by formally mainstreaming both India and Pakistan in the global nuclear order. They are nuclear weapon states. In practical terms, by virtue of the U.S.-India deal India enjoys access to technologies as a de facto member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Pakistan has no such access, and the resulting discriminatory treatment rankles its policymakers. Pakistan is keen to join the global nuclear community on a fair and nondiscriminatory basis. Its interest to be a partner in a secure and responsible global nuclear regime is apparent in the relevant international conventions it has signed and the unilateral measures it has adopted for the safety and security of its strategic assets.<sup>31</sup> Removal of this anomaly by acknowledging Pakistan's nuclear status will exert a healthy influence on Pakistan-India relations and in favor of restraint in regional nuclear policies.

## Conclusion

Improving Pakistan-India relations is critical in a region where leadership and government need to focus on the great challenges of socioeconomic development, demographics, food and water security, and climate change. Despite existing communication channels and some will for improving the relationship, the prevailing norm of bilateral deadlock ensures a persistent and dangerous risk of new crises and future conflicts. The nuclear status of each is a continuous reminder of the potential escalatory costs if persisting tensions are not addressed, underlining the importance of doctrinal challenges and the utility of ideas like a return to minimum credible deterrence. South Asia's long history of India-Pakistan crises are rich sources for lessons in management. There is the obvious need for resumption of dialogue to address all issues, including political disputes. The promise of future cooperative counterterrorism measures (like

31. To date, Pakistan has signed the Convention on Nuclear Safety, Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, Convention on Early Notification of Nuclear Accident, Convention on Assistance in case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency, and International Atomic Energy Agency Code of Conduct on Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources. Pakistan also regularly submits reports under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1540.

intelligence sharing) hinges on acknowledgement of the fact that both countries are plagued by the challenge of terrorism. Most importantly, however, institutionalized engagement and formal dialogue and crisis management mechanisms are required, including regular summitry and reviving comprehensive dialogue while also expanding to include multiple civil and military levels.



# INTELLIGENCE, STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT, AND DECISION PROCESS DEFICITS

## The Absence of Indian Learning from Crisis to Crisis

*Saikat Datta*

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There is an apocryphal tale frequently shared by retired Pakistani intelligence officials with their Indian counterparts about the Pakistani decision-making process that epitomizes the Indian perspective on strategic choices made in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.<sup>1</sup> Years after the 1999 Kargil War, India's intelligence community was still speculating whether the Pakistani civilian government had known of the Pakistan Army's plans to invade Kashmir when a former Pakistani intelligence chief told his Indian counterpart the "real" story at a Track 2 meeting. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ostensibly did not know about his army chief's plans to occupy the heights of Kargil. However, as the tale goes, Sharif did let the army know that if they happened to be planning to march on from Kargil to Srinagar, the summer capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, he would be happy to accompany them.

Despite being on very different sides of the civil-military coin, India and Pakistan exhibit similar pathologies when it comes to national security decision-making in crises. In Pakistan, it is the historic civil-military divide that often enables, complicates, and intensifies crisis management in an already very complex South Asian rivalry. The imbalance in Pakistan's civil-military relations since abolishing the constitution in 1953 has exacerbated misperceptions about the center of control, threats and intentions, and escalation sensitivity, which have distorted signaling and appropriate response calibration during crises. What is underappreciated is that the byzantine and convoluted architecture of India's national security decision-making process has also contributed to difficulties in South Asian crisis management. Effective crisis management hinges on effective intelligence on the actors at play, strategic assessment of objectives and capabilities, and internal and external communication. These processes of intelligence, assessment, and communication situated within a broader architecture of national security decision-making can have profound effects on the quality of a state's preparation for and successful management of crises.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Author's interview with A.S. Dulat, Delhi, April 14, 2016.

2. Risa Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.

Effective crisis management hinges on effective intelligence on the actors at play, strategic assessment of objectives and capabilities, and internal and external communication. These processes of intelligence, assessment, and communication situated within a broader architecture of national security decision-making can have profound effects on the quality of a state's preparation for and successful management of crises.

This essay investigates such security processes to evaluate how India has handled various crises in its bilateral relationship with Pakistan — a relationship largely defined by security since its inception in 1947. Whereas in Pakistan the military has a dominant influence on India-Pakistan relations, in India it is the intelligence community. India's history of crisis management has been shaped by successes and failures of the Indian intelligence apparatus and its processes. The failures to obtain or process accurate intelligence, produce strategic assessments for effective responses, and clearly control messages between crisis management actors and domestic and international audiences are vulnerabilities that have not been addressed in the decades since the intelligence breakdowns that led to the 1962 India-China War. Responses to these failures — barring the slew of committees created after the 1999 Kargil War — have been unimaginative and ultimately have not addressed the Indian intelligence community's systemic failures. Intelligence shortcomings have been re-highlighted nearly every decade, including during the prolonged attack during the 2008 Mumbai crisis (26/11). The most recent crises, such as the 2016 Uri attack on a military camp that led to the deaths of 19 Indian soldiers, show that some of these systemic failures continue to evade solutions. There is a lack of processes, accountability, dissemination, and analysis.

The first section of this paper revisits some of these major bilateral crises to examine the role played by Indian intelligence. I identify several interacting strands of intelligence problems: intelligence collection (resources and technology), bureaucratic coordination, and intelligence analysis (separating the signal from the noise). An element of each type of these intelligence-related failures is present in every crisis, but highlighting the dominant type(s) in each episode enables closer study of the nature of the intelligence reform necessary. In section two, I consider the role of political and military strategic assessment and decision-making by principals during a crisis. In past India-Pakistan crises, confusion over objectives, capabilities, and roles has hindered strategic assessments. The third section discusses the dynamics of message control during a

crisis by considering how civil and military leaders, together with the media, disseminate information to domestic and international audiences. Clear, centralized message control has at times bolstered Indian management of past crises. However, more often the lack of an effective government communication strategy for crises has ensured an ad hoc decision-making process-driven in part by muddled and divided messaging.

As each episode is unique, context is critical for analyzing failures in past Indian crisis management. It is easy to draw erroneous conclusions and lessons from a crisis by failing to consider a larger perspective that includes history as well as dynamics particular to specific crises. Each crisis has to be understood within the larger framework of past crises and their management and resolution over time. To that end, media and scholarly analysis in this study is supported by several interviews I conducted with high-level government officials who served during critical crises, overseeing and participating in (1) intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination, (2) strategic assessment and decision-making, and (3) the processes of extrapolating lessons and developing new policies. This essay assesses the challenges in Indian management of bilateral India-Pakistan crises and highlights both the consistent failure to learn lessons and the need for reform to create a more process-driven crisis management model.

## **Intelligence Challenges: Collection, Analysis, and Coordination**

A review of the long history of Indian intelligence failures illustrates the need for major systemic reform to achieve effective future crisis management. In particular, three key interlinked intelligence failures have occurred at different levels. Effective intelligence collection is often a result of poor resources or technology. Failures related to analysis of incoming intelligence also emerge when there is trouble separating the signal from the noise — deciphering what information is credible and critical for understanding the crisis at hand. Finally, the large and many bodies involved in crisis management — both within the government and military and between the lower and higher ranks within institutional bodies — have consistently suffered from poor coordination on intelligence gathering and analysis.

Independent India's first major intelligence failure came in 1961-62, an episode highlighting both poor coordination and collection processes. By the time China's People's Liberation Army crossed the McMahon Line that divides Tibet from India's Arunachal Pradesh, India had found itself in the middle of its first serious interstate crisis. New Delhi's intelligence breakdowns and inability to adequately predict an attack led to the first major reorganization of India's intelligence community.<sup>3</sup> However, that organization failed to comprehensively

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3. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), *A Case for Intelligence Reforms in India* (New Delhi: IDSA, 2012); and "Intelligence Failure: No Lessons Learnt from 1962 War," *The Times of India*, March 20, 2014.

address the structures and levers of crisis and conflict management and mitigation that India has faced since. There were incremental gains and capacity building, but neither amounted to the systemic changes expected after the failure of 1962.

Prior to the 1961-62 crisis, Indian Army Commander of Central Command Lt. Gen. S.P.P. Thorat virtually predicted the Chinese invasion, including details on where China would attack and how much time it would take to carry it out. However, his assessment failed to go beyond Army Headquarters. Meanwhile, the political leadership, fed by faulty or inadequate intelligence, continued to make disastrous strategic decisions. The “forward policy” of creating Indian Army posts well beyond the McMahon Line, as well as beyond known Chinese positions, was a central strategy for the political leadership. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) — then the sole agency tasked with gathering intelligence internally as well as externally — validated and supported this strategy. The relationship between then IB Chief B.N. Mullick and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a key element, as both men worked quite closely to formulate this policy.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the episode, poor coordination between intelligence and policy actors ensured flawed crisis management and policy-making decisions.

U.S. presence in the region added a layer of complexity to this conflict, as the CIA was already playing a role in China. While it had two divisions directly involved with operations in China, they were not in sync. This lack of coordination undermined U.S. support of the Tibetan resistance movement, ensuring its failure.<sup>5</sup> This covert activity was by all available accounts known to the Indian leadership, but New Delhi continued to ignore it as a factor in its bilateral relationship with Beijing. However, the Chinese leadership suspected India of being an active participant in these activities and precipitated its plans to teach India a lesson.<sup>6</sup>

Until Chinese troops walked through the rudimentary Indian defenses in Ladakh in the west and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, the Indian intelligence community was completely unaware of Chinese intent and the extent to which the crisis could unfold. Failure to subsequently recognize these systemic fault lines would lead to New Delhi’s perpetual reactive mode for future crises and conflicts — the possible exception being the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

Comparing the events of the pre-1962 India-China War with those preceding the 1999 Kargil War reveals similar systemic gaps in bureaucratic coordination. Just as the military exercise conducted by Lt. Gen. Thorat in March 1960 revealed the Chinese capabilities and strategy to invade India,<sup>7</sup> a similar exercise

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4. For differences between the CIA’s South Asia and Far East Division on support to the Tibetan resistance against the Chinese, see Bruce Riedel, *JFK’s Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2015), 38-39, 131.

5. For a look at the CIA’s support of the Tibetan resistance, see Riedel, *JFK’s Forgotten Crisis*; and Mikel Dunham, *Buddha’s Warriors* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

6. For example, see John W. Garver, “China’s Decision for War with India in 1962,” in *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 86-130.

7. See Shiv Kunal Verma, *1962: The War That Wasn’t* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016), 38-41.

was conducted by the Indian Army's Jammu and Kashmir-based Northern Command. The findings of this latter exercise predicted a covert Pakistani invasion of the upper reaches of Kargil and its surrounding areas. However, the prescient results of this exercise did not reach the apex military or political leadership, ensuring that lessons learned were never implemented. In addition to information failing to move from lower to higher levels, two other critical factors contributed to India's inability to anticipate the infiltration by Pakistani troops into the heights of Kargil that overlook a strategic highway in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

First, the military was overtly focused on low-intensity conflict instead of overt military incursions; it is difficult to see something you are not looking for.<sup>8</sup> Involved in domestic actions for nearly a decade, the military had become focused primarily on counterinsurgency operations. The prospect of conventional war had receded, and domestically deployed infantry units were well-equipped and prepared to take on raging armed militants within the state, with battalion commanders focused on getting more "kills." This impacted the posture and training of the military units, eventually allowing the Pakistani military to stage a major surprise.<sup>9</sup>

Second, there was a major early intelligence failure to adequately read and analyze warning signals.<sup>10</sup> Like in 1962, India's intelligence community failed to comprehensively appreciate accumulating strands of information. There was intelligence about the Pakistani military buying snow boots in large numbers, as well as sightings of Pakistani irregulars made by local shepherds. At one point, then IB Director Shyamal Dutta reportedly sent across a signed letter to the army chief raising concerns about intruders in Kargil.<sup>11</sup> A signed letter from the IB chief is traditionally considered a rare occurrence only done when the chief is convinced about the seriousness of the intelligence input and its implications.

The military has a different version of the events preceding the Kargil War, suggesting that conflicting information flows made separating critical intelligence signals from the "noise" difficult. Then Director General of Military Operations Lt. Gen. N.C. Vij had received an assessment from the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency, that there was no possibility of a war with Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> This created a situation where the military depended on bits and pieces of information that were at times contradictory.<sup>13</sup> When the first

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8. This is also a conclusion cited by the *Kargil Review Committee Report* as one of the causes for the failure to anticipate and interpret the infiltration. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*, February 23, 2000, available at the Nuclear Weapon Archive, <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/KargilRCB.html>.

9. After the 2006 Lebanon War, similar concerns were raised about the Israeli Defense Force's capacity to fight hybrid or conventional war after decades of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

10. See Gurmeet Kanwal, "Pakistan's Strategic Blunder in Kargil," *CLAWS Journal* 4 (2009): 53-72.

11. See Saikat Datta, "The Lie Nailed," *Outlook*, May 22, 2006. This was confirmed by Ajit Doval, who was posted as the additional director of the Intelligence Bureau in Srinagar before the Kargil War and was behind the issuance of the letter to Army Headquarters 11 months before the intrusions were detected.

12. Author's interview with N.C. Vij, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, April 13, 2016.

13. *Ibid.*

intrusions were detected in May 1999, it was assumed by Army Headquarters in New Delhi that this was a normal infiltration bid. The first meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) were inconclusive, and then Chief of Army Staff Gen. V.P. Malik was on a tour of Poland and continued his trip while the war started. By May 13 media reports had already confirmed the presence of Pakistani regulars, but inaccurate intelligence estimates continued to cause inaction at various levels of the government.

Another key intelligence failure during Kargil related to the method and source of the intelligence — collection was limited to a single source. The Kargil Review Committee, established by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's government soon after the war ended, believed that India's intelligence apparatus had failed. It pointed out that "the RAW facility in Kargil area did not receive adequate attention in terms of staff or technological capability."<sup>14</sup> Notably, it also pointed out that "In other words, the Indian threat assessment is largely a *single-track*<sup>15</sup> process dominated by RAW."<sup>16</sup> Clearly this indicated that not only was intelligence inadequate but also dominated by a single agency, leading to the failure to accurately predict Pakistan's plans for an asymmetric strategy to undermine Indian security interests. In fact, the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Defence noted in its 22nd report issued in July 2007 that "amidst these dramatic developments [to the external and internal threat environments India faced], the traditional structures and processes for the management of national security are under considerable stress."<sup>17</sup>

This lapse of intelligence at Kargil would not be the first that year. In December 1999, New Delhi faced a fresh crisis when an Indian Airlines flight (IC 814) from Kathmandu, Nepal, was hijacked. The IC 814 hijacking crisis was in part due to an intelligence collection failure. Just as the country prepared to celebrate Christmas, the aircraft took off from Kathmandu, landed in Amritsar, and then flew to Kandahar in Afghanistan via Lahore and Dubai. Not only did Indian intelligence fail to predict and prevent the hijacking, it also had no clarity about the hijackers for the first 48 hours.<sup>18</sup> The first information about the hijacking came from then IB Director Dutta, who informed Deepak Chopra, officer on special duty to the Deputy Prime Minister and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani. Though the government Crisis Management Committee activated, it was several hours into the first 48 hours before senior officials could figure out who to contact and where to meet.

The inability to process disparate strands of intelligence into a coherent and actionable narrative compounds the lack of intelligence problem. This issue was most visible when terrorists from the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba

14. See paragraphs 13.31 and 13.40 of the *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

15. Author emphasis added.

16. See paragraphs 13.31 and 13.40 of the *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

17. Lok Sabha Secretariat, *22nd Report: 14th Lok Sabha Standing Committee on Defence* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2006-7).

18. Author's interview with Dulat. During the time of the hijacking, Dulat was the Secretary (R) in the Cabinet Secretariat (e.g., the head of R&AW).

(LeT) attacked Mumbai on Nov. 26, 2008.<sup>19</sup> The earliest intelligence reports issued on Aug. 7, 2006, mention LeT's plans to infiltrate *fidayeen* (suicide attackers) into India by sea. There were other alerts that were more specific between 2006 and 2008 — one as late as Nov. 11, 2008 — that predicted an imminent attack. The high-level committee set up by the Maharashtra Government to inquire into the failures during the attack summarized that “an overall assessment and proper analysis of these reports would have revealed a strong indication that some major terrorist action was being planned.”<sup>20</sup>

Another alert was sent across by the IB on September 24 stating that the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel could be a possible target.<sup>21</sup> Despite the plethora of these inputs, there was no organizational pathology to coordinate and process the information together. While the IB sent across its reports, it did not coordinate its efforts with the Mumbai Police or seek its feedback. There seems to have been a complete lack of discussion on a possible response in case such an attack did take place. The central intervention force for terrorist attacks — the National Security Guard (NSG) — was never brought into the loop, and it had no plan for such an exigency until the attack started on the night of November 26.

As former National Security Advisor (NSA) Shivshankar Menon admitted,<sup>22</sup> no one managed to decipher the intelligence signals that were pouring in. As disjointed bits emerged, there was no effort to create a single task force that could track all the bits and piece together scenarios. Shortcomings in India's ability to effectively coordinate different government and military agencies in efforts at intelligence collection and analysis during crises continue to undermine bilateral crisis management. These front-end challenges were exacerbated by weakness in strategic assessments during the responsorial decision-making stages of crisis management.

## Strategic Assessments

Even in the absence of intelligence failures, poor strategic assessment can arise involving deficits in information sharing, limited strategic coordination, gaps in competencies for national security, and ambiguity of authorization. Poor strategic assessments can intensify crises through misestimation of relative military capabilities and destabilizing strategies, neglect of political constraints, failure to convert political goals into military strategies, and obscured signaling that causes miscalculation by adversaries.<sup>23</sup>

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19. See Section I — Intelligence in (India), Government of India, *Report of the High Level Enquiry Committee (HLEC) on 26/11*, December 2009, 5-28, available at <https://www.scribd.com/doc/179156650/Pradhan-Committee-Report-about-26-11-pdf>.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See Paragraph 13, *Ibid.*, 5.

22. See James Glanz, Sebastian Rotella, and David E. Sanger, “In 2008 Mumbai Attacks, Piles of Spy Data, but an Uncompleted Puzzle,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 2014.

23. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy*, 6-9. These pages introduce the international implications of four types of failures in strategic assessment.

**Poor strategic assessments can intensify crises through misestimation of relative military capabilities and destabilizing strategies, neglect of political constraints, failure to convert political goals into military strategies, and obscured signaling that causes miscalculation by adversaries.**

All four of these strategic assessment failures have occurred in India during past bilateral crises. First, information deficits have led Indian leadership to be unclear on India's intelligence and force capabilities during different crises. Second — as a result of poor coordination between intelligence, military, and political agencies — considered response options were poorly calibrated. Third, Indian options were in fact limited by deficits in the capabilities, training, and preparation of different actors in the security forces and intelligence communities. Finally, strategic assessments suffered from a lack of clear organizational structure and delineated civil-military roles and authorities. Because of these challenges, perceived means have often driven Indian crisis management strategy instead of preconceived objectives and accurate capabilities assessments.

During the 1999 Kandahar hijacking, decision-makers overestimated military capabilities when planning India's response. As the Indian Airlines plane arrived at Kandahar in Taliban-held Afghanistan, the Crisis Management Group (CMG) met several times to discuss the available options to rescue the hostages. While a special forces raid was suggested, it was quickly dismissed as impractical. The force that was thought to be ideal for such an operation, the NSG, did not have the wherewithal, training, or orientation to carry out such an operation so far from home. The Indian Air Force (IAF) — crucial for this type of operation — was also clear that it lacked the right special operations-capable aircraft that could transport the troops and facilitate such a rescue. Clearly, an "Entebbe-like operation" as it was described during the meetings, was out of place.<sup>24</sup>

The other briefly suggested but quickly dismissed option was to conduct an IAF air strike from Iran. A strike, it was discussed, could divert and intimidate the Taliban and allow Indian troops to carry out a major evacuation. However, no one took the suggestion very seriously and everyone in the CMG started coming

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24. The Israelis carried out a rescue operation when Jewish hostages on board an Air France flight were taken as hostages to Entebbe, Uganda in 1974. The Israelis carried out a special forces raid and brought all hostages barring two back to Israel.

around to carrying out negotiations with the Taliban. The decision was aided by a breakthrough that helped the R&AW to obtain vital clues about the hijacking. Then State Commissioner of R&AW Hemant Karkare, an Indian Police Service officer on deputation to the external intelligence agency, was posted in Mumbai. Acting on a tip, he engineered a series of arrests that would unravel the plot and give the CMG the first clues about the hijackers.<sup>25</sup>

However, while this was crucial intelligence, it continued to support only one option for the CMG — a negotiation that could be pared down to a minimum exchange of prisoners with the hostages. A critical assessment of this crisis and a few other events that took place during Prime Minister Vajpayee's tenure show that strategic objectives were dictated by the limited options on the table. India's options were not first shaped by strategic government objectives. This trend continued through the major crisis that followed as the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took over.

The attack on the Indian Parliament on Dec. 13, 2001, is a particularly interesting crisis to study because it led to the second formal mobilization of the Indian military after the Kargil War. Strategic assessment in the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis featured an overestimation of capabilities and a disconnect between military means and political ends. Within days of the attack the CCS decided to mobilize the military to launch a possible strike across the international border into Pakistan. While official records are not clear about what the objectives of Operation Parakram were, several key personalities close to the decision have given conflicting perspectives but agreed that the overall decision-making body seemed to be unclear about the strategic objectives for India's biggest mobilization since the 1971 war. Then Naval Chief Adm. Sushil Kumar is on record that the government did not have any stated political objectives for the mobilization under Operation Parakram, which hampered the military objectives.<sup>26</sup>

The confusion over the strategic objectives of Operation Parakram is not new. The Kargil War (Operation Vijay) saw similar differences between the highest decision-making bodies during the crisis. Political leaders limited military options by refusing to consider crossing the Line of Control (LoC). While it has been recorded that Prime Minister Vajpayee was against the crossing of the LoC during the Kargil War, his Cabinet colleague and deputy, Advani, has always been a proponent of "hot pursuit." A telling commentary by then Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis records that the prime minister was against any crossing by the Indian Armed Forces during the war. A briefing of the CCS on May 25, when the crucial decision was taken to allow the IAF to take out Pakistani targets in

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25. Author's interview with Dulat. Also, see Saikat Datta, "NIA's Malegaon U-Turn: Why Hemant Karkare Does Not Deserve to Die All Over Again," *Scroll.in*, May 14, 2016.

26. See "Op Parakram Was a Most Punishing Mistake: Ex-Navy Chief," *The Indian Express*, November 5, 2011. Also see "Operation Parakram after Parliament Attack Lacked Clear Objectives: Ex-Navy Chief Sushil Kumar," *The Times of India*, November 6, 2011.

Kargil, saw the prime minister reinforce his decision not to allow any crossings of the LoC.<sup>27</sup> However, Advani, as the union home minister — a position considered second only to the prime minister in the order of precedence — had always pushed for a “hot pursuit” line, which did not materialize when it could have served as a legitimate military strategy.<sup>28</sup> This also ensured that special forces were left with limited options, severely curtailing strategic special operations that could have ended the war much earlier.<sup>29</sup>

Poor strategic coordination within and between civilian and military bodies is another deeper malaise that leads to a lack of clear strategic objectives during a national exigency. More recent crises, such as the 2008 Mumbai crisis and the 2016 Pathankot attack involving a terrorist strike on an IAF base in Punjab, exemplified the inevitable crisis management breakdowns that ensue when the authorization process for decision-making is unclear. On both occasions, the indistinct delineation of roles among various agencies led to substantial confusion on the ground.

In 2008, as initial reports of a terrorist strike in Mumbai reached New Delhi, there was extensive confusion among key members of the security establishment and the then NSA M.K. Narayanan came under considerably criticism for being missing in action.<sup>30</sup> Narayanan’s role in ensuring that the two principal intelligence agencies in India — the IB and the R&AW — had chiefs close to him has been criticized on several occasions.<sup>31</sup> It has also been pointed out that during his tenure he ensured that IB Director Ajit Doval (current NSA) could retire after a mere eight months to guarantee that Narayanan could appoint his former staff officer as the next chief.<sup>32</sup>

The way New Delhi handled the 2008 Mumbai crisis is indicative of the deeper systemic failures that guarantee repeating past mistakes in crisis after crisis. In many ways, this is symptomatic of the lack of professionalism and meritocracy. As a case in point, the office of the NSA has drawn from people close to either the incumbent prime minister (Brajesh Mishra during the Vajpayee years) or the power center of the dominating political party (Narayanan during Prime Minister Singh’s tenure). This has led to the NSA emerging as a power center within the Prime Minister’s Office, accruing command over vast resources without any direct accountability to either the people, through Parliament, or to the ministries handling these sensitive issues.

27. See A.Y. Tipnis, “Operation Safed Sagar,” *Force Magazine*, October 2006, 12.

28. See Zafar Meraj and Ajith Pillai, “Hot Pursuit,” *Outlook*, June 8, 1998. Also see Advani’s position subsequent to the war, where he would consistently raise the option of “hot pursuit”: “Hot Pursuit Legitimate: Advani,” *The Times of India*, October 9, 2001.

29. See Saikat Datta and P.C. Katoch, “Op Vijay: The Kargil Conflict,” in *Indian Special Forces: The History of India’s Special Forces*, ed. P.C. Katoch and Saikat Datta (New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2013). Also see “Army Planned Offensive Across LoC in January,” *The Tribune* (India), December 24, 2002.

30. See Jitender Gupta, “Why M Sounds Better Than MK,” *Outlook*, December 15, 2008.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

The challenges India faces to effective strategic assessment and the resulting crisis management failures become apparent to wider audiences — at home and abroad — through government and military communications as crises unfold.

## Message Control and the Decision-making Process

Public communication can have a profound impact on crisis management. When different elements of both political and military leadership decide to release information during a crisis, they do so with specific objectives. In the past messages have been aimed with varying intensity at domestic Indian audiences, forces across the border in Pakistan, and the broader international community. Communication strategies during crises therefore affect public reactions and political pressures. The news media often serves as the tool for this information dissemination, but it sometimes also functions as the actual source of information while a crisis unfolds. As such, the media itself can function as a crisis dynamic.<sup>33</sup> State management failures and glitches in the decision-making process during past crises are in part attributable to poor message control. These failures, namely the spread of misinformation or prematurely released information, offer tactical advantages to enemies as events unfold in real time. Similarly, they can raise alarm or alternately a false sense of security amongst security forces or the public near an unfolding crisis. In past exigencies, India has used public communication in ways that both helped and hurt crisis management.

In January 2016, as terrorists crossed the Indo-Pakistan international border and attacked the IAF base at Pathankot, initial reports indicated that New Delhi was prepared to handle the unfolding crisis, but events would prove that institutional roles were unclear. A complement of commandos from the NSG had been airlifted to the base as a precautionary measure on the orders of the NSA. However, the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs in the management of the crisis was not clear. The ministry is the nodal agency for all internal security matters and directly controls the NSG, but the public statements from senior officials of the ministry revealed that it was not in the decision-making loop, leading to confusion about counterterrorism operations on ground. While the union home minister declared on the microblogging site Twitter that the country's terrorism operations were over, subsequent reports indicated ongoing fire-fights. The operation would continue for another 20 hours as ground forces continued to lay siege to a building believed to have housed two terrorists not accounted for in the initial estimates.

The embarrassment led to the union home minister deleting his tweets, but the disjointed management of the crisis would continue as criticism accumulated.

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33. See essay in this volume by Ruhee Neog, "Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policy-Making, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises."

Military veterans indicated the presence of battle-hardened troops and the army's special forces located within hours of the Pathankot air base, which had been ignored in favor of the NSG.<sup>34</sup> It was argued that the army's special forces could have conducted a swifter operation instead of rushing in the NSG, which was unfamiliar with the air base. However, this too has been disputed by those who observe that the NSG's operational leadership was familiar with the on-ground situation.

While debate on tactics continues, what is clear is that the crisis did not see the government function in unison. Reports suggested that the Ministry of Defence was not in the loop even though the air base was under its operational command.<sup>35</sup> This also left the army units largely out of the operation, while the Ministry of Home Affairs was also unaware of the unfolding ground operation. Like the IC 814 hijacking crisis in 1999, the central crisis management teams of the federal government remained disjointed and separated despite a decade of experience. Intelligence remained vague, and despite the proactive deployment of the NSG, the results were far from desirable. While the NSG operations lasted for over 60 hours during the 2008 Mumbai crisis, it took them a little over 48 hours to clear Pathankot. Clearly, the internal communication channels of the federal government had not improved in the intervening years, highlighting a concerning failure of institutional lesson learning.

However, a crisis is also an opportunity, and New Delhi has at times displayed remarkable alacrity at effectively controlling messages during national exigencies. The Kargil War is an example of India's technical intelligence capabilities and communications savvy: information was released to effectively send messages to domestic and international audiences. India intercepted a call between Gen. Pervez Musharraf and his Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz while on an official visit to China even as the Indian armed forces were assaulting Pakistani-held positions in Kargil.<sup>36</sup> The intercepted conversations became a major diplomatic tool quickly used to build world opinion against Pakistan and expose the role of its military in planning the operation.<sup>37</sup> In a major carefully coordinated diplomatic exercise, the tapes of the conversation were delivered to Prime Minister Sharif by R.K. Mishra, a former journalist who led a prominent think tank in New Delhi and was close to the Vajpayee administration, accompanied by Vivek Katju, then a joint secretary covering Pakistan in the Ministry

34. For example, see Josy Joseph and Dinakar Peri, "Deploying NSG Instead of Army Was a Mistake: Experts," *The Hindu*, January 6, 2016.

35. See P.C. Katoch, "Our Inward Looking Policy Has Cost Us Dearly," *Rediff*, January 4, 2016; and P.C. Katoch, "Refurbishing Security — Something Cooking?" *Indian Defence Review*, January 16, 2016.

36. "Excerpts of Conversations between Gen Musharraf and Lt Gen Aziz," *Rediff*, June 11, 1999.

37. See Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy & the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002). Riedel was present at the summit and gives an insider account. The U.S. intervention was significantly bolstered after the tapes were shared with the U.S. administration. Also see reports from India and Pakistan, "Clinton Advisor: Confusion Gripped Islamabad during Kargil Crisis," *Dawn*, October 23, 2006; and "Vajpayee Stood Firm during Kargil Conflict: Clinton Aide," *The Times of India*, May 19, 2002.

of External Affairs.<sup>38</sup> The reaction to the tapes followed expected lines and led to a major diplomatic coup for New Delhi. Having such clear proof to show an adversary as well as a broader public audience was invaluable to India's image at home and abroad.<sup>39</sup>

Sending the tapes to Pakistan and other key global leaders was a risky decision, ultimately driven by then NSA Brajesh Mishra,<sup>40</sup> who was also the principal secretary to Prime Minister Vajpayee. Mishra, a former Foreign Service officer, was in a unique position by the virtue of the twin positions held by him. As NSA, he had the intelligence agencies reporting to him, while his position as the principal secretary gave him proximity to the prime minister and therefore considerable political heft. This ensured that he had the clout to push through such a decision. While some analysts have debated the decision to release the intercepted tapes due to the erosion of some intelligence capabilities, the consensus has been that it was an unqualified success both internationally and domestically.

The decision-making process in India in the upper echelons of higher strategic management and communication is largely personality rather than process-driven. While principal personalities like Prime Minister Vajpayee, his deputy Advani, and NSA Mishra played a dominant role during the Kargil War and IC 814 crisis, it was left to the NSA Narayanan to take charge during the 26/11 terrorism attack on Mumbai (though he was criticized for being at a party even after the attacks had started in Mumbai).<sup>41</sup> Ostensibly, the CCS — comprised of the prime minister and his home, defense, finance and external affairs ministers — is the key decision-making body during any national exigency. The CCS gets support from the chiefs of the armed forces and the intelligence agencies when necessary.

However, this structure has not been process-driven and is usually dependent on the personalities holding the chair. As recent reports indicate, the Prime Minister's Office has emerged as the pre-eminent power on all issues related to security, strategic affairs, and foreign relations. The same trend is now visible in policy handling and crisis management when it comes to recent events like the 2016 Pathankot or Uri crises and their responses via coordinated surgical strikes in late September 2016.<sup>42</sup> The last two years have seen Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally leading efforts to improve India's external relations with the major powers. However, whether his direct stewardship has translated into strategic gains remains to be seen, and his failure to garner favorable responses

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38. Pranay Sharma, "Delhi Hits Sharif with Army Tape Talk," *The Telegraph* (India), July 3, 1999.

39. Suzanne Goldenberg, "'Barbarism' Insult Fired at Pakistan," *The Guardian*, June 11, 1999.

40. Author's interview with an anonymous former Cabinet minister.

41. Shishir Gupta, "What Went Wrong? The Inside Story," *The Indian Express*, December 26, 2008. Also see "'It's Not Your Fault,' Rice Told NSA Narayanan Post-26/11," *Deccan Herald*, October 28, 2011.

42. See Saikat Datta, "Behind the Scenes: How India Went About Planning the 'Surgical Strikes' after the Uri Attack," *Scroll.in*, September 29, 2016.

on India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group in June 2016 is an indication that this strategy may not have worked well.<sup>43</sup>

This trend indicates that communication by key government stakeholders as well as external participants such as the media has not been effective enough. The multiple mistakes during the Pathankot crisis — such as erroneous tweets from the union home minister declaring the operation over even while fire-fights continued — are a clear indication of the lack of adequate internal communication as mentioned earlier in this essay. These communication failures highlight the disconnect between forces on ground and the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi, which has the overall responsibility for internal security. The pronouncements from Delhi and the disjointed reports from Pathankot led to a dangerous cycle. Forces on the ground continued with the operation even though four of the militants had already been neutralized. Premature communications over operational completion by the Union Home Ministry, displayed on social networking sites such as Twitter, added to the confusion and led to needless extension of operations.

However, the role of the media, especially during crises, has also come under some unfair scrutiny and criticism. For instance, the live coverage of the NSG's operations during the 26/11 attack by LeT was severely criticized by the Supreme Court.<sup>44</sup> However, it was then Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil who gave an interview to several TV news channels in the early hours of November 27 that he was flying to Mumbai with a complement of 250 commandos from the NSG, taking away any element of surprise that could have benefitted rescue operations.<sup>45</sup> This failure to effectively manage information during the 2008 Mumbai crisis has largely escaped scrutiny. Similar issues in 1999 were raised by the Kargil Review Committee, and the need for an effective communication strategy for exigencies has been discussed on various occasions.<sup>46</sup> However, beyond utilizing statutory powers to delay live coverage of terrorism attacks and hostage rescue missions, no formal plans have been implemented so far.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion: Need for Process-driven Management

This essay illustrates that critical failures of Indian crisis management and defense stem from a lack of process-driven intelligence, assessment, and communication. The fact that some organizations set up after one crisis are subsequently

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43. Yashwant Sinha, "After NSG Mess, We're Told 'Failure *Acche Hain*,'" *NDTV*, July 4, 2016. Yashwant Sinha is a Bharatiya Janata Party leader and former finance and external affairs minister but was not included in the current National Democratic Alliance government. Also see former national security advisor in the Congress-led government's opinion on the Nuclear Suppliers Group bid, "M.K. Narayanan, "Pause for a Reality Check," *The Hindu*, July 4, 2016.

44. S. Ahmed Ali, "26/11 Attack: Media Pulled Up by Supreme Court for It's Role," *The Times of India*, August 31, 2012.

45. Nitin Gokhale, "26/11: Sheer Paralysis Gripped the Government," *Rediff*, November 26, 2014. Also see "Shivraj Patil Airbrushes 26/11 from His Autobiography," *The Times of India*, September 1, 2014.

46. Government of India, *Kargil Review Committee Report*.

47. Himanshi Dhawan, "Centre Bans Live Coverage of Anti-Terror Operations," *The Times of India*, March 24, 2015.

This essay illustrates that critical failures of Indian crisis management and defense stem from a lack of process-driven intelligence, assessment, and communication.

changed after another crisis inhibits their ability to effectively function.<sup>48</sup> There is little discussion around the efficacy of different managing bodies or the specific purposes they serve. The limited discussions that have occurred have yielded few tangible outcomes. High-level political leaders stating intents to reform national security and make it more process-driven have repeatedly failed to produce change under various administrations.<sup>49</sup> These failures ensure that the decision-making process in the government and its impact on key stakeholders, both internal and external, remain an ad hoc process at best. Even though governments have changed several times over the crises reviewed in this essay, each national security exigency reveals the same fault lines and systemic failures. The lack of a cohesive and well-coordinated plan ensures that India will continue to repeat its past mistakes.<sup>50</sup>

In the United States, the failure of Operation Eagle Claw by U.S. special forces in their attempt to rescue diplomats and embassy staff from Iran led to a major overhaul of the Pentagon<sup>51</sup> and the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command.<sup>52</sup> A similar overhaul of the U.S. intelligence community after 9/11 led to major reforms that were structured through the creation of the Office of Director of National Intelligence<sup>53</sup> and two structured “100 Day”<sup>54</sup> and “500 Day”<sup>55</sup> plans. By contrast, the reforms process in India has been restricted to

48. The National Security Advisory Board was created after the Kargil War as part of the reforms in higher security management. It was suspended after the National Security Advisory Board's term ended once Narendra Modi became prime minister. Since then, its exact role or efficacy has never been discussed publicly or in Parliament.

49. P. Chidambaram, “Intelligence Bureau Centenary Endowment Lecture: A New Architecture for India's Security” (lecture presented in New Delhi, December 23, 2009), [http://www.mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload\\_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/HM-IB-Endowment231209.pdf](http://www.mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/HM-IB-Endowment231209.pdf). This is a case in point. His proposal to create a detailed process-driven security architecture fell apart subsequently and remains only on paper to date.

50. Devjyot Ghoshal, “Pathankot Strike: Why Isn't the Indian Govt Better at Handling Terror Attacks?” *Quartz*, January 3, 2016. Also see “Why India's Response to Pathankot Attack Was a ‘Debaacle,’” *BBC*, January 6, 2016.

51. The Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization of the Pentagon Act saw major reforms in the way the military would function during national emergencies. It is also worth reading the findings of the Adm. Holloway Commission that was set up after the failure of Operation Eagle Claw to investigate the causes of the debacle. The commission findings can be read at George Washington University's National Security Archive at, <http://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB63/doc8.pdf>.

52. U.S. Special Operations Command was set up through the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

53. For an overview of these reforms, see the Director of National Intelligence “History” page: <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/history>. Also see the 9/11 Commission Report, available at <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf> and the “Intelligence Reform & Terrorism Prevention Act” at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ458/pdf/PLAW-108publ458.pdf>.

54. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *100 Day Plan: Integration and Collaboration* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, July 27, 2007), <https://fas.org/irp/dni/100-day-plan-followup.pdf>.

55. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *500 Day Plan: Integration and Collaboration* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, October 10, 2007), <https://fas.org/irp/dni/500-day-plan.pdf>.

the Kargil Review Committee after the war in 1999, and there has been no major structural or comprehensive review since then. Many of the major recommendations from the committee are still pending, and a later commission — known as the “Naresh Chandra Task Force on National Security” — created by the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance government was discarded as soon as the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government came to power in May 2014.<sup>56</sup> It appears that the only consistency in reforming India’s moribund and bureaucracy-ridden security architecture remains ensuring that no comprehensive reform occurs.

The current administration under Prime Minister Modi has yet to address these systemic failures, though the need for institutional reform and building a process-driven approach has never been more acute. The eruption of violence in Kashmir in the summer of 2016 and the many injuries and blindings due to the excessive use of force by state security demonstrate this lack of strategy. The violence has only escalated and led to deeper crises rather than peace.<sup>57</sup> The fact that India’s security agencies have not followed a data-driven approach for formulating policy further exacerbates the problem.

To address some of the key challenges highlighted in this essay, India needs to introduce meaningful reform to its higher security echelons. Some key recommendations for the reformation include:

- Creating processes with clear institutional roles and responsibilities during crisis scenarios. This has never been established and has been subjected to too many changes without any empirical evidence on efficacy. Institutional roles need to be reassessed and reoriented to address large gaps in current capabilities for managing crises.
- Addressing issues of accountability and establishing a clear delineation of responsibilities in intelligence reform. Accountability must be in terms of collection and dissemination of intelligence, while delineation must be a function of intelligence analysis and assessments.
- Ensuring policy making is data-driven, with data leading the way, rather than situating an appreciation. Projects created to address some of these issues, though inherently flawed, are classic examples of how decisions are taken without adequate data, leading to a largely reactive posture.<sup>58</sup>

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56. “Task Force on National Security Presents Report to PM,” Press Information Bureau (India), Prime Minister’s Office, May 23, 2012, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=84437>.

57. See the detailed data sheets maintained by the South Asia Terrorism Portal that tracks violent incidents in Jammu & Kashmir, [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data\\_sheets/index.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/index.html).

58. Two projects are a case in point: The Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems project was created to link all the police stations across the country for real-time data sharing and coordination between different states. Separately, the federal government started the National Intelligence Grid project to connect 22 databases to ensure real-time big data analysis on intelligence inputs. Both projects have yet to deliver despite existing for over a decade. However, in the opinion of the author both projects are inherently flawed and will never deliver the results originally intended.

- Creating a clear, internally understood escalatory ladder and ensuring that all the escalation steps are geared to deliver optimally.
- Institutionally protecting intelligence assessments against groupthink by building key responsibility areas that are processed through sound and proven methodologies.

The reorganization of India's higher defense management, started after the Kargil War, continues to languish despite the lapse of nearly 16 years. Key appointments, such as that of the chief of defence staff, continue to elude political sanction. Recommendations for new institutional structures, such as the creation of a dedicated special operations command and a cyber command, have yet to take off, even though a pronouncement was made as recently as August 2017 by the union defence secretary at the Unified Commanders Conference in New Delhi. With the military seen as an integral part of the escalatory ladder, this lack of substantive reform continues to hamper decision-making for crisis management in India.



# SELF-REFERENCING THE NEWS

## Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises

*Ruhee Neog*

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This essay seeks to understand how the Indian media interacts with government and public opinion in framing the news. It considers factors that motivate and limit media behavior together with media impact on policymaking through coverage of India-Pakistan crises. Specifically, I primarily assess the role of English-language Indian media by reviewing coverage and drawing upon interviews with key journalists and government officials during the subcontinent's recent crises. Taken together, this analysis demonstrates the emergence of a discernible pattern of crisis behavior within the Indian media.

I address two questions, one general and one narrow. First, is the Indian media an important source of information that informs the government and society on foreign policy, especially during a crisis? Second, does the Indian media affect policymaking or decision-making during a crisis? To address the first question, I identify the problems associated with mass media and employ a diagrammatic and textual representation of its pulls and pressures. The media, news-consuming public, and policymaking community form a self-referential cycle in which each feeds and reaffirms the other's perception of reality regarding India-Pakistan crises. This cycle determines how news is framed.

To address the second question, I identify three dominant phases of Indian media-policy interaction and the flow of information. Scholarship on the role of the media highlights three modes in which this communication can take place: top-down, bottom-up, and "media-policy agency." While I find the media in India has not directly influenced policymaking in a way that impacted crisis management, it has played a role in communicating crisis narratives and amplifying the consequences of crises for democratic politics and society, all of which have indirect or second-order effects on future crisis management.

Ultimately, this study concludes that during periods of crisis the media takes its cues from the government while responding to what the news-consuming public expects to hear, see, and read. Nationalist media rhetoric fortifies clear policy

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action, and in the absence of policy certainty, the media frames information to support a course of action and government policy.

This essay proceeds in four parts. In the first section, I give a general overview of the Indian media. The second section considers the media's informational role during crises and the motivations and constraints that determine its behavior. The third section briefly reviews the literature on relationships between foreign policy, public opinion, and mass media to gauge the lens that best explains the Indian media's role in crisis situations. These are then applied to three chronological phases of government-media interaction in India since the Kargil conflict. Finally, I offer some concluding thoughts on the implications of the media's role in South Asian crises and potential for future study.

## Overview of the Indian Media Landscape

India hosts a vibrant, burgeoning, and highly competitive media.<sup>1</sup> This media is not a monolith and comprises newspapers, television, radio, and new media platforms (e.g., social media) reporting on different issues and catering to varied audiences.<sup>2</sup> South Asia also bears witness to India-Pakistan bilateral tensions characterized by low-intensity conflict and cross-border terrorism. In these interstate crisis situations, information is a valuable currency, and as the conduit between policymakers and the public, the media plays a crucial role. How information is interpreted and presented helps determine how crises are viewed, with potential to influence their trajectory. By dealing in information, the media becomes a stakeholder in crises as both a collection of unique actors and as a government tool for information dissemination. Shaping the way in which news is consumed assures that the media not only reports the news but also becomes part of it.

It is critical to first acknowledge that the Indian news media comprises a sweeping and diverse landscape. There are nearly 400 television news channels.<sup>3</sup> According to the latest figures (2013-14), of the 23 languages that newspapers across the country are registered in, there are 13,138 newspapers and periodicals in English alone.<sup>4</sup> These numbers have likely increased with the granting of more licenses in the intervening years.

On the consumption side, in 2014 there were 301,570,000 print publication readers (an annual increase of 6.5 percent), 621,118,000 television viewers (an annual increase of 3 percent), 98,967,000 Internet news site visitors (an annual increase of 1.5 percent), and 58,518,000 radio listeners (an annual increase of 1.3 percent).

1. James Painter, "Introduction," in *India's Media Boom: The Good News and the Bad*, ed. James Painter (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2013).

2. Beena Sarwar, "Media Matters," *India International Centre Quarterly* 35, no. 3/4 (2008-9): 184-93.

3. Ministry of Information Broadcasting (India), "List of Permitted Private Satellite TV Channels as on 31-05-2017," <http://mib.nic.in/sites/default/files/Master%20List%20of%20Permitted%20Private%20%20statellite%20TV%20Channels%20as%20on%2031.07.2017.pdf>.

4. "All India Number of Registered Newspapers and Periodicals by Language from 2001 to 2013-14," Open Government Data Platform India, <https://data.gov.in/catalog/number-registered-newspapers-and-periodicals-language-all-india-and-state-wise>.

The highest-grossing newspaper was a Hindi-language daily, *Dainik Jagran*, with a readership of 16,631,000. *The Times of India* was the most read English daily at 7,590,000 readers. Both newspapers' readerships increased by 1,104,000 and 336,000, respectively, from 2013 to 2014.<sup>5</sup> In January 2015, there was a 4 percent annual increase of television viewers, with the all India digital television penetration at 66 percent in reported markets.<sup>6</sup>

These numbers represent only a fraction of the Indian media. The sheer volume of news media outlets illustrates the complexities of analyzing the role and impact of the media during a crisis. Understanding such a diverse body's interaction with policymaking and public opinion, which itself defies easy definition, is similarly challenging. Nevertheless, media coverage of crises in South Asia lends itself to certain generalizations.

## Self-Referential Crisis Narratives: Motivations and Limitations

This first section seeks to address the question of what informational role the media plays between the news-consuming public and government during times of South Asian interstate crises. Information plays a central role in conflict and crisis, and in theory the media can play a valuable role as an independent source of information in adversarial or crisis situations. However, the Indian media has suffered a crisis of credibility for several years, especially relating to coverage of India-Pakistan bilateral tensions. It is often claimed that journalistic integrity and objectivity are habitually sacrificed at the altar of national security during interstate crises.<sup>7</sup> This section contends that the media contributes to a self-referential cycle that lacks the independence to offer critical viewpoints and hard investigative reporting.

This cycle stems from three factors: low adherence to certain standards, government influence and constraints, and structural incentives or changes in the media industry that drive a race to the bottom.

### *Adherence to Standards*

The information management relationship between the news media and the government during South Asian crises dates to independence. To protect the rights of minorities, Indian and Pakistani leaders formulated a code of conduct for journalists and media houses, but few outlets have actually adhered to these lofty yet important standards.

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5. The top daily newspapers with the highest readership were all Hindi-language: *Dainik Jagran*, *Hindustan*, and *Dainik Bhaskar*. Of the English dailies, *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu* had the highest readership. "Indian Readership Survey 2014," Media Research Users Council, 2014, [http://www.mruc.net/sites/default/files/IRS%202014%20Topline%20Findings\\_0.pdf](http://www.mruc.net/sites/default/files/IRS%202014%20Topline%20Findings_0.pdf).

6. "TAM Annual Universe Update 2015," TAM Media Research, 2015, [http://www.tamindia.com/webview.php?web=ref\\_pdf/Overview\\_Universe\\_Update\\_2015.pdf](http://www.tamindia.com/webview.php?web=ref_pdf/Overview_Universe_Update_2015.pdf).

7. Beyond widespread anecdotal arguments by South Asia analysts, see the study of news media crisis coverage in South Asia conducted in P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 186-87. The authors conclude that "the press, including the elite press, seems to gravitate to the government's position...show[ing] little if any disagreement from the line of the government of the day."

During the tenures of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, newspapers of the time reflected and sometimes allegedly amplified bilateral political disagreements. These reports pertained to the post-Partition treatment of minorities — primarily Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims — that chose to remain behind in either India or Pakistan. To record their displeasure with these news portrayals, a telegram was sent to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in February 1950 that read:

...newspapers continue to indulge in fantastic statements about happenings across the border. In Pakistan, frequent references to “master plans,” which exist only in the imagination of certain newspaper editors and others in Pakistan and scurrilous writings...cannot but cause excitement in Pakistan against the minority community.<sup>8</sup>

New Delhi received an almost identical reply that matched its tone and tenor.<sup>9</sup>

The political turmoil surrounding the rights of minorities led to the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of April 1950, also known as the Delhi Pact.<sup>10</sup> It contained clauses for appropriate behavior for the media houses on both sides of the border.<sup>11</sup> A “joint press code” was then adopted in June 1950 by the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference and the Pakistan Newspaper Editors' Conference. It called upon the media to facilitate the implementation of the Indo-Pakistani Press Agreement of 1948:

- a. By avoiding the dissemination of news calculated to undermine relations between the majority and minority communities in the two countries
- b. By refusing to give currency to mischievous opinion of individuals or organizations likely to rouse communal passions or create a sense of insecurity among the members of the minority community
- c. By rigorously excluding from the Press of each country opinion directed against the territorial sovereignty of the other or purporting to incite war
- d. By seeking through normal Press channels or Government Agencies verification of news or communal incidents before it is published
- e. By always exercising due care and caution in regard to the publication of reports of communal incidents
- f. By avoiding alarming headlines for reports of communal incidents
- g. By exercising care in the publication of pictures and cartoons likely to excite communal passions

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8. Pallavi Raghavan, “India-Pakistan’s 1950 Code on Media Portrayal of Each Other Is Relevant Even Today,” *The Wire*, January 15, 2017.

9. Raghavan, “India-Pakistan’s 1950 Code.”

10. Archana Subramanian, “Sealing the Deal,” *The Hindu*, April 8, 2016.

11. Amit Baruah, “Agreement Yes, Implementation No,” *Dawn*, March 4, 2013.

- h. By affording full facilities to Governments for correction or contradiction of published reports.<sup>12</sup>

This is an important and eminently “sensible” document in the words of Amit Baruah, resident editor at *The Hindu* and correspondent in Pakistan for several years who covered the Kargil conflict from Islamabad.<sup>13</sup> The joint press code cautions against sensationalist reporting, identifies the deliberate use of prejudiced news and opinions to provoke tensions, and advises the creation of modalities to corroborate and verify information.

This document, however, has never had salience.<sup>14</sup> During research for this essay, most journalists asked about the relevance of this document had not heard of it. As an immediate and understandable corollary, its conditions have never fully been complied with, and the media’s coverage of India-Pakistan crisis situations has therefore remained complicated.

### *Government Influence and Constraints*

The Indian government has often maintained an interest in shaping — if not outright controlling — media coverage. During crises, it particularly seeks to do so in order to manage blowback on its agenda or political base. According to Shivshankar Menon, India’s national security adviser from 2011-14 and foreign secretary from 2006-9 under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Kandahar hostage crisis that followed the Indian Airlines flight 814 hijacking was probably the first and only time the government felt that public opinion was being accurately portrayed on television.<sup>15</sup> This incident allowed both the government and media to draw useful lessons. The government felt that although it had taken all necessary measures to deal with the crisis, this was not fully reflected by the media.<sup>16</sup>

For India, everything connected to relations with Pakistan is both a diplomatic and a domestic political issue. How governments address tensions with Pakistan — and the hypernationalist rhetoric that may accompany it — is a function in part of how they see that policy playing with their constituents. Dr. Sanjaya Baru, Prime Minister Singh’s media advisor and chief spokesperson from May 2004 until August 2008, said that his “singular objective” as media advisor “each time there was a terror attack was to prevent communal tension” within the country.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, during the tenures of Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, the Indian National Congress’ line of thinking was that good relations with Pakistan would earn it the Indian Muslim vote. With

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12. Ibid.

13. Author’s interview with Amit Baruah, New Delhi, February 17, 2017.

14. Ibid.

15. Author’s interview with Shivshankar Menon, New Delhi, May 30, 2017.

16. Ibid.

17. Author’s interview with Sanjaya Baru, New Delhi, March 6, 2017.

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the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning the 2014 national elections, the game further changed because the party's electoral strategy deprioritized the Muslim vote. The state of domestic politics is, or at least has in the past been, a more vital element of crisis decision-making than media narratives. Simultaneously, the media plays a key role in framing which domestic political issues the public views as important. Managing media influence on domestic politics is thus a priority for governments during periods of crisis.

All journalists interviewed for this essay agreed that the Indian government employs varying methods to manage media during crises. According to Manoj Joshi — who covered India-Pakistan crises for publications such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, and *India Today* — media coverage of national security issues is determined to a large extent by restraints imposed or allowances made by the policy elite.<sup>18</sup> In the same vein, Baru offers that “[w]e don't live in an era where governments dictate to the media. Instead, it tries to manipulate the media to message and ensure that the crisis doesn't go out of control. The media, or any other institution, can't, in the government's view, be allowed to set the agenda.”<sup>19</sup> Shekhar Gupta — founding editor of *ThePrint.in*, host of “Walk the Talk” on NDTV, and a former editor for *The Indian Express* — believes that it is legitimate for the government to seek to manipulate the news and shape crisis narratives for its interests. It is the responsibility of reporters to determine the veracity of the messaging.<sup>20</sup>

However, in the past, government management was not done by overtly pressuring the media to behave in certain ways. Using his time working with Singh as a frame of reference, Baru says, “it's not about carrots and sticks; it's about relationships.”<sup>21</sup> Successful media communications are often invisible. A lot of Baru's time went into “building relationships with journalists so that when you

18. Author's interview with Manoj Joshi, New Delhi, February 20, 2017.

19. Author's interview with Baru.

20. Author's interview with Shekhar Gupta, New Delhi, March 9, 2017.

21. Author's interview with Baru.

need them you can simply pick up the phone and say don't do this story."<sup>22</sup> He describes "one of the most valuable lessons" learned "was not telling journalists what they should do but being able to learn from them what somebody was about to do."<sup>23</sup> The relationship between the Indian government and media has thus been far more transactional and symbiotic than popularly believed: "[a]ny mature, seasoned politicians wouldn't waste time threatening editors because there are subtler, softer ways to influence the media that often involves IOUs."<sup>24</sup>

This relationship between the Indian government and media emphasizes the importance of having a media adviser with journalism experience: "[t]here is a need for a person who enjoys the confidence of the media and of the prime minister."<sup>25</sup> The best person for this job has worked as a journalist, knows how the government works, and understands the importance of spin. This is clear in the appointments of past media advisers, all except one of whom were seasoned journalists.<sup>26</sup> Maintaining these symbiotic relationships will remain key for future crisis management. Changes to the media landscape, however, require closer study and adjustments to the shifting dynamics of future crises.

### *Media Evolution in the Information Age*

Several key factors limit and motivate the evolving news media landscape globally.<sup>27</sup> Competing pressures among the media, government, and news-consuming public form a self-referential cycle to shape media narratives (*Figure 1*). To illustrate, the Indian public demands quick and resolute retaliation against cross-border perpetrators,<sup>28</sup> while the government seeks to simultaneously demonstrate to its public and its adversaries a willingness and readiness to respond.<sup>29</sup> The majority of the public expects nationalist media coverage, while the media must grapple with the sometimes-competing goals of preserving journalistic integrity and galvanizing national solidarity against perceived "enemies." The media must also balance these priorities while relying upon the government as the primary source of information during a crisis. Further challenges include the flooding of the media market both horizontally and vertically, the arrival of new media platforms, economics increasingly determining content, and the corporatization of media ownership.

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

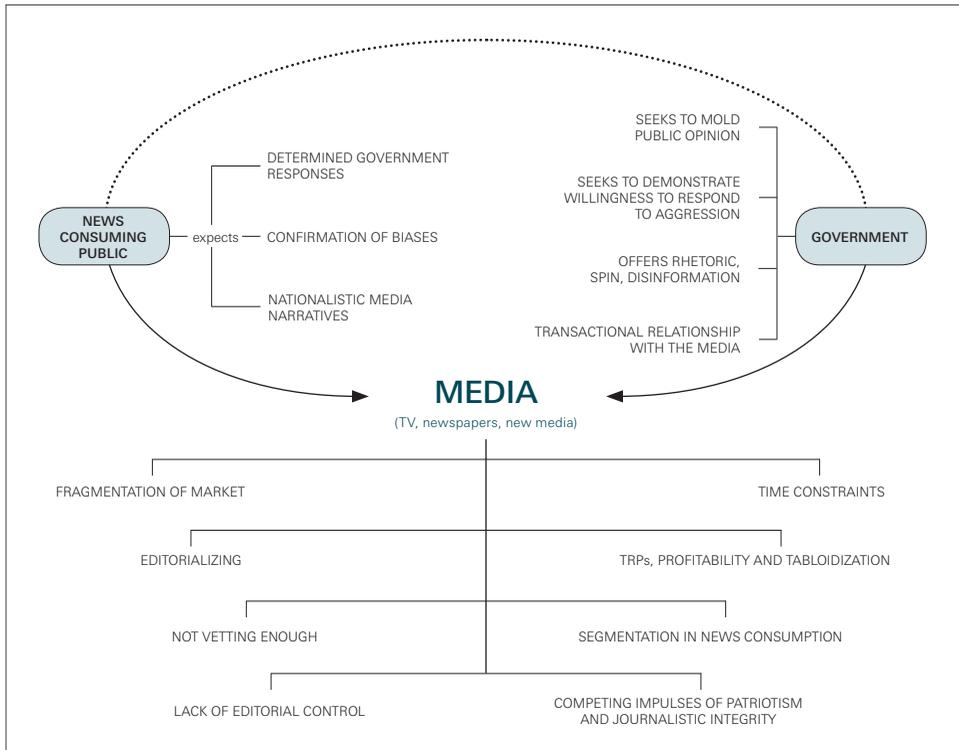
26. Former Chief Information Commissioner Deepak Sandhu followed Baru in December 2008. Both Harish Khare, who filled the position after Sandhu's departure in 2009, and Pankaj Pachauri, who was media adviser after Khare from 2012 until 2014 when the Narendra Modi government came to power, were journalists.

27. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with Menon; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist, New Delhi, March 9, 2017.

28. For example, see Prashant Jha, "Uri Attack: Is India Getting Impatient with Delhi's Strategic Restraint?" *Hindustan Times*, September 18, 2016.

29. For example, see Mohua Chatterjee, "We Will Fight This to Finish: Amit Shah on Uri," *The Times of India*, September 25, 2016; and "Uri Terror Attack: PM Modi Likens Anger to 1965, Reposes Faith in Army," *The Times of India*, September 25, 2016.

## Self-Referencing the News



**Figure 1: Self-Referencing the News in the Information Age**

**Technology.** Technology has transformed the mechanisms for the delivery of narratives. India has a growing media and the volume of coverage itself has been augmented. Newspapers, TV networks, online news publications, and social media are all information behemoths. In previous decades, there were far fewer newspapers and TV channels, very little Internet access, and stricter editorial control.<sup>30</sup> Newspaper circulation in India is up; it is the only country in the world where print media is expanding.<sup>31</sup> India's demographics are different — with a rise in population and increasing literacy there has also been a rise in both English and vernacular newspapers, which has led to increased circulation and profits. Across these mediums, the difference in coverage is most often in degree and not in kind, allowing for a broader discussion of media as an actor.<sup>32</sup> There is now more news media coverage and many more ways for consumers to access it. Television reflects these shifts in how technology and consumption have changed the delivery of media narratives. TV debates have now relegated

30. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist; and Author's interview with Menon.

31. Prannoy Roy, "More News is Good News: Democracy and Media in India," in *India's Media Boom: The Good News and the Bad*, ed. James Painter (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2013), 1-19.

32. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with Menon; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

newspapers, once “at the top of the totem pole” of information dissemination, to second place.<sup>33</sup>

**Social Media.** Just as the arrival of new technologies in the 1980s changed the ability of the media to provide real-time, uninterrupted coverage of the news, as was witnessed during Tiananmen Square and the fall of the Berlin Wall,<sup>34</sup> the more recent proliferation of new media — social media and news publications that offer real-time digitized content via the Internet — has added another layer of complexity to a media market already saturated with newspapers, satellite news, and radio channels.

Social media has one meaningful advantage. It is accessible to everyone, and one need not be a reporter or a TV anchor to publicly opine on important issues. Such open communication is undoubtedly a double-edged sword. It democratizes dialogue but can also facilitate the abusive, vituperative online behavior that is so regularly a characteristic of anti-India or anti-Pakistan sentiments.

There are also numerous pitfalls to the popularity of social media. The public increasingly relies on social media platforms to air grievances as well as supply and draw from what is sometimes fake news, which through sheer volume created by repeated circulation can manifest as facts among the populace. These “facts” are produced without checks and vetting — there is no editorial board to check or verify sources. This need also does not arise because reporting facts through social media plays a secondary role to allowing the spread of like-minded beliefs irrespective of whether they are based in reality. The anonymity of social media is misused — especially in crisis situations — which raises questions among some about whether this veil of anonymity should be pierced in extreme situations through legal measures.<sup>35</sup>

Take, for instance, Facebook, which uses algorithms to learn user consumption patterns and then curates stories that are tailor-made to individual tastes and proclivities. This fosters an echo chamber where uninformed or biased opinions are validated by the presence of similar perspectives in user newsfeeds. This mode of “news analysis” is popular for this very reason.

This example illustrates that news consumers are not seeking to have their beliefs corrected but are instead looking to have biases confirmed. Social media makes this possible.<sup>36</sup> Within the insularity of these echo chambers, perspectives on India-Pakistan crises are emotionally charged, and in trying to outdo one another in demonstrating one’s nationalistic credentials, these perspectives are magnified and picked up by visual and print media by way of coverage or

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33. Author’s interview with Joshi.

34. Piers Robinson, “The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 301-9.

35. Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

36. W. Lance Bennett and Robert N. Entman, eds. *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 2; Author’s interview with Baruah; Author’s interview with Joshi; Author’s interview with Baru; Author’s interview with Gupta; and Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

commentary. During South Asian crises, social media gives an amplified voice to every hawk or retired soldier calling for military action, often intensifying anger much more than spreading calm.<sup>37</sup>

**Social Media-Savvy Leadership.** New technologies are reshaping the current landscape of news media and impacting how it interacts with governments and the public in crisis scenarios. Social media in particular has changed communication during crises. Prime Minister Narendra Modi uses these new mediums deftly, enabling virtually instant communication about potential and unfolding crises.<sup>38</sup> For the most part, his ministers have been adept at handling public messaging and acting as his spokespeople in place of a single media adviser. Many selected for Modi's Cabinet had either been in the media before or were consummate public personalities. Appointments like Nirmala Sitharaman (previously of *BBC World Service*), Prakash Javadekar (BJP spokesperson), and Piyush Goyal (BJP 2014 communications campaign lead), not to mention Modi himself — utilizing new media technologies like campaign holograms — equipped the Cabinet with skilled oratory and messaging. These are personalities made for television.<sup>39</sup>

**News Gathering.** How media runs itself is also changing. Established media houses are known to have solidified ideological orientations — centrist, right of center, left of center — that are to some degree tempered by the ruling elite.<sup>40</sup> Today, far less money is spent on newsgathering, which has created a correspondingly adverse impact on the quantity and quality of actual information, leading to more opinion than news.<sup>41</sup> The struggle to make news-gathering “sufficiently profitable” is widespread.<sup>42</sup> A journalist interviewed for this essay seconded this view, arguing that in India the fragmentation of the market has also contributed to less money being spent on newsgathering, with all TV news channels cutting costs.<sup>43</sup>

**News Cycle.** The nature of the news cycle has also changed: newspapers that once had a 24-hour period to produce print copies now have online editions that are updated in real time. Breaking news, ranging from terrorist attacks to government announcements, is also often first released on Twitter.<sup>44</sup> In the rush to break the news — with newspapers competing to remain relevant and

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37. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

38. For example, see Kamna Arora, “Terror Attack on Indian Consulate in Afghanistan Foiled, Four Gunmen Killed,” *Zee News*, May 24, 2014.

39. Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

40. Author's interview with Baruah; and Author's interview with Joshi.

41. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with Menon; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

42. Robert G. Kaiser, *The Bad News about the News* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2014).

43. Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

44. Raheel Khurshed, “Modi's Government Is #TransformingIndia through Twitter,” Twitter Blog, May 26, 2016, [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_in/a/2016/modi-s-government-is-transformingindia-through-twitter-in.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_in/a/2016/modi-s-government-is-transformingindia-through-twitter-in.html). It is also relevant to note the growing use of Twitter by Indians, who are projected to have the second largest group of users (after the United States) by 2020. See “Twitter's User Base to Grow by Double Digits This Year,” *eMarketer*, June 22, 2016.

TV networks facing off for television rating points — interpretation and packaging are prioritized over quality. This also pressures the government toward quick responses, a challenge Nik Gowing characterizes as “first, fast, flawed and frightening: the tyranny of the timeline.”<sup>45</sup> In this short timeline, no amount of vetting can validate with certainty that received information is legitimate or complete.<sup>46</sup> When an editorial desk or newsroom must make a call on whether or how to release a story, the impulse to break a new development frequently overtakes the journalistic impulse to authenticate it.

**Sources.** With shifting technologies and a faster news cycle, using unverifiable sources has become increasingly common. This is an unwelcome development because, as one senior journalist observed, the sources are often politicized.<sup>47</sup> If there is an anonymous or off-the-record tip, it should be vetted even if the information comes from the ministerial level. However, in quickly developing scenarios, journalists often overlook this step. In a developing crisis scenario, the media may seek a multiplicity of sources at a time when the government controls the narrative and can distort information. The dilemma here is whether to rely on one single source — the government — or use several unverifiable sources, especially if the information is contradictory. The lack of editorial scrutiny that ails social media also affects newspapers and television, albeit to a lesser degree.

For example, after the Uri attack, communication via the WhatsApp messaging service that claimed Indian special forces had crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and killed 20 Pakistani terrorists found its way to an online publication, *The Quint*:

Two units of the elite 2 Paras comprising 18-20 soldiers flew across the LoC in the Uri sector in military helicopters and carried out an operation that killed at least 20 suspected terrorists across three terror camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).<sup>48</sup>

The Indian Army denied the claims.<sup>49</sup> While *The Quint* stands by its story, citing corroboration by the military and two other independent sources, some have concluded that this could have been the result of a disinformation campaign by the government to make itself “look good” and the lack of any Pakistani response was proof that the story was fake.<sup>50</sup> According to this conclusion, the media effectively played into the government’s hands, offering its own

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45. Nik Gowing, *Skyful of Lies’ and Black Swans: The New Tyranny of Shifting Information Power in Crises*, RISJ Challenges (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2009).

46. Author’s interview with Baruah; Author’s interview with Joshi; Author’s interview with Baru; Author’s interview with Gupta; Author’s interview with Menon; and Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

47. Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist. I acknowledge the irony of quoting an anonymous respondent on the proliferation of anonymous “sources” in the media. This respondent has uniquely valuable experience.

48. Chandan Nandy, “Exclusive: Uri Avenged, Army Conducts Surgical Strikes Across LoC,” *The Quint*, September 29, 2016.

49. “Army Denies ‘Cross-border Surprise Raid,’” *The Times of India*, September 22, 2016.

50. Shivam Vij, “In War Season, Beware of Disinformation Campaigns,” *Huffington Post India*, September 22, 2016.

Clausewitz's concepts of "fog" and "friction" during war are useful for understanding media behavior during crises. The uncertainty of news as it develops and unpredictable twists in unfolding crises consistently yield the possibility of relevant facts not being fully accounted for — because of both time constraints and competition — or being completely neglected if they do not fit the media representation of a certain event.

substantiation of whys and wherefores, motivated by the need to print a story while most likely being cognizant of the lack of an authorized narrative. While this explanation may or may not hold water, it demonstrates how governments can attempt to use disinformation or carefully placed stories that do not necessarily reflect reality to serve their own agendas.

**Time.** Time is a very real constraint that leaves room for error — what Gowing calls the "tyranny of real time."<sup>51</sup> Limited real-time access to information often leads to a saturation of news coverage during crises that involves continuously repeating the same information and accounts of violence. Given the crucial role visual representation plays in shaping perception, this endless stream of violent images — played on a loop on television coverage and often with no link to the event being covered — has a negative impact on the framing of crisis narratives.

Clausewitz's concepts of "fog" and "friction" during war are useful for understanding media behavior during crises.<sup>52</sup> The uncertainty of news as it develops and unpredictable twists in unfolding crises consistently yield the possibility of relevant facts not being fully accounted for — because of both time constraints and competition — or being completely neglected if they do not fit the media representation of a certain event.<sup>53</sup> In fast-moving scenarios, news on unfolding crises may not even make it to the editorial desk before release.<sup>54</sup>

**Primetime News.** Thanks to their many roles today beyond traditional news reporting, TV news channels are more attractive for their "infotainment" value. It is this characteristic that trumps the "duller" fact-based newspaper reportage for viewers. In fact, TV channels have been held responsible for fueling public hysteria in times of crisis. A case-in-point is the 2008 Mumbai crisis, when news

51. Nik Gowing, *Real Time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions* (Cambridge: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 1994).

52. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

53. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

54. Ibid.

channels and journalists were criticized for disregarding journalistic ethics at both the scene and in the newsroom by revealing operational details<sup>55</sup> and resorting to highly invective and jingoistic name-calling. In addition, talk shows have become a platform for theatrical performances, and a significant amount of money is allegedly spent by Indian TV news channels to feature Pakistani commentators known for their anti-India rhetoric.<sup>56</sup>

For example, at an India-Pakistan conference between journalists of both countries months after the Mumbai attacks, one participant noted that about “80 percent of the prime-time coverage of the top 20 Indian news channels has been about Pakistan.”<sup>57</sup> He also noted that programs were “provocatively titled ‘Beware, Pakistan’ and ‘Improve Now, Pakistan’ and said they were often accompanied by ominous music to create ‘fear and panic’ among viewers.”<sup>58</sup> TV news coverage has evidently become high-pitched with a significant amount of editorializing. This coverage becomes even shriller during crisis situations, building on the need to visually demonstrate nationalism as well as feed into public resentment.

**Tabloidization and Profitability.** A senior journalist suggested that the degrading quality of Indian media coverage of India-Pakistan crises is ultimately financial. The more fragmented and competitive the media, the more tabloid-like it becomes. Competition leads to tabloid journalism because it attracts the highest readership/viewership. This is supported by Menon, who states, “[t]wo things have happened: one, newspapers have become businesses; *The Times of India* was the first to make this transition in the early 1990s. Two, there is a profusion of columnists and opinion, which devalues the product.”<sup>59</sup> He adds that part of the problem is the economics of not just establishing but also keeping a news channel running.<sup>60</sup>

In India, advertising agencies do not make much distinction between tabloid and serious content. How many “eyeballs” the TV network or newspaper elicits determines the advertising rate. There is thus a direct relationship between revenue, tabloidization, and fragmentation. A journalist also asserted that agencies find it difficult to justify to their clients why an advertisement should be placed on a channel that may be credible but has a lower viewership than another so-called news channel.<sup>61</sup> This provokes the prime-time news space to become what Baruah sees as “TV shows that resemble a fractious kind of high-pitched family quarrel” replacing the traditional news reporter.<sup>62</sup>

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55. “Live TV Coverage Put National Security in Jeopardy, Says Bench,” *The Hindu*, August 29, 2012.

56. Author’s interview with Baruah; and Author’s interview with Gupta.

57. Rama Lakshmi, “Journalists from India and Pakistan Discuss Role in Wake of Mumbai Siege,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2009.

58. Ibid.

59. Author’s interview with Menon.

60. Ibid.

61. Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

62. Author’s interview with Baruah.

**Language.** Language is another factor in the developing news media landscape. Despite the large number of Hindi news consumers, most advertising agencies in India give higher rates to English than Hindi channels and newspapers. This gap is even wider between English and other local languages. There is also a divergence in the kind of issues covered, with the vernacular media more focused on local developments. This means that a majority of the English print and visual news media can, even with lower television rating points, do serious journalism and still make their advertising fees. Local-language TV channels do not have this luxury, and when they cover bilateral crises, there is a high degree of accompanying sensationalism.<sup>63</sup>

**Headline Inflation or Clickbait.** News reports serve one fundamental function for a society: to reproduce facts as per available sources. Issues emerge in how headlines are constructed and the sources from which information is gleaned. Context therefore is important, and this is habitually neglected during crises. For example, a provocative headline may not bear any similarity to the actual content of a news report but could effectively create a heightened sense of alarm in the newsreader at the point of first impact.<sup>64</sup>

**Asymmetric Information.** In crisis situations, journalists are primarily reliant on government briefings for information. As the primary source of credible information, the government may attempt to use the media as a “force multiplier” by transmitting information that fits its agenda. Like the media, the Indian government is also under pressure. During a crisis, the government is faced with the competing challenges of needing to (1) publicly release enough information on a crisis as it unfolds to demonstrate a coherent management response and (2) simultaneously limit the flow of information — and specifically the involvement of foreign actors — so as to prevent unwanted escalation during a crisis.<sup>65</sup> This is where disinformation becomes an effective tool: “[t]he news is manipulated by both government and the media — media doesn’t say let’s go to war, they say let’s go to war and win it.”<sup>66</sup>

The media may participate in this campaign willingly or unknowingly depending on its relationship with the government and its own sensibilities. There is also much agency granted to the journalist, whose decision regarding the interpretation and presentation of this information becomes crucial in setting public views on a crisis. There is the added issue of cost limitations (i.e., media houses simply do not have the resources to gather information on every situation), which is where regular government briefings become relevant. The government can thus use access to incentivize crisis media narratives congruous with its own. In this

63. Author’s interview with Baruah; Author’s interview with Joshi; Author’s interview with Baru; Author’s interview with Gupta; and Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

64. Author’s interview with Baruah; and Author’s interview with Gupta.

65. Austin Carson, “Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War,” *International Organization* 70, no. 1 (2016): 103-31.

66. Author’s interview with Gupta.

sense, the media, as the intermediary between the government and public, can facilitate a government's agenda-setting process for influencing public opinion by representing threats and challenges that portray policy choices in a positive light.

**Confirmation Bias.** The public plays an equal role in making the generation and production of news a self-referential cycle. With a collective historical consciousness rooted deeply in partisan discourses, most of the Indian and Pakistani publics continue to view each other in an "us versus them" narrative. This is heightened during interstate crises. By and large, the Indian population is curious about the "other," and there is a niche audience that seeks unbiased news to develop informed opinions. However, a majority appears to seek news that will confirm prejudices. In this regard, both the media and the government are under pressure to deliver.

**Segmentation.** The way news is consumed is also segmented.<sup>67</sup> This occurs because the public does not look to a single news source as a point of reference. Instead, it seeks information from various platforms. For crisis coverage, people tend to favor TV channels and social media over newspapers.<sup>68</sup> TV requires far less effort from the news consumer, and the public looks to visual mediums for crisis coverage because they are immediate.<sup>69</sup>

**Editorial Control.** More and more media institutions lack content editors. On TV channels, anchors serve as their own editors and have no one to legitimately edit their work. Primetime TV is now mostly debates and there is no real news reporting between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. In effect, newspapers break the news and TV channels debate it.

**Journalistic Ethics.** In covering India-Pakistan crises, journalistic impulses also become moot. A journalist's job is to report with integrity and without biases, and as the primary purveyor of information in a quickly developing landscape, he or she is accountable to a country's public. Their duty should be serving public interest. Here, several complications arise.

What defines public interest? The mood during crisis situations suggests that a majority of the public is interested in having their prejudices reinforced and substantiated through the news. This in turn leads to a veritable railroading of what constitutes the news and how it should be presented. The government and the media have the same audience, and the public exerts pressure on both: on government to react stridently to cross-border transgressions and on media to endorse and corroborate policy action. Thus, while the government and the media may have their own set of motivations for the kind of behavior they display, public expectations play a considerable role in informing those motivations.

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67. Author's interview with Joshi.

68. Daya Kishan Thussu, "Managing the Media in an Era of Round-the-Clock-News: Notes from India's First Tele-war," *Journalism Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 203-12.

69. Author's interview with Gupta.

In addition to these extenuating circumstances, a journalist could also face obstacles by reporting the news without prejudice. During crises, these obstacles can prove to be nearly insurmountable. In a state that draws its legitimacy from the political and cultural roots of its founding and to which territoriality is a deeply sensitive issue, impartial journalism and patriotism do not always go hand in hand.<sup>70</sup> Journalists are also likely to feel the moral burden of building solidarity across the country and not merely sitting on the sidelines as observers. India and Pakistan have great historical baggage, and under most circumstances, those covering the news appreciate what this obligation entails. Crisis situations reveal the extent to which the notions of patriotism and journalistic objectivity come into conflict as competing impulses.<sup>71</sup> This is an unenviable position.

Menon believes that in India, “media output is determined by factors apart from its desire to influence and/or shape policy.”<sup>72</sup> The information communicated between the Indian government and public during crises is shaped by issues such as profitability and competition, new technology, leadership with social media savvy, marketing pressures, a substantially faster news cycle, diversified information sources, and the rise of TV talk shows. These elements come together to determine how and why the media chooses, with the limited agency available to it, to cover interstate bilateral crises between India and Pakistan. These elements have together shaped crisis narratives in the media throughout recent South Asian history.

## Models of Media and Policymaking

The second portion of this essay seeks to understand different models of media-policy relations and how they might explain policy and crisis decision-making. In this section, I draw on the literature to identify three basic models of media-policy relations. I subsequently evaluate which of these models best accounts for different phases from 1999-2017.

The relationship between public opinion and policymaking is easier to acknowledge and substantiate than the link between public opinion and foreign policy as a subset of public policy. Public opinion, too, defies easy definition. Menon believes that “what is portrayed in the media as suggestive of public opinion is often really a representation of narrower interests.”<sup>73</sup>

A recently conducted survey, the “largest ever random, nationally representative survey of foreign policy attitudes of Indians in 2005-6 covering more than

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70. Author’s interview with Gupta.

71. Author’s interview with Baruah; Author’s interview with Joshi; Author’s interview with Baru; Author’s interview with Gupta; and Author’s interview with anonymous senior journalist.

72. Author’s interview with Menon.

73. Ibid.

200,000 households...of nine specific socio-economic (SEC) groups,”<sup>74</sup> was conducted across urban and rural India. Some of its key findings include:

- Urban elite are the most consequential in shaping foreign policy
- In a ranking of positive domestic public attitudes toward foreign countries, Pakistan fares the worst
- Broad public opinion on foreign policy suggests pragmatism and a lack of naiveté.<sup>75</sup>

These attitudes are, no doubt, drawn in part from Indian media coverage of foreign policy issues. With the transformation of the media landscape, the media has gone from a “passive transmission mechanism”<sup>76</sup> to taking on a more “activist role,”<sup>77</sup> priming public opinion through filtered messaging and thereby also “informing, shaping, or skewing the foreign policy debate.”<sup>78</sup> This independence may help shape public opinion and influence foreign policy insofar as it can hasten the decision-making process — especially through negative coverage — but it does not substantively determine policy.<sup>79</sup> In general, the public approves government foreign policy decisions as long as they are within a range of acceptable options.<sup>80</sup> The bottom line is that while the media’s role in policymaking has diminished, it still matters. Eventually, however, “its influence is not going to affect policy change.”<sup>81</sup>

Information consumption and knowledge of politics, policy, and relations between states, individuals, and societies are not an objective experience of reality. Through symbols, words, images, and opinions that have “social, political or personal ramifications,”<sup>82</sup> mass media provides a subjective version of reality to base political judgement. Commercialization and the commodification of news increasingly impact media behavior as well.<sup>83</sup> In effect, the “media could determine what the public takes to be important,” shaping public agendas.<sup>84</sup>

In answering the five foundational “Ws” of reporting — who, what, when, where, and why — journalists and editors are confronted daily with choices, such as assessing received information and determining how much

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74. Devesh Kapur, “Public Opinion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 302.

75. *Ibid.*, 302-3.

76. *Ibid.*, 304.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Manoj Joshi, “The Media in the Making of Indian Foreign Policy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, 265.

79. For further discussion, see Joshi, “The Media in the Making of Indian Foreign Policy”; Kapur, “Public Opinion”; and Shruti Pandalai, *Who Sets the Agenda? Does “Prime Time Really Pace Policy?” The Indian Experience* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2013).

80. Kapur, “Public Opinion.”

81. Author’s interview with Menon.

82. Karen S. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing: Constructing Political Reality* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 16.

83. See Bennett and Entman, *Mediated Politics*, xxiv.

84. Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder, “Experimental Demonstrations of the Not-So-Minimal Consequences of Television News Programs,” *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (1982): 848.

importance to accord it in programming and news coverage. This process helps shape public opinion and influence policymaking through three tools at the media's disposal:

- Agenda-setting. "Readers learn...how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position."<sup>85</sup>
- Priming. "Changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations."<sup>86</sup>
- Framing. Describing and contextualizing an issue "in one way rather than in a logically equivalent alternative way" that "can radically alter which options are chosen and which foregone."<sup>87</sup>

These choices can lead to different versions of the same story, or differentiated news "products" put out by newspapers and television channels.<sup>88</sup> Reality is thus a highly subjective experience, filtered through communication with mass media rather than a direct interaction with it.<sup>89</sup> As Walter Lippmann, one of the most influential journalists of the 20th century, once noted,

The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception.<sup>90</sup>

This results in a reality mediated by the media, which is then filtered based on consumer perceptions and discussion with peers.<sup>91</sup>

Three explanations dominate studies of the relationship between the news media and policymaking: (1) pre-cable era "manufacturing consent" that theorizes news only reflects official government lines,<sup>92</sup> (2) the "CNN effect" that posits ways in which the media triggers foreign policy decision-making through its coverage, and (3) the more recent "Al-Jazeera effect" that indicates a symbiotic relationship between social media and the news media, with its specific roots in the "Arab Spring" of 2011 when *Al-Jazeera* amplified emerging stories told by the public on social media.<sup>93</sup>

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85. Maxwell E. Coombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 176-87.

86. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

87. Ibid.

88. James T Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 1.

89. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 4.

90. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004), 49.

91. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 16.

92. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).

93. Pandalai, *Who Sets the Agenda?*

There are two implicit means of manufacturing consent: the executive and elite versions. The executive version argues that state leadership and media owned by major corporations collude to create an agenda-driven environment that induces favorable public policy opinions in the interest of the state elite. The elite version argues that news conforms to the official line without any pressure necessarily being exercised on it, and any journalistic criticism of policy is a result of the professional inclination to question and critique.<sup>94</sup>

From this literature, we can derive three general models for how the Indian media interfaces with the government and the public in times of crisis. The first model is essentially a “top-down” model in which the government colludes with or captures the media to influence public opinion.

The second model — the “media-agency” model — derives from literature on the *CNN* effect. This literature was developed around post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy and posits that saturated coverage and 24-hour news cycles can force certain issues on to government agendas (even if they are suboptimal for government interests) and potentially accelerate decision-making. This model accords more autonomy and capacity to the media to influence government decision-making through the selection of news coverage as well as the tenor, tone, and intensity of coverage. Adapted to the case of India, the model suggests the media can drive issues and decision-making rather than determining them.

Another variant of this media-agency model is what Piers Robinson describes as a “media-policy interaction” model by taking note of the circumstances in which both the *CNN* effect and “manufacturing consent” occur in motivating decisions to intervene.<sup>95</sup> In this model, the media influences policy when there is government uncertainty by framing narratives that “advocate a particular course of action.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, the media critiques policy when there is conflict within the establishment regarding policy options. In the same scenario, if the government has a clear, unified, or strong position, it will set the agenda for the media. Government action (or inaction) is the independent variable that determines the course of media behavior. The media amplifies clear policy regarding bilateral crisis situations; in moments of policy uncertainty, the media can use the space created by government uncertainty to question executive decision-making or lack thereof.

A third “bottom-up” model might expect that with the increasing democratization and horizontal networks of information, through mediums like social media, agendas in the future could be introduced by the public through the media and then on to the government. Both the media-agency model and the bottom-up model expect that the media can influence government decision-making

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94. Robinson, “The CNN Effect.”

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Ibid.*

insofar as setting an agenda, accelerating a policy choice, and tilting a position. After the Uri attack in September 2016 some analysts speculated that pressure from domestic constituencies manifested through social media may have factored into the Indian government's choice of more publicized and aggressive "surgical strikes."<sup>97</sup>

Delving into the specific subset of foreign policy, what impact does the mass media have on Indian decision-making and public opinion regarding India-Pakistan crises? Government decision-making can be reflective of public opinion and media to the extent there is an overlapping interest between all three.<sup>98</sup> While media coverage can "highlight problems and help to put them on the policy agenda,"<sup>99</sup> it rarely, if at all, plays a decisive role in policymaking.<sup>100</sup> Media attention highlighting issues can encourage policy action as "a catalyst for humanitarian help and financial aid," for example, but so far "has not forced crisis prevention beyond carefully defined diplomatic limits."<sup>101</sup>

Public opinion as interpreted and portrayed in the media also does not lend itself to policy formulation. The public is not thought to have a deep understanding of crisis decision-making, especially in relation to military measures. For example, consider the 2016 Indian "surgical strikes" on "terror launch pads" along the LoC in Pakistan in response to the Uri attack on an Indian army brigade headquarters in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).<sup>102</sup> Many speculated that Prime Minister Modi's decision to authorize the strikes was "likely influenced" by public pressure for serious punitive action.<sup>103</sup> As experienced analysts and the Indian National Congress party were quick to point out, similar military actions were also taken under Prime Minister Singh's government, which were not made public at the time.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the strategy of "surgical strikes" incorporated in the recently released Indian military doctrine is not a new decision that the Modi government was induced to take under public pressure.<sup>105</sup> Rather, media coverage replicated the media-policy interaction model of reflecting policy decision-making. However, both public opinion and the media likely influenced the nature of communication about the strikes.

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97. C. Uday Bhaskar, "Uri Attack: Pressure on Modi Govt to Act Decisively 'Now' Is Visible, but Must Be Well Thought Through," *The Indian Express*, September 19, 2016; Harish C. Menon, "Wounded by Pakistan, Indians Are Preparing for Battle — on WhatsApp and Facebook," *Quartz*, September 23, 2016; and Samanth Subramanian, "What Actually Happened in Kashmir?" *The Atlantic*, October 6, 2016.

98. Author's interview with Menon.

99. Nik Gowing, "Inside Story: Instant Pictures, Instant Policy: Is Television Driving Foreign Policy?" *The Independent*, July 2, 1994.

100. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with Menon; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

101. Gowing, "Inside Story."

102. "Surgical Strikes: Full Text of Indian Army DGMO Lt Gen Ranbir Singh's Press Conference," *The Indian Express*, September 29, 2016.

103. See for example, Shashank Joshi, "Kashmir: Why Is India's Modi Going on the Offensive?" *CNN*, September 30, 2016.

104. Joshi, "Kashmir"; and Indo-Asian News Service, "Surgical Strikes Were Conducted Thrice During UPA Rule: Congress," *NDTV*, October 5, 2016.

105. Ministry of Defence (India), *Joint Doctrine Indian Armed Forces*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, 2017).

The broader news media, receiving its cues from the government in crisis scenarios like Uri, amplifies clear and decisive policy. Social media, like other news mediums, impacts the national conversation around issues such as crisis scenarios but does not influence policy decisions. The *Al-Jazeera* effect, therefore, bears weight in an Indian context only insofar as social media helps color how a crisis is understood and experienced by the public. In periods when the government lacks a clear policy, however, such as after the beheading of an Indian soldier in December 2012, the Indian media sometimes shapes the debate around policy action and pushes for aggressive government action.<sup>106</sup> In 2013, India saw the first uptick in annual violence in J&K since the 2001-2 crisis.<sup>107</sup>

In India, if there are instances of discernible public pressure and calls for action against Pakistan, the government is on most occasions able to respond through equally nationalist official speeches irrespective of whether this is mirrored in actual government policy. Eventually, the government will undertake a set of actions it considers in its and India's best interests, regardless of public sentiment. The choices available to the government become limited once a foreign policy stance is made public, after which the series of events become predictable. Decisions that narrow government options are taken long before the media or the public get wind of them, indicating their lack of agency in shaping policy. These decisions are based primarily on what the government determines as the will of its support base.<sup>108</sup>

External powers like the United States believe that they have more influence on Indian decision-making than is the case but are also ultimately cognizant that their role in India's strategic calculations is secondary or perhaps even tertiary. The primary consideration is the government's own survival and how well it does domestically.<sup>109</sup> The process of media and policymakers interacting, together with the public, forms a cycle that shapes how crises are understood.

### Three Phases of Crisis Media Narratives: 1999-2017

In this section, I assess whether these three types of media-policy models (top-down, media-agency, and bottom-up) can be used to explain Indian state behavior and policymaking during a two-decade period punctuated by numerous India-Pakistan interstate crises.

In the roughly 19-year period since the 1999 Kargil conflict, crisis media narratives in India have not undergone dramatic change.<sup>110</sup> However, there have been several different phases of crisis narratives, all of which were shaped by

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106. "Defence Ministry Formally Confirms Beheading of Soldier," *The Hindu*, January 12, 2013.

107. Praveen Swami, "Exclusive: Dirty War on LoC Preceded Deadly Poonch Ambush," *Firstpost*, August 6, 2013.

108. Author's interview with Menon.

109. *Ibid.*

110. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; Author's interview with Menon; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

cues taken by the media from the government of the day.<sup>111</sup> These phases roughly break down as (1) 1999-2008, (2) 2009-13, and (3) 2014-17.

The top-down model of media-policy relations via government-shaped narratives seems to explain the first phase. In the second phase, from the 2008 Mumbai crisis up through 2013, the media-agency model appears to have greater traction. While it did not have a direct effect on policy, government weakness, uncertainty, and inconsistency created openings that allowed the media to inject its own narrative. This media agency unleashed potential second-order effects on domestic politics, paving the way for a change in government and public attitudes, which would eventually — though indirectly — shape future crisis policy and decision-making. The third period is once again best characterized by the top-down model but bears some traces of a bottom-up model due to the increasing importance of social media.

### *Period 1 (1999-2008)*

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's careful rhetoric and mature signaling during the 1999 Kargil conflict, which had a parallel impact upon media coverage, characterized the first phase. As the top-down model would expect, whether he was upping the pressure on Pakistan to act or toning it down to ensure successful coercive diplomacy, media coverage generally mirrored the government's tone.<sup>112</sup>

Baru characterized government interactions with the media during Kargil as a successful example of a "planned media intervention."<sup>113</sup> Specifically, he referenced the subgroup set up within the National Security Advisory Board, which brought together a set of civilian experts to advise the government on media management. Kargil marked the beginning of daily media briefings, which were undertaken by Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Raminder Jassal. Media analysis of Kargil was a diplomatic victory for India, "because of how media coverage was shaped and public opinion was molded."<sup>114</sup>

Prime Minister Singh, who came to power in 2004, initially carried on Vajpayee's policy of composed, measured messaging. Gupta observes that the evidence of Singh's strategy working well was the media amplifying the government's clear policy and messaging on Pakistan.<sup>115</sup> This pattern of successful government management of crisis narratives continued until the next major India-Pakistan crisis: the 2008 Mumbai crisis.

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111. Author's interview with Baru; and Author's interview with Gupta.

112. Author's interview with Gupta.

113. Author's interview with Baru.

114. Ibid.

115. Author's interview with Gupta.

## *Period 2 (2009-13)*

The media-agency model becomes increasingly useful in explaining the second period. Phase two of India's crisis narratives took shape under a weakened Prime Minister Singh and government led by the Indian National Congress party, the chaos of the 2008 Mumbai crisis, and the 2009 general election. In July 2008, Singh faced a vote of confidence over the U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.<sup>116</sup> Although he survived the vote and the deal went on to become a cornerstone of his legacy, the victory was hard-fought against a harsh domestic political backdrop characterized by members of Parliament calling for his resignation.<sup>117</sup>

In November 2008, the Indian government was caught completely off-guard by the Mumbai attacks and had “zero planning” for a media response to the incident. As a result, the chiefs of the Central Reserve Police Force, National Security Guard, and the Mumbai Police were all simultaneously speaking on behalf of the government as the crisis was unfolding. Marine commandos even held a briefing wearing masks; everybody wanted a piece of the action. There was no central, organized government management strategy for handling the crisis or the media. In addition to its own intrinsic reporting foibles and while it operated in a fog of information, the media picked up on the absence of a clear, coherent government response to the Mumbai attacks. In the absence of policy certainty, it rushed in to compel a befitting response to Pakistan, with the potential to produce a *CNN* effect during a policy vacuum.<sup>118</sup> Despite much saber rattling on Indian television, government policy did not end up reflecting the media's calls for military action.<sup>119</sup> Menon, India's foreign secretary at the time, also asserts that although media coverage of the attacks did very little to affect policy change, the government realized rather belatedly that they needed to control the situation and the narrative.<sup>120</sup> Subsequently, during the 2010 German bakery bombing in Pune, journalists were not allowed access to the scene.<sup>121</sup>

The 2009 Indian general election resulted in the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance being elected for a second term. However, internal political tumult within the alliance further weakened the ability of the Indian government to portray a unified policy message.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the run-up to the election ensured a fraught domestic political climate. These conditions created space for the Indian media to be more critical of Indian policy and advocate taking a harder line with Pakistan.

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116. In a bicameral parliamentary system of government, a vote of confidence is a way of challenging a sitting government — the prime minister and his or her Cabinet. If the vote results in a no confidence motion, the government must resign.

117. Rama Lakshmi and Emily Wax, “India's Government Wins Parliament Confidence Vote,” *The Washington Post*, July 23, 2008.

118. Author's interview with Baruah; Author's interview with Joshi; Author's interview with Baru; Author's interview with Gupta; and Author's interview with anonymous senior journalist.

119. Samarth Pathak, “Indian TV News Channels Draw Flak for 'Irresponsible' Reporting of Mumbai Attack,” *Hard News*, December 6, 2008.

120. Author's interview with Menon.

121. *Ibid.*

122. Author's interview with Baru; and Author's interview with Gupta.

Bilateral tension followed both the 2008 Mumbai crisis and the 2009 general election. Violence on the LoC, the process of attempting to bring all the Mumbai attack suspects to India for trial, investigations into the failures to prevent the attack,<sup>123</sup> and Singh's continuing belief in dialogue with Pakistan against all odds cost him considerable domestic political capital.

The second phase lends support to Robinson's hypothesis of policy uncertainty and inconsistent messaging in his media-interaction model facilitating greater autonomy in media coverage. For example, Indian media sources were critical of perceived weakness in the Singh government after it accepted a clause in a 2009 joint statement with Pakistan that referenced claims of India fueling militancy in Baluchistan.<sup>124</sup> Generals on television also voiced complaints about India conceding too much ground.<sup>125</sup>

The headline-dominating beheading of an Indian soldier, Hemraj, on the LoC in January 2013 is another instance of a weak government creating a vacuum for the media to fill.<sup>126</sup> 2012 was the least deadly year on the LoC since the 1980s.<sup>127</sup> At that point in the year in all of J&K, India had lost only 14 uniformed men, of whom 7 were J&K police and 5 from the Central Reserve Police Force. The ceasefire had in fact held very well.<sup>128</sup> Following the beheading, BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, then leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, said that if Pakistan did not return Hemraj's head, India should get at least 10 heads from Pakistan in return.<sup>129</sup> The government, under Singh, lost control of the debate on this issue.<sup>130</sup>

Even though the post-Mumbai period was not very lively on the LoC, every small incident was reported with much fanfare. It was in this period, coinciding with the beginning of the third phase and the weakening of Singh's leadership, that the BJP- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh alliance began building the anti-corruption, hypernationalistic narrative that it would eventually ride to power in the next general election in 2014.

### *Period 3 (2014-17)*

Prime Minister Modi's meteoric rise and the BJP-led government brought about the third and current phase where the top-down model once again explains much of the media-government relations in crisis. At the same time, the bottom-up model appears to have some traction in this third period given pressures

123. See for example, Shishir Gupta, "What Went Wrong: The Inside Story," *The Indian Express*, December 26, 2008.

124. Joshi, *The Oxford Handbook on Indian Foreign Policy*; and "TEXT — India, Pakistan Prime Minister's Joint Statement," *Reuters India*, July 16, 2009.

125. Author's interview with Gupta.

126. "Defence Ministry Formally Confirms Beheading of Soldier," *The Hindu*, January 12, 2013.

127. "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Jammu and Kashmir 1988-2017," South Asia Terrorism Portal, [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data\\_sheets/annual\\_casualties.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm).

128. Author's Interview with Gupta.

129. "If We Don't Get Hemraj's Head, Let's Get 10 of Theirs, Says Sushma Swaraj," *NDTV*, January 14, 2013.

130. Author's interview with Gupta.

exerted by social media in setting the conversation. Bottom-up pressures, however, have yet to have any real policy impact.

This phase is characterized by three developments: the rise of a hypernationalist narrative that both media and government mutually reinforce, very selective and controlled messaging about crisis decisions resulting in limited information available to the media, and an increasingly “tenuous relationship between what the government does and what the media says.”<sup>131</sup>

“Superannuated generals and sundry hawks” shaking their fists at Pakistan began appearing on primetime news roughly around the beginning of this phase, and on that, Gupta believes “sanity has not been restored since.”<sup>132</sup> It is difficult to genuinely debate national security issues on television; the hawkish, aggressive, and militaristic discourse precludes intellectual discussion. Nothing in the Indian discourse, which is tactical and jingoistic, reflects critically on the utility of force, and the media portrays every military development as advancement.<sup>133</sup>

On the institutionalization of official communications to enable feedback on government policy, Menon argues that while Modi has demonstrated his capability to establish a link with the public, he has been less successful in explaining government policy or broader foreign policy frameworks to the same audience. Without a cohesive body making foreign policy and better communications procedures to explain why the government chooses certain decisions, the media is left to interpret what it can glean from official press briefings.<sup>134</sup> This indicates a strong top-down model at some divergence with phase one, which, though also top-down, was defined primarily by Vajpayee’s measured overtures to the media, later carried on by Singh. In this phase, Modi speaks directly to the people, often bypassing the need for the media as an amplifier. Tellingly, Modi does not favor travelling with a team of journalists from different media houses on his foreign trips, as has been the tradition, and prefers scripted speeches in a controlled environment to press conferences.<sup>135</sup> The two-way interaction between the media and government has become “less and less,”<sup>136</sup> and with such little back-and-forth between the media and government, the former’s policy influence has dwindled.<sup>137</sup>

According to Menon, media coverage of the post-Pathankot and Uri landscape is a good way to look at how the Modi government effectively regulated media narratives by releasing controlled doses of information.<sup>138</sup> Both the Pathankot

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131. Author’s interview with Menon.

132. Author’s interview with Gupta.

133. *Ibid.*

134. Author’s interview with Menon.

135. Ashok K. Singh, “Indian Media Needs Modi. Modi Doesn’t Need Indian Media,” *DailyO*, June 12, 2017; and “Criticise Trump, but at Least He’s Holding Press Conferences. Modi Isn’t,” *DailyO*, February 17, 2017.

136. Author’s interview with Menon.

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*

Good journalism is balanced; it reports facts and attempts to reflect reality — but it does not operate in isolation. Coverage is also inevitably rooted in historical, cultural, and political contexts. There are many stakeholders in a crisis — the government, the media, and the public being some of the principal characters — all of whom work under push and pull circumstances.

and Uri attacks occurred within a few months of each other, one roughly at the beginning of 2016 and the other toward its end. Massive calls for action on social media — also showcased on news channels as the dominant public sentiment — defined the year, especially post-Uri. The government’s highly publicized “surgical strikes response” displayed the increasing currency of the bottom-up model in this phase.

These three phases illustrate how the Indian media has interacted with and responded to leadership in New Delhi during bilateral crises. They also highlight how shifts in Indian domestic politics impact media narratives and determine the role of media during crises.

## Conclusion

Good journalism is balanced; it reports facts and attempts to reflect reality — but it does not operate in isolation. Coverage is also inevitably rooted in historical, cultural, and political contexts. There are many stakeholders in a crisis — the government, the media, and the public being some of the principal characters — all of whom work under push and pull circumstances. In South Asia, governments, media, and the public have much to contend with, and foremost among these pressures is the India-Pakistan relationship and its fraught history.

The news media can help governments identify and prioritize problems during a conflict if the coverage is effective. Regrettably, patchy, selective, and biased news — especially on television — ensures that it is unable to play a constructive role in policymaking.<sup>139</sup> During crises, the Indian media at best shapes the environment in which policy calculations are made and become publicly acceptable but does not contribute to policymaking directly. Government action or inaction is the cornerstone by which media cues are drawn, mirroring decisive leadership and policy action or amplifying elite conflict over policy when the leadership appears lacking.

139. Author’s interview with Gupta.

This essay approached media-policy interactions in India through two central questions: what role does the media play in informing the government and public opinion on foreign policy during crises, and does the media influence, or shape, crisis decision-making? I found that government, media, and public opinion in the information age form a self-referential cycle in framing the news — especially during crises. Each of the three stakeholders responds to various motivations and constraints while also imposing limitations on the other two. While these problems are not inherent to the Indian mass media only, they become important in understanding the factors that shape crisis media narratives. These range from competition and profitability — acknowledged by several interviewees as one of the key limitations on good journalism — to a lack of sufficient vetting of information and editorial control. Eventually, the temperature of media coverage of national security issues is largely determined by restraints imposed or allowances made by the policy elite, and as a result, the media does not appear to be the most dependable arbiter of information in a crisis.

To address the second question, I identified three phases of government-media interaction post-Kargil — 1999-2008, 2009-13, 2014-17 — coinciding with the Vajpayee, Singh, and Modi governments. An analysis of the literature revealed three primary modes of communication between the media and policymakers: top-down, media-policy agency, and bottom-up. Contextualizing these modes in the three phases identified above, I found that both the Vajpayee and Modi periods are best explained by the top-down model, where the media takes its cue from a decisive government, with some degree of difference in how both Vajpayee and Modi have engaged with the media in their personal capacities. In the Modi phase, the pressures of social media — the bottom-up model — also become increasingly relevant. While Singh continued the top-down approach in his first term, his second term is characterized by the media-policy agency model, in which a weak government creates a vacuum for the media to steer the conversation. Thus, the independent variable determining media behavior is consistently the state of the political leadership.

Ultimately, different models of media-policy interaction notwithstanding, the media in India does not shape crisis policymaking. It can, however, play an important role in amplifying and communicating narratives, hastening the decision-making process, and framing public conversation around crises. It is through this framing role that the media could potentially have an indirect influence on future crisis management.

This study has offered some initial analysis of the shifting role of news media in subcontinental crisis management. The media will continue to play a key role in any future crises in South Asia. There is therefore a need for additional studies on the role of both the Indian and Pakistani media in how crises develop and play out.



# CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN NUCLEAR SOUTH ASIA

## A Pakistani Perspective

*Zafar Khan*

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Crisis management is the process by which potential escalation toward major military confrontation is controlled, but this management does not necessarily resolve initial provocations or their underlying sources of tension. Generally, India-Pakistan crisis management has historically followed this pattern by failing to facilitate complete cooperation between the two states or resolve crisis-triggering problems. The thorniness of underlying sources of tension on the subcontinent, such as the dispute over Kashmir and (for India) militancy, are enduring problems entrenched in India and Pakistan's shared histories and domestic political contexts. In recent years, however, nuclear weapons have stymied escalation of crises to major wars. Both countries fear that potential escalation could lead to nuclear weapons use, and the growing sophistication and diversity of nuclear delivery vehicles have made this point increasingly true. Furthermore, the fear of nuclear war has ensured intervention by international community members — particularly by the United States — to politically and diplomatically pressure both sides to show mutual restraint and manage crises before escalation to broader conflict.

One can observe several events — the Kargil crisis (1999), the Twin Peaks crisis (2001-2), the Mumbai crisis (2008), and the Pathankot, Uri, and Nagrota attacks (2016) — where both India and Pakistan showed strategic restraint to avoid major conflict. These cases provide numerous insights that could potentially help both states to develop strategies that better manage and prevent future crises in South Asia. Enduring grievances like the Kashmir dispute are unlikely to be resolved in the short term, so it is therefore especially urgent that both India and Pakistan delve into their past crises to find mistakes, successes, and missed opportunities and apply lessons from those events to possible future crises before these underlying issues are resolved.

This essay examines these crises to glean lessons from a Pakistani perspective. For Pakistan, this introspection highlights lessons learned to guide future

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**Enduring grievances like the Kashmir dispute are unlikely to be resolved in the short term, so it is therefore especially urgent that both India and Pakistan delve into their past crises to find mistakes, successes, and missed opportunities and apply lessons from those events to possible future crises before these underlying issues are resolved.**

crisis management strategies. From an Indian perspective, this essay provides a Pakistani viewpoint that could help lessen strategic ambiguity during a future crisis or even dispel unfair stereotypes of Pakistan's motivations. Finally, from an international perspective, this essay offers local nuances and contexts of crises in South Asia to bolster understanding of these issues within the international community (particularly the United States) when acting as a trusted arbiter of crisis management. A study of the Pakistani perspective of crisis management, therefore, has diverse utility.

India-Pakistan crises generate tremendous danger for the subcontinent but also present some opportunities.<sup>1</sup> From a U.S. perspective, South Asian crises are always negative, as they risk escalation between states with nuclear weapons. However, from the perspective of South Asian states, crises do not represent absolute danger. Similar to nuclear brinkmanship theories that emerged during the Cold War, the successful management of threats and risks during South Asian crises, below the threshold of outright interstate conflict, can present certain opportunities. States may anticipate opportunities for (1) achieving military objectives without escalation,<sup>2</sup> (2) achieving political objectives (both domestic and international), and/or (3) forging more stable bilateral relations. In addition to principles of crisis management, this essay considers whether positive results might be gleaned from crisis management. A fourth and ex post facto opportunity is that productive crisis management can foster a learning environment. States can extrapolate lessons about how to prevent or better manage future crises.

Alastair Johnston's assessment of eight codified Chinese principles of crisis management serve as a useful means of framing the range of available crisis management techniques and strategies:<sup>3</sup>

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1. For a discussion of whether and how Chinese thinking on crises incorporates ideas of opportunity, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 28-71, 30.

2. These objectives could be deemed tactical or strategic depending in part upon the state suffering the military action.

3. Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management," 33-34.

- Communicate with the adversary clearly and constantly, and be specific about what is being demanded
- Articulate limited goals; be prepared to drop unlimited ones
- Maintain military flexibility, respond symmetrically in your options; don't excessively pressure the other side, and don't take the use of force lightly
- Avoid excessively ideological positions; don't threaten the other side's basic values, and don't moralize conflicts of interest
- Exercise self-restraint, including in response to provocative actions by the other side
- Do not issue ultimatums; ensure that the adversary can back down in a face-saving manner
- Divide large issues into smaller, manageable parts
- Anticipate unintended consequences of particular moves

How a state understands crises — in the India-Pakistan context, as danger with some potential for opportunity — impacts its crisis management approaches. Reflecting on these principles, this essay considers crisis management lessons to be drawn from past experiences on the subcontinent. Then, considering the abovementioned fourth potential opportunity inherent in successful crisis management — learning and extrapolating lessons from previous events — the final section of this essay reviews the possibility of future crises in South Asia and strategies to manage and prevent them. Topics discussed include improving confidence-building measures (CBM) based upon previous successes and failures, discouraging warlike strategies and doctrines, working toward an arms control regime, and addressing systemic tensions between India and Pakistan such as the Kashmir dispute.

I conclude that although nuclear weapons have helped deter major military confrontations in South Asia and ensured the continued engagement of the international community, they have not prevented the initiation of crises in the first place. This fact highlights the importance of improving bilateral crisis management strategies in the immediate future to enable the governments of India and Pakistan to better manage future crises that will likely continue to arise until both countries can resolve systemic tensions. It further underlines the limitations of existing CBMs and the need for fresh approaches to long-term arms control. Strengthening CBMs will help resolve prevailing crises, prevent future crises, and address outstanding issues like the Kashmir dispute. Another key finding is that the international community, specifically the United States, has played and will continue to play an important role in crisis management in South Asia. This essay concludes with a discussion of ways in which India and Pakistan, as well as the international community, can facilitate concrete crisis

management mechanisms between New Delhi and Islamabad to both help resolve prevailing crises and prevent future crises in South Asia.

## The 1999 Kargil Crisis: Early Lessons in Crisis Management

As the first major crisis between India and Pakistan after their 1998 nuclear tests, Kargil is important for understanding how nuclear weapons affected Pakistan's strategic calculus and its crisis management decision-making. When Pakistani forces crossed the Line of Control (LoC) to take up positions in the Kargil heights of Kashmir and Indian troops launched operations to recapture the lost positions, India and Pakistan were working through being newly declared nuclear powers. Both states were institutionalizing their deterrent forces and policies, with India releasing a draft nuclear policy in 1999 and Pakistan adhering to a policy of ambiguity.<sup>4</sup>

There are several major interpretations of why Pakistan provoked the Kargil crisis with an infiltration of troops across the LoC. First, historic strategic compulsions played a role, as Pakistan may have wanted to provide an equalizer to India's capture of the contested Siachen Glacier in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Jalil Abbas Jilani, former director general for South Asia in Pakistan's Foreign Ministry and former ambassador to the United States, argued that "without Siachen, Kargil would not have taken place."<sup>6</sup> Second, Pakistan could have desired to bring major regional and international attention — particularly that of the United States — to the broader Kashmir issue by highlighting how the contested territory creates opportunities for nuclear escalation. This aim would align with the broader perspective of India viewing Kashmir as a bilateral issue and Pakistan viewing it as one requiring the international community's participation.<sup>7</sup> Third, the Pakistani offensive in the Kargil district of Kashmir reflected a strategy of "preemptive defense," with Pakistan responding in anticipation of presumed Indian offensives.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, Pakistan could have desired to use low-intensity conflict to test India's appetite for risk considering the newly declared nuclear

4. Pakistan to date has not officially announced its comprehensive nuclear policy. Islamabad favors using ambiguity to bolster the deterrent effect of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. For India's nuclear policy and its doctrinal posture, see Ashley Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001); George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Rajesh Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Bharat Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 2008); and K. Sundarji, *Blind Men of Hindustan: India-Pak Nuclear War* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1993). On Pakistan's nuclear policy, see Bhumitra Chakma, *Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009); and Zafar Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London & New York: Routledge 2015).

5. For interesting analysis on this, see Timothy Hoyt, "Politics, Proximity and Paranoia: The Evolution of Kashmir as a Nuclear Flashpoint," *India Review* 2, no. 3 (2003): 117-44.

6. Jalil Jilani's statement quoted in S. Paul Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," *International Security* 33, no. 2 (2008): 76.

7. For interesting Pakistani analysis on this perspective, see Sardar F.S. Lodi, "India's Kargil Operations: An Analysis," *Defense Journal* 3, no. 10 (1999); Ihtashamul Haque, "Peace Linked to Kashmir Solution," *Dawn*, June 26, 1999; Shireen M. Mazari, "Re-examining Kargil," *Defense Journal* 3, no. 11 (2000); Javed Nasir, "Calling the Indian Army Chief's Bluff," *Defense Journal* 3, no. 2 (1999); Ayaz Ahmed Khan, "Indian Offensive in the Kargil Sector," *Defense Journal* 3, no. 5 (1999).

8. This is Pakistan's official account. For analysis of this strategy, see Zafar Iqbal Cheema, "The Strategic Context of the Kargil Conflict: A Pakistani Perspective," in *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict*, ed. Peter Lavoy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41-63.

status of the two countries.<sup>9</sup> Although the international border was not crossed, India responded effectively with its military forces because it considered the crossing of the LoC as a violation of Indian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Regardless of Pakistan's primary goal, most scholars agree that nuclear weapons encouraged Pakistan to undertake its foray into Kargil with the belief that escalation risks would ensure a hesitant Indian response or even international intervention in Pakistan's favor.<sup>10</sup> Nuclear weapons were in a way both the cause or enabling condition of the crisis (Pakistan would not have moved on Kargil without a nuclear umbrella) and the incentive for crisis management (India's options for punitive action were more limited than before the 1998 tests).<sup>11</sup>

The crisis component of Kargil emerged as India began its military response in earnest against infiltrated Pakistani forces in May 1999. As India mobilized not only its land forces but also its airpower, incentives for both countries to expand the scope of the conflict increased.<sup>12</sup> Pakistan faced pressure to reinforce and defend its isolated positions in Indian-administered territory, while India had strong incentives to expand the nature of its campaign across the LoC, whether from a military perspective to counter forward positions or even for domestic political reasons.<sup>13</sup> Nuclear weapons were likely the primary factor that enabled both countries to retain a policy of restraint even though strong pressures existed to expand the conflict's scope. Nonetheless, both India and Pakistan desperately needed political cover to back down so that the crisis would not expand further.

The international community, and the United States in particular, played an important role in creating opportunities to withdraw from the conflict.<sup>14</sup> U.S. President Bill Clinton met with both the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers to prevent the escalation of the Kargil conflict in July. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and U.S. Central Command General Anthony Zinni also visited both countries in order to de-escalate the crisis.<sup>15</sup> President Clinton encouraged Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee not to cross the LoC and assured him that the United States would convince Pakistan to make the quickest possible withdrawal from Kargil. In turn, President Clinton offered

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9. Nicholas J. Wheeler, "'I Had Gone to Lahore with a Message of Goodwill but in Return We Got Kargil': The Promise and Perils of 'Leaps of Trust' in India-Pakistan Relations," *India Review* 9, no. 3 (2010): 319-44; Rajesh M. Basrur, "Kargil, Terrorism, and India's Strategic Shift," *India Review* 1, no. 4 (2002): 39-56; and Amitabh Mattoo, "India's 'Potential' Endgame in Kashmir," *India Review* 2, no. 3 (2003): 14-33.

10. See, for example, Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," 77.

11. Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 191; and Basrur, *Minimum Deterrence and India's Nuclear Security*, 73-74.

12. See Raj Chengappa, "Face-Saving Retreat," *India Today International*, July 19, 1999; and Harinder Baweja and Ramesh Vinayak, "Peak by Peak," *India Today International*, June 14, 1999.

13. Myra MacDonald, *Defeat Is an Orphan: How Pakistan Lost the Great South Asian War* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 63-64.

14. For useful studies, see Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 127-52; and Paul Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," 71-94. For a detailed account, see Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

15. See Chengappa, "Face-Saving Retreat"; and John Lancaster, "US Defused Kashmir Crisis on Brink of War," *The Washington Post*, July 26, 1999.

to personally mediate talks between New Delhi and Islamabad if Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ensured a withdrawal from Kargil.<sup>16</sup> These talks helped give both countries enough political cover to slowly withdraw their forces and wind down the conflict. From a Pakistani perspective, management of the Kargil crisis constituted a significant political opportunity that Islamabad successfully capitalized on. Pakistan not only ensured international, especially U.S., attention in a bilateral dispute but also elicited promises from the United States to help resolve the core issue of Kashmir.

Beyond international intervention, it is also prudent to consider Pakistan's own crisis management decision-making during this crisis, which highlighted the importance of communicating with the adversary and maintaining military flexibility. When the opportunity for achieving a military victory without escalation passed, Pakistan withdrew its troops. Hotline discussions between Pakistani and Indian political leaders were a critical mechanism for de-escalation.<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Sharif sent Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz to meet his counterpart Jaswant Singh to resolve the escalating crisis. Later, Sharif also secretly sent Pakistan's former Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik to negotiate with Indian leaders as part of backchannel diplomatic processes.<sup>18</sup> The general fear associated with nuclear weapons activated political and diplomatic efforts in South Asia to prevent escalation to major military confrontation.

More broadly, the Kargil crisis serves as an important case study for conflict between states with nuclear weapons. During the crisis, nuclear weapons allowed low-level conflict to occur while increasing incentives for preventing further escalation. Although some analysts contend nuclear weapons emboldened Pakistan to infiltrate a small number of troops across the LoC, Pakistan was also constrained from further reinforcing its position in Kargil because of the risk of nuclear escalation.<sup>19</sup> Other analysts have argued that Kargil could never have escalated to a full-fledged war because neither state crossed the international border.<sup>20</sup> India's conventional superiority, from the perspective that "nuclear weapon states do not fight with each other,"<sup>21</sup> was limited by Pakistan's strategic forces, as suggested in the Indian *Kargil Review Committee Report*.<sup>22</sup> Opposing analysis suggests that Kargil disproved prevailing theories on nuclear peace and that India's decision not to escalate further had more to do

16. MacDonald, *Defeat Is an Orphan*, 66.

17. Raj Chengappa, "Will the War Spread?" *India Today International*, July 5, 1999.

18. Zaffar Abbas, "When Pakistan and India Went to War Over Kashmir in 1999," *Herald*, October 1, 2016. The article was first published under the title "War?" in June 1999.

19. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*. For a response to the emboldenment argument, see Sameer P. Lalwani "Re-evaluating the Emboldenment Argument: Evidence from South Asia" (paper presented at International Studies Association Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, March 16-19, 2016).

20. For more on this, see Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York & London: W.W. Northern & Company, 2003), 119.

21. Agha Shahi, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, and Abdul Sattar, "Securing Nuclear Peace," *News International*, October 5, 1999; and Davin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 184.

22. See Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), 197-99.

with political signaling to the international community.<sup>23</sup> Regardless, Kargil reaffirms the stability-instability paradox, suggesting that two states possessing nuclear weapons may avoid large wars but wage war at limited levels.<sup>24</sup>

## The 2001-2 “Twin Peaks” Crisis: Further Escalation

After the Kargil crisis brought nuclear India and Pakistan to the brink of war, both states were *expected* to have learned a great deal about crisis management. Yet, in 2001-2, hundreds of thousands of Indian and Pakistani forces were mobilized at their shared border for months, undermining the credibility of CBMs and enhancing the risk of war.

The first peak occurred when militants launched an attack against the Indian Parliament building in December 2001. Although no Indian ministers were killed in the incident, there were 12 casualties and the event stirred the world’s largest democracy to join the war on terror. India linked the attackers to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) militant organizations and alleged that Pakistan either directly supported or failed to control the activities of these groups. The burden of responsibility for these attacks was put on the shoulders of the Pakistani security establishment. This led to regional and international pressure on Islamabad to take strict actions against these violent nonstate actor groups to de-escalate the rising tension between India and Pakistan.<sup>25</sup>

The initial pressure, however, came from India, which perceived it had the strategic legitimacy to carry out direct actions against these organizations, even on Pakistani soil, akin to U.S. justifications for taking action against al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan after 9/11. Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani identified the 2001 attacks as “the most audacious and most alarming act of terrorism” and signaled India’s willingness to act against groups based in Pakistan without waiting for U.S. intervention.<sup>26</sup> India’s major objective in managing this unfolding crisis was not only to urge the international community to pressure Pakistan but also to compel Islamabad to curb terrorist infiltration into Indian territory and to hand over 20 militants that it considered responsible for the attacks. New Delhi sought to successfully manage the crisis in a way that incentivized Islamabad to prevent future attacks on India linked back to Pakistan. To make its compellence strategy during the crisis more credible, India mobilized

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23. For examples, see Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*; Kapur, “Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia,” 78-79; and Scott D. Sagan, “The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia,” *Asian Survey* 41, no. 6 (2001): 1064-86.

24. Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

25. Zafar Jaspal, “Understanding the Political-Military Context of the 2002 Military Standoff: A Pakistani Perspective,” in *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff: Crisis and Escalation in South Asia*, ed. Zachary S. Davis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2014).

26. Rama Lakshmi, “India Wages a War of Words; Pakistan Again Assailed for Attack, U.S. for Its Response,” *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2001.

significant military forces (Operation Parakram) at the Pakistan-India border.<sup>27</sup> This posture made it very difficult for Pakistan to back down and forced it to mobilize its military in response to contain Indian forces' further movements across both the LoC and the international border. Although formal conflict did not ultimately occur, military casualties were incurred amid troop mobilizations, cross-border shelling, and mine laying.<sup>28</sup>

India's compellence strategy appeared to achieve some desirable outcomes even without waging limited strikes against Pakistan after the first peak's incident. Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf pledged that its territory would not be used by militants to launch attacks against India across the border and signaled he was ready to implement a ban on LeT and JeM.<sup>29</sup> The "second peak" emerged in May 2002 when terrorists attacked an Indian Army base near Kaluchak, killing many family members of Indian troops mobilized at the India-Pakistan border. However, despite this escalation many Indian officials felt there was no need to strike Pakistan after the Kaluchak attack because of perceived successes in pressuring the international community and compelling Pakistan to curb cross border infiltration. Those of this persuasion argued that the second peak was not severe enough to provide India the incentive to strike Pakistani territory.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, however, the fact that the Twin Peaks crisis resulted in both Indian and Pakistani military forces mobilizing undermined the credibility of New Delhi's compellence strategy, as India failed to prevent additional terrorist attacks.

Third-party pressure was again critical in de-escalation. The U.S. war in Afghanistan played an important role restraining India from striking Pakistan, a key U.S. ally in Afghanistan and the broader war on terrorism. This motivation was especially important because the United States did not want Pakistani troops redirected from counterterrorism operations to the Indian border. As with the Kargil crisis, fear of nuclear use, even in a limited war, created further impetus for Indian restraint and ensured substantial U.S. involvement in crisis management. U.S. officials at the highest levels, including Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage, intervened to help manage and de-escalate the crisis.<sup>31</sup> Pakistan was asked to contain cross-border infiltration and implement a ban on the organizations suspected of orchestrating the 2001 and 2002 incidents. In turn, the U.S. crisis management team implored India to show restraint if the Pakistani security establishment acted against these groups.<sup>32</sup>

27. See Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," 149-50; and Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," 71-94.

28. See "Operation Parakram Claimed 798 Soldiers," *The Times of India*, July 31, 2003; and Rajat Pandit, "India Suffered 1,874 Casualties without Fighting a War," *The Times of India*, May 1, 2003.

29. Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," 149.

30. Kapur, "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia," 82.

31. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 18-21.

32. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 22-32.

During critical early segments of the crisis, the key crisis management tool for both India and Pakistan was dialogue. However, equally important was the bilateral communication that continued after the immediate danger of war had passed. Both India and Pakistan agreed to take several CBMs in 2004 to help resolve the crisis and reduce the possibility of war in the future.<sup>33</sup> Indian and Pakistani leadership agreed on a ceasefire mechanism in 2003,<sup>34</sup> and in 2004 both sides agreed to revive and improve the secure hotline mechanism both at the foreign secretary and director general of military operations levels.<sup>35</sup> They also held talks on the implementation of the 1999 Lahore Declaration.<sup>36</sup> A new hotline to communicate about nuclear risks was established, and both sides agreed to extend their declared moratorium on nuclear tests and prenotification of ballistic missile trials.<sup>37</sup> The bilateral crisis management team between India and Pakistan also held talks on fencing the LoC, installing surveillance equipment on different points along it, and preventing drug trafficking,<sup>38</sup> smuggling, and illegal immigration.<sup>39</sup> The dialogue process yielded a lift on visa restrictions, restoration of train lines, and initiation of cricket diplomacy between the two sides.<sup>40</sup> This host of diplomatic engagements highlights a key lesson learned by both sides in the Twin Peaks crisis: if handled successfully, crisis management can actually forge more stable relations between the involved states than existed before the crisis began.

## The 2008 Mumbai Crisis: Escalation Control

After the Kargil crisis and Twin Peaks incidents, both India and Pakistan — with direct assistance from the international community — emerged with a stronger template for facilitating communication and resolving conflicts. However, these efforts ultimately failed to prevent the Nov. 26, 2008, Mumbai attacks in which 10 gunmen killed more than 170 people in some of the busiest sections of Mumbai. In the wake of the Mumbai attack, India blamed Pakistan for allowing the gunmen to operate from within its borders. It was reported that Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari received a threatening call in response to the attack from someone claiming to be India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, although Mukherjee later denied this.<sup>41</sup> Pakistan denied its involvement in the attacks, and its foreign secretary urged India to allow a joint investigation of the events, calling terrorism a “major challenge”

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33. John Lancaster, “India, Pakistan to Set Up Hotline,” *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2004.

34. Amit Baruah and Sandeep Dikshit, “India, Pak. Ceasefire Comes Into Being,” *The Hindu*, November 26, 2003.

35. Lancaster, “India, Pakistan to Set Up Hotline.”

36. A copy of the Lahore Declaration is available through the Nuclear Threat Initiative at <https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/aptlahore.pdf>.

37. “India and Pakistan Set Up Hotline,” *BBC News*, June 20, 2004.

38. Shamsa Nawaz, “Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue: Risks and Opportunities for Pakistan and India,” *Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2016): 77-99.

39. “Full Text of Indo-Pak. Joint Statement,” *The Hindu*, February 19, 2004.

40. “Officials Expect India, Pakistan Will Ease Visa Restrictions - 2004-08-03,” *Voice of America News*, October 30, 2009; and Kamran Rehmat, “Cricket Diplomacy: Where Peace Is a Jigsaw Piece,” *News International* (Pakistan), November 1, 2015.

41. Press Trust of India, “I Made No Phone Call to Zardari: Mukherjee,” *Hindustan Times*, December 12, 2008.

and terrorists a “common enemy.”<sup>42</sup> However, despite this statement of cooperation, Islamabad refused to turn over those it arrested in connection with the Mumbai attacks to India.

Unlike the Kargil crisis and Twin Peaks incidents where both India and Pakistan mobilized their forces and risked major military confrontation, the Mumbai crisis did not escalate to military mobilization. This could be a result of several factors. First, both India and Pakistan learned from past crises when escalation risks, including to a nuclear exchange, were relatively high. In the end, both sides largely preferred talks over the mobilization and escalation tactics that risked so much in the previous crises.<sup>43</sup> These stances reflected both countries’ commitment to showing restraint and strategic patience through the proposed joint investigation process. India did not mobilize and therefore Pakistan had no cause to mobilize in response.

Second, the U.S. crisis management team quickly reached out to both India and Pakistan’s leadership before either state implemented risky response strategies. The United States balanced its approach by talking to each state and making it clear to the two sides that resolving the Mumbai crisis would be in the security interest of South Asia as a whole. Washington also encouraged both sides to peacefully resolve their outstanding issues, including the core issue of Kashmir. These tactics reflect significant gains and a deeper maturity in the U.S. crisis management team’s understanding of the various dynamics that emerge during crises between India and Pakistan and how to help manage them quickly before escalation to military force.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, as the United States continued to fight its war on terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan remained a critical front-line state for cooperation. Washington needed Islamabad to not only play an effective role in the Afghanistan peace process but also to support the withdrawal of its forces and war equipment from the region through Pakistan. This ensured U.S. commitment to successful crisis management between India and Pakistan.

If India had not shown restraint and the U.S. crisis management team had not responded so promptly, the Mumbai attacks could have escalated toward a major mobilization of military forces at the common border. In the wake of the attacks, India considered certain issues including the failure of Indian intelligence capabilities, poor policy planning, inadequate counterterrorism training, and insufficient execution of response protocols, to improve its response to future acts of terrorism. A key gain for Pakistan was a worthwhile attempt to

42. Candace Rondeaux, “Pakistan Offers to Join with India in Investigating Mumbai Massacre,” *The Washington Post*, December 3, 2008.

43. See Vipin Narang, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Posture: Implications for South Asian Stability,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Policy Brief, January 2010, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/pakistans-nuclear-posture-implications-south-asian-stability>. For detailed analysis on this see, Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan Nuclear Posture and South Asian Stability,” *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009): 38-78.

44. Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crises Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012).

limit activities by Jamaat-ud-Dawa and LeT, the groups India held responsible for carrying out the attacks.<sup>45</sup>

The Mumbai crisis did not ultimately escalate to conflict and the opportunities for both India and Pakistan to learn lessons were abundant, but little was gained in terms of crisis prevention strategy. Failure to resolve the core issues that often spark crises such as the Kashmir dispute ensured the emergence of future crises and highlighted the continued absence of a more comprehensive strategy for both India and Pakistan to minimize nuclear risk in South Asia. A series of fresh crises have evolved in recent years, including the 2016 Pathankot, Uri, and Nagrota incidents, that have further derailed bilateral dialogue.

### **The 2016 Pathankot, Uri, and Nagrota Crises: Normative Instability?**

The Pathankot, Uri, and Nagrota incidents indicate that crisis dynamics between the two rival states in South Asia have changed. India again blamed Pakistan for failing to uproot either JeM or LeT after these three attacks occurred and during the ensuing crises that followed. Pakistan denied responsibility, accused India of “false flag” operations, and urged Indian leadership to jointly investigate the incidents with Pakistan and promote broader dialogue between the two states to resolve core disputes, including terrorism. However, these crises demonstrated two key shifts in dynamics between New Delhi and Islamabad: they (1) elicited consideration of more measured military responses than troop mobilization and (2) happened when bilateral dialogue had stalled. A diplomatic breakthrough in bilateral relations occurred in December 2015 when India and Pakistan announced a new comprehensive dialogue — replacing previous “composite” and “resumed” dialogues and indicating all issues of dissent as up for discussion.<sup>46</sup> This progress was further bolstered by an unannounced Christmas Day visit to Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif in Lahore by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.<sup>47</sup> Before the talks had a chance to take off, however, the attack at Pathankot renewed instability.

During the January 2016 Pathankot incident, six militants killed seven Indian soldiers during an attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot. In response to the attack, Indian Minister of Home Affairs Rajnath Singh stated, “Pakistan is our neighboring country. We also want peace, but if there is any terror attack on India, we will give a befitting reply.”<sup>48</sup> Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar also attributed blame to Pakistan for the attack.<sup>49</sup> Though Islamabad denied responsibility, it arrested some JeM members and proposed a joint investigation with India. Five Pakistani members of the joint investigation team

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45. For a detailed discussion, see Angel Rabasa et al., *The Lesson of Mumbai* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009), 9-17.

46. Irfan Haider, “Pakistan, India Agree to Restart ‘Comprehensive’ Dialogue Process,” *Dawn*, December 9, 2015.

47. Suhasini Haider and Kallol Bhattacharjee, “PM Goes to Lahore, Makes a Christmas Date with History,” *The Hindu*, December 25, 2015.

48. Vijaita Singh, “Will Give Befitting Reply to Terror Attack: Rajnath,” *The Hindu*, January 2, 2016.

49. See “Indian Defence Minister Blames Pakistan for Attack in India-held Kashmir,” *Dawn*, June 26, 2016.

(an additional inspector general of police, a deputy inspector general of policy, two lieutenant colonels, and one inspector) were sent to conduct interviews and collect data on the Pathankot incident.<sup>50</sup> The joint investigation, together with Modi and Sharif's personal diplomacy mere weeks before, held the potential to improve ties between the two beleaguered neighbors. However, in their official report, Pakistan's investigators concluded that the "attack has been staged by the Indian government to malign Pakistan."<sup>51</sup> The Pathankot crisis derailed the proposed comprehensive dialogue between the two, and both sides cancelled further talks, with Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj claiming "[t]error and talks cannot go hand-in-hand."<sup>52</sup>

In the September 2016 Uri attack, militants attacked another Indian military base in Kashmir. The timing of the Uri attack was significant in that unrest in Kashmir in the wake of the killing of a popular young Kashmiri militant commander, Burhan Wani, had generated the largest anti-India protests in recent years.<sup>53</sup> Eleven days after the Uri attack, the Indian Army claimed to have conducted surgical strikes against "terrorist teams" preparing to "carryout infiltration and conduct terrorist strikes inside Jammu and Kashmir and in various metros in other states."<sup>54</sup> Although it is still not clear how India could have carried out these so-called surgical strikes across the LoC to attack terrorist camps, some in the Indian media claim that the Indian Army penetrated about two to three kilometers into Pakistani territory.<sup>55</sup> Islamabad rejected New Delhi's claim of launching outright surgical strikes, with Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa, spokesperson for Pakistan's military services, stating that "[t]he notion of surgical strike linked to alleged terrorists bases is an illusion being deliberately generated by India to create false effects."<sup>56</sup>

The November Nagrota attack on an Indian military base was the third major crisis incident in 2016 and resulted in the death of seven soldiers.<sup>57</sup> Although a definitive reaction has yet to emerge from either India or Pakistan, militants penetrated the base in police uniforms, thus exposing major intelligence and security failures within the Indian armed forces. Rather than clamoring for surgical strikes against Pakistan, Indian security leadership should revisit security mechanisms within Indian military bases to study how and why these attacks

50. Irfan Haider, "Pakistan Arrests Jaish Members in Connection with India Air Base Attack," *Dawn*, January 14, 2016.

51. See "Pathankot Attack: Security Agencies Ill-prepared, Govt Response Inadequate, Says Scathing Report of Standing Committee," *Daily News and Analysis*, May 3, 2016.

52. See "Sushma Swaraj Rules Out Talks with Pakistan, John Kerry Says No Good or Bad Terrorist," *The Indian Express*, August 31, 2016.

53. See Mateen Haider, "Pakistan Condemns India's Killing of Hizbul Mujahideen Militant Commander," *Dawn*, July 10, 2016; and "Indian Troops Suffer Deadly Kashmir Ambush," *DW News*, September 18, 2016.

54. "Press Statement by DGMO," Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defense (India), September 29, 2016, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=151242>; and "Kashmir Attack: India 'Launches Strikes against Militants,'" *BBC News*, September 30, 2016.

55. Syed Sammer Abbas, "Army Rubbishes Indian 'Surgical Strikes' Claim as Two Pakistani Soldiers Killed at LoC," *Dawn*, September 29, 2016.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Geeta Anand and Hari Kumar, "Militant Attack Indian Army Base in Nagrota, Influencing Tension with Pakistan," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2016.

occurred as well as how to prevent them in the future without risking conflict with Pakistan.<sup>58</sup>

These incidents showcase the same fundamental tensions between India and Pakistan and their competing interpretations of crisis origins. India blames Pakistan for directly or indirectly supporting the spread of terrorism across the LoC, while Pakistan denies responsibility for the attacks and claims that India utilizes them to divert the international community's attention from the core issue of Kashmir — the root cause of all issues between India and Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> These attacks have brought the comprehensive dialogue process between India and Pakistan to a standstill. India and Pakistan's bilateral crisis management strategies are clearly yielding few useful gains while fostering dangerous instability. The continuous unrest in Indian-held Kashmir, recurring crises, and the on-and-off exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani troops at the LoC appear to have eclipsed the proposed dialogue process for all unresolved issues. Instability has become the norm with a series of 2016 crises distinguished in part by shorter Indian response times.

These concerning trends beg the question of what lessons might be learned from past crises on the subcontinent. What management strategies worked well for India and Pakistan? When and how might the United States help foster stability between South Asia's nuclear neighbors? And what actions can be taken to prevent crises?

## Crisis Lessons in Nuclear South Asia

Nuclear weapons — specifically India and Pakistan's decisions to test in 1998 — changed the nature of crises in South Asia in three key ways. First, they created space for low-intensity covert (para)military adventurism (e.g., the Kargil incursion and surgical strikes). They also ensured international attention and vested third-party interest in averting escalation to an India-Pakistan nuclear war. Finally, South Asia's rapidly expanding and maturing nuclear programs and escalation risks associated with nuclear-armed states increased the urgency of improving crisis management and prevention mechanisms.

Past efforts by India and Pakistan, together with those of the international community, have failed to make substantive progress toward resolving the core but complex issue that sparks bilateral crises: the Kashmir dispute. Until both states find a political resolution to Kashmir, crises will continue to occur. India and Pakistan must learn from the past crises, create better bilateral crisis

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58. For analysis on poor Indian security mechanism and intelligence failures, see "Nagrota Terror Attack: Clamour Grows for Post Uri-like Surgical Strikes," *The Financial Express*, November 30, 2016; Manoj C.G., "Uri Attack: Congress Questions 'Intelligence Failure,'" *The Indian Express*, September 20, 2016; and Ravi Krishnan Khajuria, "Attack on Nagrota Army Base Exposes Major Security, Intelligence Failure," *Hindustan Times*, November 30, 2016.

59. See Adil Aziz Khanzada, "Uri Attack an Inside Job, Says Khawaja Asif," *Dawn*, September 27, 2016.

**Nuclear weapons may not prevent India and Pakistan from smaller border skirmishes and future crises unless both countries craft alternative crisis management and confidence-building strategies.**

management mechanisms, and enhance CBMs to prevent future crises and foster durable peace in South Asia.

The international community, particularly the United States as a seasoned third-party crisis manager, should continue to increase its understanding of the underlying grievances behind crises in South Asia and encouraging methods to facilitate long-term resolution. Given U.S. geoeconomic and geostrategic interest in South Asia, it is likely that the United States will continue to play a key crisis management role. The actions of Pakistani leadership continue to indicate that the role of the international community will remain essential in bilateral tension over Kashmir.<sup>60</sup> China could also play a significant role in the future as a balancer to avert major conflict escalation from prevailing India-Pakistan crises. This development is more likely as China strives to economically integrate both India (through a proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor) and Pakistan (through the rapidly developing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). Chinese economic integration in South Asia increases incentives for Beijing to support the successful management of India-Pakistan crises to avoid major conflicts in South Asia.

Nuclear weapons continue to strengthen strategic stability in South Asia by ensuring deterrence from large-scale attacks and that the international community will intervene when a crisis appears on the verge of severe escalation. But nuclear weapons may not prevent India and Pakistan from smaller border skirmishes and future crises unless both countries craft alternative crisis management and confidence-building strategies. This risk is especially apparent after the 2016 crises and India's declared willingness to conduct cross-border surgical strikes. In the past, despite senior Indian security leaders' beliefs that limited war could be possible despite the presence of nuclear weapons, there appeared to exist a general feeling in New Delhi that India should continue to show strategic restraint and avoid even limited strikes against Pakistan.<sup>61</sup> However, in the wake

60. See Syed Sammer Abbas, "Nawaz Urges Permanent UN Members to Ask India to Stop Bloodshed in Held Kashmir," *Dawn*, September 19, 2016.

61. See for example, Rajesh M. Basrur, "Kargil, Terrorism, and India's Strategic Shift," *India Review* 1, no. 4 (2002): 43-46.

of the Uri crisis, the Indian public heavily pressured its leadership to respond with punitive military action against Pakistan. This indicates that India may have changed the nature of bilateral crises by communicating willingness to execute *publicized* surgical strikes, penetrating Pakistani territory and carrying out quick limited attacks on suspected terrorist camps.<sup>62</sup>

Reliance on nuclear weapons amid growing conventional asymmetry continues to define the South Asian strategic environment. Pakistan has also made strategic shifts, determining that the arrival of tactical nuclear weapons in South Asia deters the possibility of limited war. Pakistan's shift to full-spectrum deterrence, a concept that evolved from within its strategy of credible minimum deterrence, deters both conventional (e.g., India's Cold Start doctrine) and nuclear forms of aggression.<sup>63</sup>

These gradual strategic developments are accompanied by advances in nuclear submarines, intermediate-range ballistic missiles, ballistic missile defense systems, and multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles.<sup>64</sup> Taken together, these increased capabilities sharpen escalation risks and the challenges to successful future crisis management.

## Moving Forward: Recommendations for Future Crisis Prevention and Management

A review of South Asia's nuclear-era crises reveals a long history of successful crisis management. However, crisis prevention and conflict resolution strategies are dormant. Crisis management studies consistently predict additional future crises of both low and high intensity with the potential to undermine the credibility of various CBMs in South Asia. Thus, there is a need for crafting strategies in South Asia to prevent crises in the first place. Major powers such as the United States and China may encourage both India and Pakistan to help resolve their issues, but South Asia must ultimately craft its own strategies to resolve emerging crises and prevent future ones. To that end, there are four critical areas where renewed efforts have the potential to yield the most progress: (1) existing CBMs, (2) deterrent strategies, (3) arms control, and (4) Kashmir.

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62. For analysis on this shift in Indian strategy, see Saikat Datta, "Behind the Scenes: How India Went About Planning 'Surgical Strikes' after the Uri Attack," *Scroll.in*, September 29, 2016.

63. "Press Release," Inter-Services Public Relations (Pakistan), April 19, 2011, [https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press\\_release&id=1721&search=1](https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=1721&search=1); Khalid Kidwai, "A Conversation with Gen. Khalid Kidwai" (remarks at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference 2015, Washington, D.C., March 23, 2015), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/03-230315carnegieKIDWAI.pdf>; Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, "Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence Stability in South Asia: Pakistan's Stabilization-Destabilization Dilemma," *Strategic Studies* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2014); Mansoor Ahmed, "Proactive Operations and Massive Retaliation: Whither Deterrence Stability?" *South Asian Voices*, September 11, 2013; Manpreet Sethi, "Counter Pak Nuke Tactics," *The New Indian Express*, July 24, 2014; and Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy*.

64. Michael Krepon, Joshua T. White, Julia Thompson, Shane Mason, eds., *Deterrence Instability and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2015); and Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler, and Shane Mason, *The Lure & Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2016).

### *Enhancing the Credibility of Confidence-Building Measures*

Despite past attempts to introduce various combinations of CBMs, including nuclear, into South Asia, most efforts have failed during crises.<sup>65</sup> The existing agreements are there, but getting New Delhi and Islamabad to actually buy into and improve these CBMs is crucial to ensuring deterrence stability in South Asia.

CBMs are revisited after every crisis to ease tensions between India and Pakistan, and reinforcing their utility is urgent. Both countries should first ensure that CBMs remain viable during crises to buy more time for de-escalation. For example, pursuing joint investigations into incidents takes time and can slow escalation by maintaining sustained dialogue. India and Pakistan could also work to foster domestic political and diplomatic communication that enhances stability and avoids the negative perceptions that quickly arise during a crisis. A clearer flow of information within and across borders will help Indian and Pakistani crisis managers to better understand the mode, time, direction, and intensity of a crisis.

### *Discouraging Warlike Strategies*

Before the introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia, India and Pakistan fought several wars. Since their introduction to the subcontinent — and as their delivery systems become increasingly credible — the likelihood of intentional major war has decreased, but nuclear weapons have neither averted crises altogether nor eliminated the risks for miscalculation and accidental war. India and Pakistan have confronted several crises since acquiring nuclear weapons and will continue to face additional ones in the future. This pattern weakens deterrence stability in South Asia.

After the Kargil and Twin Peaks crises, both India and Pakistan continue to bolster their nuclear deterrents. Despite CBMs that include nuclear measures between the two countries, both India and Pakistan tested nuclear-capable missiles of different ranges. India struck a nuclear deal with the United States in 2005, opening the door for India to engage in open nuclear trade with the United States — purportedly for peaceful, civilian purposes.<sup>66</sup> However, Pakistan has always remained suspicious of this deal and later of the Nuclear Suppliers Group's special waiver that lifted the U.S.-led world embargo on civilian nuclear trade with India, worrying that these agreements have far-reaching strategic consequences for South Asian strategic stability. Pakistan believes

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65. See Kent L. Biringir, "Security Agreement and Confidence Building for India: Past, Present and Future," *India Review* 1, no. 4 (2002): 57-90; Dipankar Banerjee, "Addressing Nuclear Dangers: Confidence Building Between India-China-Pakistan," *India Review* 9, no. 3 (2010): 345-63; and Umbreen Javaid, "Confidence Building Measures in Nuclear South Asia: Limitations and Prospects," *South Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2010): 341-59.

66. For India-US civil nuclear agreement, see U.S. Department of State, "Agreement for Cooperation Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of India Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy," October 10, 2008, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122068.pdf>.

these developments further India's pursuit of a larger nuclear weapons arsenal and more broadly strengthen its stockpile of fissile material.<sup>67</sup>

Further key strategic developments also followed the Kargil and Twin Peaks crises, namely the development of India's quick-mobilization Cold Start doctrine,<sup>68</sup> Pakistan's responsorial tactical ballistic missile, Nasr,<sup>69</sup> and the corresponding adoption of full-spectrum deterrence of both conventional and nuclear threats.<sup>70</sup> These strategies, though designed for deterrence purposes, have escalation implications for managing future crises effectively and thus merit closer study by crisis management teams in India, Pakistan, China, and the United States. Future crisis management strategies should create a strategic restraint regime (such as an arms control regime) to strengthen the credibility of crisis management and minimize the danger of war in South Asia.

### *Creating an Arms Control Regime*

Institutionalizing an arms control regime (ACR) could help secure long-term prospects for peace and stability in South Asia. Working toward this broader goal will in turn create opportunities for preventing and limiting future crises. The regime would enforce additional dialogue on the most sensitive defense issues and in the long term foster a more transparent and thus less crisis-prone strategic environment. Past unilateral and bilateral attempts to initiate the pursuit of an ACR have been unsuccessful. However, a trilateral or quadrilateral approach might yield real progress, including limiting the India-Pakistan arms race and enabling China and the United States to assure one another of their nuclear deterrent and deployed conventional intentions in Asia.<sup>71</sup>

Although there is no credible evidence that the United States or China have succeeded in encouraging strategic restraint in South Asia, both have played roles in managing various crises between India and Pakistan and have certainly helped avert major wars in South Asia. Given this crucial contribution, both the United States and China could play an essential role in a South Asian ACR. Their direct participation in early discussions and planning could help bring both India and Pakistan to the table.<sup>72</sup> An ACR could slow the production of warheads and delivery systems, ultimately helping strengthen deterrence

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67. Zafar Khan and Rizwana Abbasi, *Pakistan and the International Nuclear Order*, Islamabad Papers, Nuclear Paper Series, no. 1 (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016), 1-80, 34.

68. For interesting analysis on this, see Walter C. Ladwig III, "Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 729-72; Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/08): 158-90; Shashank Joshi, "India's Military Instrument: A Doctrine Stillborn," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 512-40; and Zafar Khan, "Cold Start Doctrine: The Conventional Challenge to South Asian Stability," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 3 (2012): 577-94.

69. The missile fits an array of categories such as tactical nuclear weapons, nonstrategic nuclear weapons, forward-deployed nuclear weapons, and/or low-yield nuclear weapons. Its terminology remains confusing for South Asians with no concrete definition.

70. Khan and Abbasi, *Pakistan and the International Nuclear Order*, 14-18; Zafar Khan, "The Changing Contours of Minimum Deterrence in South Asia," *Policy Perspective* 13, no. 1 (2016): 77-96.

71. Robert Einhorn and W.P.S. Sidhu, *The Strategic Chain: Linking Pakistan, India, China, and the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2017).

72. For deeper discussion of what this arms control regime might look like, see Khan, "Prospects for an Arms Control Regime in South Asia."

stability in South Asia, but it may not prevent border skirmishes and minor crises between India and Pakistan until the two states resolve other outstanding core issues like Kashmir.

### *Resolving the Kashmir Issue*

India and Pakistan have fought several wars and confronted numerous crises over Kashmir-linked issues. Mistrust over and lack of enthusiasm for resolving the Kashmir issue has undermined the credibility of CBMs between India and Pakistan. The oft-cited nuclear flashpoint of Kashmir<sup>73</sup> and the broader bilateral issue of confronting terrorism<sup>74</sup> create escalation risks that could cross the nuclear threshold. Although the United States and other major powers have helped manage crises between India and Pakistan, efforts have failed to produce effective preventive measures or resolution of the long-standing issue of Kashmir.

Bilateral dialogue in recent years has been stalled due in part to India's stringent conditions for talks on terrorism and Kashmir. From Pakistan's perspective, the issue of terrorism cannot be discussed without the core issue of Kashmir. No progress on Kashmir can be made without granting a directly participatory role to the key stakeholder of local Kashmiri leadership, the Hurriyat — a practice India had agreed to for 20 years and only recently changed its stance on.<sup>75</sup> India and Pakistan must find common ground to overcome this sticking point and resume dialogue.

Ultimate resolution of the Kashmir issue may assist both India and Pakistan in resolving other outstanding problems. To do so would require that both New Delhi and Islamabad (1) maintain consistency in their dialogue process despite crisis situations, (2) agree on the inclusion of Kashmiri leadership as an essential part of the dialogue agenda, (3) address the gaps within existing CBMs and past causes of failure, and (4) allow the international community a role in resolving the Kashmir issue in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir.

## **Conclusion**

Tensions and bilateral crises have endured between India and Pakistan despite the introduction of nuclear weapons. Although neither India nor Pakistan are fighting large-scale conflicts, nuclear weapons have failed to prevent crises in South Asia, and the region's peoples live between war and peace amid these enduring conflicts. It is up to Indian and Pakistani leadership to decide whether

73. Timothy Hoyt, "Politics, Proximity and Paranoia: The Evolution of Kashmir as a Nuclear Flashpoint," *India Review* 2, no. 3 (2003): 117-44; Devin Hagerty, "US Policy and the Kashmir Dispute: Prospects for Resolution," *India Review* 2, no. 3 (2003): 89-116.

74. Andrew Phillips, "Horsemen of the Apocalypse? Jihadist Strategy and Nuclear Instability in South Asia," *International Politics* 49, no. 3 (2012): 279-317.

75. Zafar Khan, "Prospects for an Arms Control Regime in South Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2016): 171-89. For a discussion of how disagreement over the involvement of Kashmiri leadership derailed talks in 2015, see: Mateen Haider, "Pakistan Says Talks Cannot be Held after India's Preconditions," *Dawn*, August 22, 2015; and Mateen Haider, "No Talks with India without Kashmir Issue on Agenda," *Dawn*, September 10, 2015.

After the Kargil conflict both India and Pakistan developed various new delivery systems for their deterrent forces. The implementation of these systems has not prevented crises in South Asia, and these conflicts continue to create mistrust, widen the communication gap, and undermine dialogue processes.

to opt for better means to resolve not only future crises but also outstanding core issues like Kashmir.

South Asian crises have accelerated the vicious arms race between India and Pakistan. After the Kargil conflict both India and Pakistan developed various new delivery systems for their deterrent forces. The implementation of these systems has not prevented crises in South Asia, and these conflicts continue to create mistrust, widen the communication gap, and undermine dialogue processes. What is most needed in South Asia is a strategy of crisis management principles for India and Pakistan that avoid misunderstanding and undermining of escalatory pressures. Bearing Johnston's eight basic principles of crisis management in mind, both India and Pakistan can show flexibility and create space for constant lines of communication. Pakistani and Indian leaders should exercise greater self-restraint on both sides of the border to avoid escalatory pressures that create incentives to unravel lines of communication.

In addition to these principles, another key takeaway from these crises is that both India and Pakistan will need to accept serious responsibility for creating a bilateral crisis management institution and rely less on third-party involvement, though roles by the United States and possibly China should not be ignored. Once crisis management is institutionalized in South Asia, India and Pakistan could further improve the sustainability of both credible regular and nuclear CBMs, which would encourage both sides to avoid using warfare strategies against each other. Besides the creation of a bilateral crisis management regime, it is possible that both India and Pakistan could work on a regional arms control regime and/or strategic restraint regime that could greatly contribute to crisis management in South Asia and improve strategic stability.

Both New Delhi and Islamabad need to come up with innovative strategies under the broader contours of regular and nuclear CBMs to prevent crises.<sup>76</sup>

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76. Toby Dalton, "What Is the Future of CBMs in South Asia?" *South Asian Voices*, May 26, 2016; and Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, September 5, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/off-ramps>.

India and Pakistan, with help from the international community, should focus on crisis prevention strategies to demonstrate restraint and perhaps even the ultimate resolution of fundamental tensions like the Kashmir dispute. Each state should improve intelligence capabilities, strengthen force infrastructure, and invest in counterterrorism strategies to further undermine sparking a crisis in the first place (e.g., preventing cross-border terrorist attacks that could escalate tensions). We have learned from Mumbai and the recent Pathankot, Uri, and Nagrota crises that India's admitted inability to stem cross-border terrorist attacks has played a role in crises emerging between New Delhi and Islamabad. Pakistan can also take such measures as part of CBMs to prevent possible failures from its side. These crisis prevention strategies, including joint and trusted investigation of crises, are proactive steps toward developing restraint, discouraging the waging an immediate war from one or the other side, and crafting policies to prevent these types of crises in the future.



# CHINA AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

*Yun Sun & Hannah Haegeland*

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China's growing role as a regional and global power may translate to greater Chinese third-party involvement in the management of future interstate crises. The nature of this involvement is uncertain, but historical trajectories of China's approach to the subcontinent offer some insight. In South Asia, despite shared borders and historic relations with both India and Pakistan, China has played a minimal role in the actual and near-wars between its southern neighbors, instead leaving any third-party management largely in the hands of the United States and European powers.

China does not yet view itself as either a military or political global superpower, and thus the incentive to adopt U.S.-style leadership in crisis management is low. Moreover, even as China rises as a global leader, it approaches third-party crisis management differently than the United States and views its interests and exposure to risks abroad through a distinct prism. Yet, as a part of China's immediate periphery, the peace and stability of the subcontinent constitutes a key area for China's national security — particularly after the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. Crises between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan could have catastrophic implications for China's critical national interests. Further, as the global geography of China's economy expands, Beijing's risk exposure as a third party in emerging bilateral crises increases.

Historically, when India-Pakistan crises have emerged, the United States has intervened in a third-party manager role. This became increasingly true after the 1998 nuclear tests.<sup>1</sup> China's rise as a major geopolitical power has occurred during a period of deepening China-Pakistan relations and a souring of U.S.-Pakistan relations. Simultaneously, recent developments have led to a decline in China-India relations (evidenced most recently during the 2017 Doklam crisis) and a strengthening of the U.S.-India relationship. These shifts add salience to a long-time question posed by U.S. and South Asian policymakers on

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1. Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Moeed Yusuf and Jason A. Kirk, "Keeping an Eye on South Asian Skies: America's Pivotal Deterrence in Nuclearized India-Pakistan Crises," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 2 (2016): 246-72; Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2014); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); Michael Krepon, "Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences," in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nathan Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, September 2011), 20-26; and P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

whether China may play a larger role in a future India-Pakistan crisis. China has historically striven to maintain a balanced approach to India-Pakistan security crises. It regularly advocates for tension de-escalation and diplomatic negotiations. However, China's ostensibly neutral position neither negates nor disguises a long-standing geostrategic instinct on Beijing's part to shield and protect Pakistan — the lynchpin of its balancing strategy on the subcontinent. This instinct has created intrinsic tensions in China's India and Pakistan policies during past South Asian crises that the shifting American role in the region under the Trump administration may exacerbate.

China's South Asia policy community disagrees on the proper role China could or should play in South Asian crises and the possible utility and risks of third-party involvement. During past India-Pakistan crises, both Pakistan and the United States have asked China to deepen its involvement. However, while China often claims neutrality in security crises between India and Pakistan, its strategic conflicts with and long-term concerns over India, along with its historical alignment and support of Pakistan, inevitably undermine its credibility as a neutral third-party crisis manager. Nevertheless, Chinese interests have at different times motivated Beijing to resort to multilateral coordination — China playing a “backstopper” role to the United States in great power management — and even pushed it toward direct bilateral engagement with India and Pakistan to encourage de-escalation during crises.

There are reasons to expect a possible change in China's approach to future crises. Chinese influence in Pakistan has grown and diversified. The relationship between China and Pakistan is often described by officials from both countries as “higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans.”<sup>2</sup> Thirty percent of Pakistan's imports came from China in 2016, and Pakistan is the world's largest importer of Chinese arms.<sup>3</sup> China has made the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) the flagship and testing ground for its broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — the signature project of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Simultaneously, China has significant interests in keeping India a part of its economic engagement in the region.<sup>4</sup> Developments in the China-Pakistan relationship, as well as general growth in China's geopolitical influence in South Asia, generate questions about China's stakes in future India-Pakistan crises.

Despite a long history of engagement, China's role in India-Pakistan crises is understudied. This essay reviews the history of China in South Asian crises and

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2. “Pakistan and China: Sweet as Can Be?” *The Economist*, May 12, 2011.

3. For more on Pakistan's imports, see AJG Simoes and CA Hidalgo, “The Economic Complexity Observatory: An Analytical Tool for Understanding the Dynamics of Economic Development,” Workshops at the Twenty-Fifth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence, 2011, <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pak/#Imports>; and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database,” <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

4. China continues its attempts to entice Indian participation in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. And India, as a market in its own right, receiving 2.8 percent of China's exports in 2016, is one of China's largest export destinations. See where China exports to at Simoes and Hidalgo, “The Economic Complexity Observatory,” [https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/export/chn/show/all/2016](https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/chn/show/all/2016).

considers the prospects for an expanded future Chinese third-party role in crisis management. We argue that China's increasing global presence will expose it to new risks and that risks resulting from crises may in turn increase incentives for China to more actively facilitate de-escalation. In section one, we review the evolution of China's India and Pakistan policies together with China's strategic interests in South Asia. Section two surveys Chinese perspectives on crises and third-party management. In section three, we consider the upward trajectory of Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises since 1950. Finally, we analyze what has changed since the iconic 2008 Mumbai crisis, or "26/11," and what China's future role may be in India-Pakistan crises.

The nuclearization of the subcontinent, together with China's growing role in global and regional affairs, has yielded greater Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises. This upward historical trajectory suggests that in a future crisis, China may be well-positioned to play a more direct management role. This role will likely not take the form of a U.S.-style central mediator. Rather, China might bring Pakistan to the table to discuss de-escalation. China playing a more active role in future South Asian crisis management may be possible and productive but would require adjustments in crisis management approaches in the region by both Washington and Beijing. The United States will need to recognize it may have lost the requisite neutrality to play the solitary third-party manager role in de-escalation. China may have to re-evaluate the possible costs and benefits of whether its new endeavors in South Asia require a more involved, hands-on approach to India-Pakistan crises.<sup>5</sup>

## **Balancing Acts: Evolving Chinese Policies toward India and Pakistan**

Understanding the history of Chinese policies on South Asia is key to assessing whether and how China might approach a future India-Pakistan crisis. Assessments of whether China may enhance its role in future crisis management must account for the evolution of China's cost-benefit calculations over time and whether current developments have significantly shifted the balance. China's South Asia policies since 1949 suggest that China has not seen itself as a principal player or manager in past South Asian crises. A decision to expand its role in the future would have to originate from an event that risked or caused major damage to China's national interests or offered the prospect of significant reward for Chinese intervention. Beyond the question of incentives, a review of China's South Asia policies also demonstrates Beijing's varying ability to play the role of a third-party broker with some neutrality. Ultimately, increased stakes resulting from China's expanding global presence could motivate China to play a more active third-party management role in a future India-Pakistan crisis.

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5. For an early version of many of these arguments see one of the author's piece, Yun Sun, "Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia," Stimson Center, *Off Ramps Initiative*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/create-channel-us-china-dialogue-south-asia>.

In many ways, China's South Asia policy, not unlike that of the United States, is an ongoing balancing act, with attempts to both maintain cooperative ties with India when possible while supporting Pakistan as a check to India's rapid rise. For the first decade after the founding of the People's Republic of China, this approach took the form of neutrality on India-Pakistan issues. Later, after the 1962 China-India War, as India's rising desire and capability to challenge China became more apparent, China's South Asia policies shifted to distinctly support Pakistan. This was particularly true during key developmental moments in India's nuclear program, namely the 1974 "peaceful nuclear explosion" and the 1998 tests. China's various policies since then have moved in gradual increments back toward neutrality. More recently, as the United States invests in India to check China's rise as a leading regional and global power, Beijing's positions are more about counter-balancing than being balanced.

Some Chinese crisis management studies have described crises as periods "between war and peace,"<sup>6</sup> while the history of India-Pakistan relations might be characterized as unending crisis punctuated by periods of peace or war. From China's perspective, this pattern — so long as tensions remain below the nuclear threshold — has long-standing utility. While India and China share significant interests, Chinese strategic concerns with regards to India and counteracting U.S. initiatives to support India's challenge of Chinese power in the region take priority. Chinese strategic investment in Pakistan to counteract or balance India's rise intensified significantly after the 1998 tests, which for India were aimed at addressing a perceived Chinese threat.

Roughly speaking, the consensus in the Chinese policy community divides China's policy toward India-Pakistan into three stages along a spectrum of neutrality: 1950-62, 1962-89, and 1990-present. This essay further divides this political history of Chinese stakes on the subcontinent into four phases — breaking up the third stage — and suggests that a fifth future stage may be in the offing (see *Table 1*).

**Table 1: Evolution of China's South Asia Policies**

<b>Stage 1</b>	1950-62	General neutrality
<b>Stage 2</b>	1962-89	Not neutral; pro-Pakistan (balancing)
<b>Stage 3</b>	1989-99	Somewhat more neutral (Pakistan is cornerstone of China's South Asia policy); advocate de-escalation
<b>Stage 4</b>	1999-2017	More neutral; active bilateral or "shuttle" diplomacy (initially just with Pakistan, later with both India and Pakistan)
<b>Stage 5</b>	Future	Likely less neutral; greater stakes; larger third-party role

6. Liu Junbo 刘俊波, "Shixi Disanfang Guoji Weiji Guanli de Tiaojian" 试析第三方国际危机管理的条件 [Analyzing the Conditions of Third-Party International Crisis Management], *Waijiao pinglun* 外交评论 [Foreign Affairs Review], no. 12 (2007): 44-49, cited in Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 28-71, 30.

India and Pakistan were among the first countries to extend political recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1950, establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing in April 1950 and May 1951, respectively. Between the early 1950s and the Sino-India Border War of 1962, China maintained a largely neutral position between the two countries. During this period, although China joined with India to advocate the famous Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, relations with India were undermined by border disputes between the two states and what China perceived as an indecent Indian role in the 1959 riots in Tibet. In comparison, despite Chinese concern over Pakistan's ambivalence on issues such as China's seat at the United Nations, China and Pakistan successfully reached a border boundary agreement in 1962.

The 1962 border war with India shifted China's alignment choices in South Asia in a pro-Pakistan direction.<sup>7</sup> From 1962 until the end of the Cold War, China was almost entirely supportive of Pakistan's position on bilateral India-Pakistan issues, including Kashmir, and provided Pakistan with economic and military aid to balance against and contain India. China supported Pakistan in the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, as well as in the pursuit of a plebiscite in Kashmir under U.N. Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 47.<sup>8</sup> China's support was rewarded by ardent Pakistani support of the PRC's resumption of China's seat at the U.N. and on the UNSC. Pakistan also played a critical role in private dialogues between China and the United States over Sino-U.S. rapprochement at this time, including a secret trip by President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to Beijing that paved the ground for Nixon's historic China visit in 1972.

The end of the Cold War necessitated a Chinese reassessment of India's strategic importance, resulting in China's South Asia policies becoming more neutral. The rising unilateralism in U.S. foreign policy exacerbated China's concern over U.S. hegemony globally and fostered a shared aspiration with India for a more multipolar world. Indian economic reforms and development increased incentives for China to pursue both political and economic cooperation with India as a fellow leader in the developing world. Meanwhile, though China strived to maintain its traditional friendship with Pakistan, it could no longer fully publicly endorse Pakistan's position on Kashmir.<sup>9</sup> This movement toward a more neutral policy, while maintaining key economic, political, and defense support for Pakistan, continued through 2016.

It is important to recognize that China's approach to its South Asian neighbors does not reflect a zero-sum perspective. Periods of improved Sino-Indian

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7. For more on "Beijing's interest in cultivating and sustaining the Sino-Pakistani relationship" at this time, and how Chinese interests in Pakistan went beyond "the India factor" and the catalyst of the 1962 war, see Christopher Tang, *Beyond India: The Utility of Sino-Pakistani Relations in Chinese Foreign Policy, 1963-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2012).

8. This support, while aggravating for India, often fell short of Pakistani hopes for Chinese diplomatic and military commitments.

9. For further reading on Chinese perspectives on Kashmir see, Cheng Ruisheng 程瑞生, "Nanya de Redian Keshimier" 南亚的热点克什米尔 [The Hot Spot in South Asia: Kashmir] (Beijing: International Culture Publishing Company, 2007).

It is important to recognize that China's approach to its South Asian neighbors does not reflect a zero-sum perspective. Periods of improved Sino-Indian relations did not lead to a weakening of China's long friendship with Pakistan.

relations did not lead to a weakening of China's long friendship with Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> China and India comprise two of the world's largest economies and emerging markets and have shared diplomatic interests as members of the global south on international issues related to energy, climate change, and the global economic order, yielding what one scholar terms "macrodiplomatic cooperation."<sup>11</sup> However, such alignments on lower-priority global issues fail to overcome divergence between China and India on core bilateral issues including territorial disputes, Tibet, and strategic competition in the region. China sees India as the only regional power in South Asia with the potential to compete for regional dominance. U.S. investment in India as a balance to China's emerging regional leadership role further antagonizes Beijing, convincing it of a shared aspiration and plan between Washington and New Delhi to contain Chinese aspirations and movements in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, Pakistan, rather than India, is the cornerstone of China's South Asia policy. Regardless of its internal fragility, Pakistan remains China's main channel of "checks and balances" against India. Given that lasting peaceful and stable relations between India and Pakistan are desirable but improbable in the near term, China essentially sees a balance of power between the two states as the key to stability in South Asia. The more asymmetrical the power equilibrium, the more unstable South Asia will be.

The introduction of nuclear weapons added new dynamics to the regional equilibrium. As one scholar notes, Chinese support of Pakistan's nuclear program historically and today is aimed at promoting strategic stability between India and Pakistan:

10. John W. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996): 326.

11. Garver posits that, "macrodiplomatic cooperation is a substitute for a lack of convergent Chinese and Indian interests on security issues and for the paltry results of efforts to increase trade and economic relations between the two countries." Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement," 326.

12. On the United States' role in Sino-India relations see, Ge Han Wen and Li Gang 葛汉文 and 李刚, "Kan Daguo Jingji Zai Yin-Ba Weijishi" 看大国竞技在印巴危机时 [In the India-Pakistan Crisis, Look at the Big Powers], *World Affairs* no 13. (2002): 16-17; and Cheng Xiaoyong 程晓勇, "Guoji Heweiji de Kongzhi yu Guanli" 国际核危机的控制与管理 [International Nuclear Crisis Control and Management: Case Study of South Asian Nuclear Crisis], *Nanya Yanjiu* 南亚研究 [South Asian Studies] no. 3 (March 2010): 17-29.

China's goal is not to check the development of India's nuclear power. Nor does it seek a comparable Pakistani nuclear arsenal. However, when Pakistan needs it, China has to provide the support as long as it is within the international laws and rules, so that the gap between Pakistan's nuclear power and that of India will not become so significant (that it is destabilizing).<sup>13</sup>

China has received much criticism for its support of Pakistan's nuclear program. According to some analysts, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons emboldens risky behavior such as low-scale conventional aggression against India and support of non-state proxy groups.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, China's support of Pakistan — both generally and specifically on its nuclear development — further strengthens Pakistan's security establishment's rationale to engage in this risky behavior. A more optimistic assessment is that China's leverage over Pakistan, both in terms of defense cooperation and on broader economic and diplomatic levels, increases the inducements for Pakistan to behave less aggressively. Some analysts posit that China's leverage in Pakistan is already having this effect, galvanizing Pakistan's perennial struggle with domestic terrorism.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, China's incentives in encouraging or discouraging certain Pakistani behaviors return Beijing to its balancing policy in South Asia. In any India-Pakistan crisis, this strategy emphasizes China's short-term goals of preventing severe escalation without disrupting its long-term agenda in balancing Pakistan against India's rise.<sup>16</sup>

## Crisis Perspectives: Increasing Chinese Stakes and Role in Third-Party Crisis Management?

The gradual upward trajectory of Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises suggests China may have increasing stakes in escalation control and third-party management on the subcontinent. This upward historical trajectory is in comparison to China's past roles — not a comparison of China to other third-party actors. Chinese perspectives on crises and crisis management are distinct from

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13. Zhang Jie Gen 章节根, "Yin-Ba Hezhanlue Wending Jiqi Dui Zhongguo de Yingxiang" 印巴核战略稳定及其对中国的影响 [The Stability of India-Pakistan Nuclear Strategy and Its Impact on China], *Yinduyang Jingji Ti Yanjiu* 印度洋经济体研究 [Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review] no 4. (2014): 21-34.

14. See for example, "Seeking Security under a Nuclear Umbrella," in Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202-25; and Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). For a response to the emboldenment argument, see Sameer P. Lalwani, "Re-evaluating the Emboldenment Argument: Evidence from South Asia" (paper presented at International Studies Association Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, March 16-19, 2016).

15. Abbas Nasir, "A Welcome CPEC Benefit," *Dawn*, March 18, 2017; and Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, "Don't Fear Pakistan's Participation in China's 'New Silk Road,'" *Defense One*, May 12, 2017. For a Chinese overview of CPEC as the flagship of BRI see, Li Xi Guang 李希光, *Zhong-Ba Jingji Zoulang: Zhongguo 'Yidai-Yi-lu' Zhanlue Qijian Xiangmu Yanjiu* 中巴经济走廊: 中国"一带一路"战略旗舰项目研究 [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Study of China's One Belt One Road Flagship Project] (Beijing: Beijing Publishing Group Corporation, 2016).

16. Some analysts will take issue with the very nature of such a policy considering the significant asymmetry between India and Pakistan — in conventional military terms but also in other significant arenas including national economies and broader geopolitical clout. Nevertheless, the nuclearization of the subcontinent has lent Pakistan a degree of asymmetric parity with India. China's manipulation of an asymmetric pairing in a balancing strategy is quite common. Consider India's own strategy to use Afghanistan to balance Pakistan. For recent scholarship on this Indian strategy see, Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017).

the United States. China eschews less interventionist tactics and does not yet see itself as a political or military superpower. As a result, it has and will continue to take a different third-party approach than that of the United States to interstate crises. In this section, we briefly review Chinese crisis perspectives and management approaches. In the case of South Asia, we argue that a gradual increase in stakes (and risk exposure) has corresponded with an increase in Chinese incentives to ensure crises de-escalate.

Chinese studies define crises as involving a negative departure from a norm of stable bilateral relations, the use of force being probable or imminent, and a sense of urgency to prevent outright conflict based on perceived time constraints. Review studies also highlight an element of uncertainty (*buquedingxing*) as a key factor in Chinese understandings of crisis.<sup>17</sup> China's expanding geopolitical influence, particularly through global investment projects like those under BRI, correlates with the geographical expansion of the Chinese economy and may lead China to perceive greater exposure to risks around the world. As one study from China's National Defense University puts it:

[A]s a rising power takes on more responsibilities (e.g., peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance) or expands its energy sources, it generates more contact points with other actors that could lead to conflict (e.g., threats to nationals living abroad, threats to energy shipments, the possibility of being pulled into conflicts during humanitarian activities).<sup>18</sup>

These aspects of China's approach to crises in which it is a direct party and overall Chinese concepts of "war control" help inform China's approach to third-party involvement in crises in which China is not a party but has great interest.<sup>19</sup> The inherent heightened uncertainty of a crisis may be compounded by the sometimes-novel contexts where Chinese core interests are expanding. Beijing is implementing BRI in areas far from China's traditional core geographic interests. Navigating recently developed "contact points" during a crisis on unfamiliar geography with emerging technologies and new state and non-state actors at play may introduce even greater degrees of uncertainty.

Chinese perspectives on crises, and their preferred management approach, can be distilled into three basic types: (1) international crises (e.g., the ongoing Syria crisis), (2) standoffs or conflicts where Chinese intervention is instigated not by a direct threat to Chinese interests but by U.S. demand (e.g., the 1990 Compound crisis), and (3) crises where Chinese interests are directly threatened (e.g., Taiwan crises). China's interest and its corresponding involvement in the first two situations are indirect. In such cases, China advocates multilateral

17. Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 30-31.

18. Wang Yong and Chen Senlin 王勇 和陈森林, *Guojia anquan weiji guanli yanjiu* 国家安全危机管理研究 [National Security Crisis-Management Research] (Beijing, National Defense University Press, 2011), paraphrased in Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," 33-34, 216.

19. See for example, Burgess Laird, *War Control: Chinese Writings on the Control of Escalation in Crisis and Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2017).

approaches to managing international crises (e.g., U.N.-led). Instances of the second type of crises require great power third-party management, largely to date the self-appointed responsibility of the United States, that China may be induced to backstop. This second type of crisis might even be in China's immediate geographic proximity — as the 1990 Compound crisis was — but nevertheless does not imminently threaten Chinese core interests.

There are two key variables in Chinese determination of the third type of crisis: the degree of proximity to core Chinese economic and national security geography and the degree of intensity/escalatory potential — imminence of actual conflict with the potential to cross the nuclear threshold. The third type of crisis occurs most often in proximity to China's eastern seaboard. These measuring sticks explain why China fails to understand, and sometimes resents, U.S. involvement in crises so far from the geography of American core interests. For China, proximity to core interests have to do with geography — both core versus peripheral physical territory (e.g., routine border tensions with India versus China-Japan standoffs over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands) and economic geography. In contrast, the U.S. collective and cooperative security perspectives that have animated U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy broadly see the threat of chaos anywhere as a threat to U.S. security and economic interests.<sup>20</sup> Thus Chinese “war control” is different from U.S. escalation control/crisis management in that China prioritizes crises with the potential to directly impact Chinese critical national security and economic stability (to maintain domestic stability politically — legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party), whereas the United States has been committed to ensuring a stable global environment. In South Asia, historically, India-Pakistan crises have only actually moved toward the characteristics of the third type of crises for China when the risk of nuclear escalation appeared imminent.

When we compare U.S. to Chinese engagement in South Asia, both states' stakes and crisis management activity increased over time. In the 1990s, the United States was closely involved in third-party crisis management in India-Pakistan crises, but both stakes and activity were raised after the 1998 tests added an overtly nuclear dynamic to South Asian crises.<sup>21</sup> From 1999 through the 2000s, U.S. stakes and crisis management activity were both high. China, by comparison, had essentially no stakes or crisis management activity prior to 1998. After India and Pakistan became overt nuclear powers, however, and as China's global role expanded and its investments in relations with and development of Pakistan grew, its stakes and activity during bilateral crises increased. In the following section, we detail the chronology of this upward trajectory. As the geography of China's economy diversifies and expands globally, its definition

20. For a good review, see Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1997): 23-32.

21. Yusuf, *Brokering Peace*; Yusuf and Kirk, “Keeping an Eye on South Asian Skies;” Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*; Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*.

of core interests will similarly gradually expand. Increasing stakes and willingness to play a role in ensuring crises do not escalate suggest that a future India-Pakistan crisis may involve higher Chinese crisis management activity.

## Parsing China's Historical Roles in India-Pakistan Crises

A review of India-Pakistan crises shows that over time China has become increasingly involved as a third party. Chinese responses to subcontinental escalation draw a broad range of reactions: disengaged statements of neutrality, public support for Pakistan, backchannel engagement with Pakistan alone, support of multilateral, international crisis management efforts, and direct third-party shuttle diplomacy with one or both countries. These responses vary depending on Chinese perceptions of the type of crisis at hand and, if a crisis threatens core Chinese interests (type three crisis), the degree to which those interests are at risk.

India-Pakistan crises began to elicit direct Chinese bilateral diplomacy at the turn of the century. Prior to 1999, China did very little active third-party crisis management to stymie escalation between its subcontinental neighbors. After India and Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, however, the stakes rose for successive crises and their potential to escalate to outright conflict. Beyond becoming more vocal, a critical difference in Chinese engagement after the 1998 crisis was that it began actively engaging in shuttle diplomacy, first with just Pakistan, and later with India also.

**Table 2: Chinese Involvement in India-Pakistan Crises**

PERIOD	YEARS	INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISES	POLICY STAGE
1	1950-90	1965 India-Pakistan War; 1971 War; 1987 Brasstacks crisis	1 and 2
2	1990-99	1990 Compound crisis; 1998 nuclear tests	3
3	1999-2008	1999 Kargil War; 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis	4
4	2008-17	2008 Mumbai crisis; 2016 Uri crisis	4

This essay divides the history of Chinese involvement in South Asian crises into four phases (see *Table 2*), which roughly align with the four developing stages of China's stakes in South Asia and resulting India and Pakistan policies outlined in *Table 1*. Period 1, approximately 1950 to 1990, is characterized by China approaching India-Pakistan crises with minimal overall involvement beyond clear and public support for Pakistan. From 1990 to 1999, in Period 2, China advocated a multilateral, international approach to crises in South Asia while continuing to express general support for Pakistan and exerting influence on Islamabad to de-escalate in a quiet, backroom setting. Later, after the 1999 Kargil crisis, China's role as a third party in India-Pakistan crises became

both more direct and increasingly involved in manager-like engagement with both Pakistan and India. Throughout this crisis history, however, regardless of China's crisis management activities, its military cooperation with Pakistan continued — a perennial thorn in Sino-Indian relations. China has consistently promoted some degree of India-Pakistan parity as a part of its strategic balancing policy on the subcontinent.

### *Period 1: 1950-90*

Two of the three major India-Pakistan crises during this first period escalated to full-scale war. In both instances, China consistently and publicly communicated support for Pakistan — offering criticism for Indian aggression and expressing general appreciation for the challenges Pakistan faced. This support, however, became more measured over the course of this period. Throughout all three crises, China pushed for restraint through direct, bilateral engagement with Pakistan, but at no point was China playing a role that resembled a third-party crisis manager. The risks for Chinese interests posed by war between India and Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s were comparatively low.

For India, the 1965 India-Pakistan war (coming right on the heels of China's war with India in 1962) was the first major conflict with Pakistan in which India grappled with the idea of China coming to Pakistan's aid militarily to create a two-front war.<sup>22</sup> In this incident, China publicly supported Pakistan and was quite critical of India, asserting that the latter “must bear responsibility for all the consequences of its criminal and extended aggression.”<sup>23</sup>

During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, China offered more measured support and strategic reassurance to Pakistan. China sought to balance its advocacy of sovereignty of states' internal affairs and continuing general support of Pakistan with its unwillingness to overly involve itself in a possible war and desire to not alienate India. The mechanisms for Chinese offerings of support included both private and public statements and subtle messaging like Zhou Enlai sending Yahya Khan a letter expressing support for a unified Pakistan and suggesting “the Pakistanis might release it to the press.”<sup>24</sup> A major impetus for this shift in China's approach back in the direction of neutrality was a decision by Moscow to arm Pakistan in 1968.<sup>25</sup>

Soviet behavior created both a challenge and opportunity. On the one hand, India and the Soviet Union's close relations at the time — culminating in the August 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty — presented the risk of direct Soviet involvement in the

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22. Tang, *Beyond India*, 11-12.

23. Official People's Republic of China statement, quoted in Tang, *Beyond India*, 12.

24. Srinath Raghavan, *1971* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 187. For more on China's role in the 1971 war, see Raghavan's chapter, “The Chinese Puzzle,” 184-203.

25. For more on responses in New Delhi to this controversial arms deal see Girilal Jain, “Soviet Arms for Pakistan: I — Success of Ayub's Diplomacy,” *Times of India*, July 17, 1968, 8. For more on the arms deal itself and a brief history of Soviet arms deals in South Asia see, Zubeida Hasan, “Soviet Arms Aid to Pakistan and India,” *Pakistan Horizon* 21, no. 4 (1986): 352-54.

event of an India-Pakistan war. On the other hand, Soviet willingness to deal with both India and Pakistan created a window of opportunity for Sino-Indian rapprochement. After exporting defense technology to India, the Soviet Union began engaging Pakistan with arms sales. Additionally, China's "avowed support for 'national liberation movements'" meant it was wary of appearing hypocritical by opposing the Bangla freedom movement during West Pakistan's violent military crackdown. China had strong relationships with power brokers in East Pakistan and was hedging against a separated, independent Bangladesh to counter Indian influence. Ultimately, "Beijing was vociferous in the attempt to dissuade military action by India, but gave no concrete assurances of military support to Pakistan" and made no commitments to protect the territorial integrity of Pakistan.<sup>26</sup>

By the late 1980s, Sino-Indian relations were on the upswing, positioning China to play a more neutral — or at least a more passive — role in India-Pakistan crises. During the 1987 Brasstacks crisis, for example, a leading study on India-Pakistan crises asserts that China played "no role" in de-escalation<sup>27</sup> — any influence that may have been wielded seems to have been done quietly behind the scenes. This shift in China's approach to India corresponded with what one scholar terms "a weakening of China's verbal deterrent support for Pakistan," during periods of crisis with India.<sup>28</sup> As India and Pakistan's nuclear programs made key developmental strides, however, China's more neutral approach changed again. The 1974 Indian nuclear test was a key moment in this transition, but it was not until the 1998 nuclear tests and the 1999 Kargil crisis that the nuclear risks began to overtly shape China's responses to escalation on the subcontinent.

### *Period 2: 1990-99*

In India and Pakistan's 1990 Compound crisis, China played a minimal, one-sided management role. Chinese politicians and military officials encouraged Pakistan to peacefully resolve the issue of Kashmir and refused Pakistan's requests for China to facilitate negotiations.<sup>29</sup> Adjustments in China's language and approach to Kashmir, a perennial source of India-Pakistan tension, during this crisis are a good example of the shift that took place in the 1990s. In previous decades, Chinese statements on Kashmir generally supported Pakistan's position that both countries ought to settle the issue based on past U.N. resolutions (rather than the more recent Simla accords — which India maintains supersede the U.N. resolutions on the issue). In the 1980s, messaging mentioned "both the Simla accords and the UN resolutions," allowing China to "straddl[e] the

26. Raghavan, 1971, 188.

27. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 67.

28. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement," 330. Garver goes on to define this deterrent as, "threats, explicit or implicit, that China might enter an Indo-Pakistan military conflict on the side of Pakistan."

29. For a timeline-review of news accounts of these and other statements during several India-Pakistan crises, see William Shimer, "Appendix V: Chinese Involvement in South Asian Crises," in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nate Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2011).

Overt nuclearization of the subcontinent swung the pendulum of China's approach to India-Pakistan tensions from neutrality back to a decidedly pro-Pakistan, anti-India position.

Pakistan and Indian positions.”<sup>30</sup> Prior to this, Chinese language consistently promoted the multilateral, international crisis management mechanisms of U.N. resolutions. During the 1990 crisis, India successfully lobbied China to play a more neutral role, evidenced in a change of tone in Chinese messaging on the issue of Kashmir.

Multiple early Chinese statements in February and March during the 1990 Compound crisis included references to “relevant UN resolutions and accords reached by both countries” and reiterations that the Kashmir issue “has been discussed by the United Nations.”<sup>31</sup> By April and May, however, Chinese statements became much more neutral from an Indian perspective, as China began to advocate bilateral “negotiations,” “mutual consultation,” and “dialogue” with no mention of the United Nations.<sup>32</sup>

Almost a decade later, however, overt nuclearization of the subcontinent swung the pendulum of China's approach to India-Pakistan tensions from neutrality back to a decidedly pro-Pakistan, anti-India position. The 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan spurred a crisis that uniquely affected Chinese interests. Specifically, India's heavy China-focused rationale for testing prompted a severe downturn in China's relationship with India that lasted until 2000.<sup>33</sup> Given that the crises in South Asia now challenged not only regional peace but also global nuclear stability, China's response to both the crisis spurred by the tests and the tension in early 1999 over Kashmir was to advocate a multilateral, international management approach.<sup>34</sup> China's approach to crisis management went from

30. Garver, “Sino-Indian Rapprochement,” 328.

31. Garver, “Sino-Indian Rapprochement,” 329.

32. *Ibid.*, 330.

33. John Garver, “The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity Following India's Nuclear Tests,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (2001): 865-89, 865.

34. For more reading on Chinese perspectives on Chinese interests in relation to South Asian security crises, see: Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇, “Yin-Ba Heshiyan” 印巴核试验 [India-Pakistan Nuclear Tests], in Jing Yu Xu Feng 劲雨煦风 [Heavy Storm and Gentle Breeze], by Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇 Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe 北京:世界知识出版社 [Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House], (2009): 388-414. and Yuan Di 原狄, “Zhongguo Dui Nanyan Anquan De Yingxiang Jiqi Zhiyue Yinsu : Kajier Chongtu Weilil” 中国对南亚安全的影响及其制约因素: 卡吉尔冲突为例 [The Influence of and Restrictions to China's Influence on South Asian Security: The Case of Kargil] *Nan Yan Jiu Ji Kan* 南亚研究季刊 [South Asian Studies Quarterly], no. 3 (2001): 8-14.

moderate and one-sided bilateral engagement in 1990 to a multilateral approach, strongly critical of India.

From an Indian perspective, the Chinese role in the 1998 crisis was simply one of an enabler for irresponsible Pakistani behavior. One Indian foreign secretary goes so far as to argue that with so much collaboration, “[f]rom the Indian point of view the Chinese and Pakistani nuclear weapons programs are so closely linked and have been for so long that they may effectively be treated as one.”<sup>35</sup> In turn, China’s reactions to the Indian and Pakistani tests were clearly differentiated. While the Chinese government “strongly condemned” the Indian tests, it only expressed “regrets” about the Pakistani tests.<sup>36</sup> In particular, India’s justification for its nuclear capabilities as a counter to a Chinese threat elicited a harsh response from Beijing.<sup>37</sup> When Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests in response to India’s, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Zhu Bangzao reaffirmed that India was at fault for the instability in South Asia as “Pakistan’s nuclear tests were conducted as reactions to India’s ‘intimidation.’”<sup>38</sup>

China’s position was that the UNSC is the primary international governance entity responsible for the “maintenance of international peace and security.” Then Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan argued that great power coordination, as manifested through the UNSC process, had the best legality and highest authority in dealing with the nuclear crisis in South Asia.<sup>39</sup> China reviewed the U.S. proposal to organize both a UNSC permanent members (P5) meeting and a Group of Eight meeting to discuss the nuclear crisis and preferred the P5 foreign minister meeting to protect the authority of the U.N. and prevent diffusion of decision-making authority. The eventual June 4 Geneva meeting produced a joint communiqué followed by UNSC Resolution 1172, clarifying the international community’s opposition to the nuclear tests and announcing a series of punitive measures.

From the Chinese perspective, this crisis demonstrated the efficacy of a multilateral international approach to manage nuclear crises. This is consistent with the Chinese position that nuclear proliferation, such as in the cases of Iranian and North Korean nuclear development, constitutes a major threat to international peace and stability as well as to the global nonproliferation regime. Great power consensus against the tests brought India and Pakistan to re-engage one another in dialogue, which led to the Lahore Declaration in February 1999. China also argues that joint efforts by the international community have prevented further nuclear tests by either India or Pakistan. Although the two countries continued

35. Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India’s Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 114.

36. “The Chinese Government Strongly Condemns India’s Nuclear Test,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 14, 1998; and “A Foreign Ministry Spokesman Said China Deeply Regrets the Nuclear Test Conducted by Pakistan,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 29, 1998. For the original statement in Chinese on India see, <http://www.people.com.cn/9805/15/current/newfiles/a1040.html>; on Pakistan, see <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/4157/4160/20010213/394640.html>.

37. “China Joins Criticism of India,” *BBC*, May 14, 1998. For more on responses to the 1998 nuclear tests, see Ming Zhang, *Changing Nuclear Posture: Reactions to the South Asian Nuclear Tests*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

38. *Ibid.*, 32.

39. Tang Jiaxuan 唐家璇, “Yin-Ba Heshiyan” 印巴核试验 [India-Pakistan Nuclear Tests].

to defy UNSC Resolution 1172, refused to join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and continued to expand their nuclear arsenals, Chinese analysts tend to attribute blame primarily to the United States, rather than the U.N., for compromising its nonproliferation policies toward both India and Pakistan in favor of counterterrorism priorities after the 9/11 attacks. Perhaps partially in response to this vacuum, in Period 3, during the 1999 Kargil and 2001-2 India-Pakistan crises, China adjusted its crisis management approach to rely more heavily on direct bilateral engagement. Severe crises now carried the risk of escalating to nuclear use very close to home.

### *Period 3: 1999-2008*

Beginning with the 1999 Kargil crisis, Chinese involvement in South Asian crisis management shifted significantly from support for multilateral international approaches to initially backstopping U.S.-led third-party management at the request of U.S. leadership, to directly engaging in shuttle diplomacy—initially with Pakistan, and later with both Pakistan and India. These shifts were prompted in large part because the nuclearization of the subcontinent raised the stakes of any major India-Pakistan crisis for China. Overall, this period suggests that China's role as a global and regional player is moving in the direction of playing a more active third-party role in South Asia's bilateral crisis.

Despite deteriorating China-India relations after the 1998 nuclear tests, China's third-party involvement in the 1999 Kargil crisis was more neutral. During Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz's trip to Beijing in June 1999, China advocated de-escalation and was unwilling to lend the international support that Pakistan sought.<sup>40</sup> China privately disapproved of Pakistan's military adventurism and publicly urged India and Pakistan to "respect the LoC and resume negotiations at an early date."<sup>41</sup> In New Delhi, China's "neutral" position was lauded as a welcome change from its approach to "all previous conflicts between India and Pakistan [in which] China had sided with Islamabad."<sup>42</sup> Despite this shift, however, some scholars observe that the Indian Army was unnerved by what might be deemed opportunistic People's Liberation Army activities on shared Sino-Indian borders beginning in June of 1999.<sup>43</sup> Support for de-escalation of the India-Pakistan war did not negate the potential for jockeying on other areas of Chinese interest.

China's continued approach to Kashmir being an issue for bilateral negotiation (rather than international mediation, as previously endorsed through U.N.

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40. See, for example, Devin Hagerty, "The Kargil War: An Optimistic Assessment," in *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 105.

41. Zhang Qiyue, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, quoted in "China Asks India, Pakistan to Hold Early Dialogue," *Times of India*, July 7, 1999.

42. Seema Guha, "India Welcomes China's Neutral Stand on Kargil," *Times of India*, July 3, 1999.

43. To read more People's Liberation Army border activity during the Kargil crisis, see V.P. Malik, "The China Factor," in *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (Noida, Uttar Pradesh: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2006), 295-302. Also see Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab, *Dragon on our Doorstep: Managing China through Military Power* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2017), 45-46.

resolution language) was another broad indication of China's more neutral stance as a third party in 1999:

[PLA Chief of General Staff Fu Quanyou's] endorsement of "[bilateral] dialogue" was equivalent to implicit rejection of Pakistan's efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue through its precipitation of the confrontation over Kargil.<sup>44</sup>

On the ground, China's attitude on the Kashmir dispute has shifted since the 1990s toward a preference for the Line of Actual Control and eventual resolution of border disputes with India through peaceful negotiation. This approach coincided with the U.S. position against unilateral actions by Pakistan to change the status quo in Kashmir.

In the case of Kargil War, most of the bilateral meetings took place in Beijing itself between senior Chinese leaders and visiting Pakistani and Indian top officials, including the then Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif, Chief of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf, and Foreign Minister Aziz, together with Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh. Through a series of high-level meetings, China conveyed its cautious and careful rejection of Pakistan's request for support, expressed its understanding of India's position, and called for the diplomatic solution to the armed conflict. Later, in the case of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin met with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Musharraf during the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in June 2002. China urged peaceful resolution.<sup>45</sup> Earlier that year, Chinese leadership had several other meetings with Musharraf and others in the Pakistani security establishment, urging de-escalation. There was one instance of a high-level trip to India when the Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji had a 10 day visit in January 2002; however, Indian Foreign Minister Singh went so far as to make a statement to clarify overtly that, "China has neither any intention nor shall it play any mediatory role in matters that involve India and Pakistan."<sup>46</sup> Beijing would go on to engage in more overt shuttle diplomacy with *both* India and Pakistan in the next major bilateral crisis.

In both the 1999 Kargil crisis and the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis Beijing utilized bilateral channels to publicly signal its position and advocate tension de-escalation. The degree to which China's efforts had an effect is subject to debate. After all, the impact of bilateral diplomacy during crises is difficult to measure unless it results in a clear statement or agreement from the involved parties. However, as

44. Garver, "The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity," 882.

45. Hu Shisheng and Jiang Yili 胡仕胜 and 江亦丽, "Shi 'Zhan' Shi 'He' Yin-Ba Jushi Chuyu Shi Zi Lukou" 是“战”是“和”印巴局势处于十字路口 [India and Pakistan are At a Crossroads between War and Peace] Moderated Discussion, *China Report*, CCTV 中国报道, 中国中央电视台; Shimer, "Appendix V: Chinese Involvement in South Asian Crises," 96.

46. Singh went on to say, "We know that China has a special relationship with Pakistan and that they have military equipment supply relationship also. Notwithstanding all this, India remains committed to improve its relations with China." The transcript of the press conference on January 13, 2002, was printed in, "Let Pakistan Operationalise What The President of Pakistan Has Announced," *Outlook*, January 14, 2002.

an important party with vested interests in South Asia and major influence over Pakistan, China's shuttle diplomacy between India and Pakistan inevitably has had some de-escalating effect — even if by simply conveying China's bottom-line preferences and signaling against moves toward nuclear escalation.<sup>47</sup> In November 2008, China's involvement became even more pronounced, amplifying this effect.

#### *Period 4: 2008-17*

In the fourth period of this timeline, Chinese involvement in India-Pakistan crises began to more closely resemble that of a great power broker. China started engaging in public bilateral shuttle diplomacy with both India and Pakistan, actively sending high-level representatives to Islamabad and New Delhi. This shift became clear during the 2008 Mumbai crisis. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei conducted shuttle diplomacy by visiting Islamabad on Dec. 28 and 29, 2008, and visiting New Delhi on Jan. 5, 2009.<sup>48</sup> He worked to highlight common ground between India and Pakistan on the importance of peace, development, and the international campaign to counter terrorism. It is also noteworthy that the Chinese military also assumed an active diplomatic role during the 2008 crisis. On Dec. 15, China and India held the second round of defense and security consultations in New Delhi, which was attended by Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army Ma Xiaotian and Indian Defense Secretary Vijay Singh. Three days later, China and Pakistan hosted the sixth round of defense consultations in Beijing, attended by the chiefs of staff of both countries.<sup>49</sup> These high-level military and diplomatic engagements with both parties in the aftermath of a major India-Pakistan crisis were emblematic mechanisms of a mature third-party manager.

China seems to be holding to this more active and neutral third-party approach to handling India-Pakistan crises. In response to the 2016 Pathankot attack, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying expressed concerns that the “attack might have been launched intentionally to disrupt” diplomatic momentum in India-Pakistan relations, imploring both countries to “enhance their cooperation and dialogue regardless.”<sup>50</sup> Later, after the attack that led to the 2016 Uri crisis, China encouraged “all relevant parties to exercise restraint and avoid escalating tensions.”<sup>51</sup>

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47. In a recent study from China's National Defence University, Wang Yong and Chen Senlin hold high-level shuttle diplomacy up as a key crisis management tool, more effective than military deterrence or economic sanctions alone. Wang Yong and Chen Senlin 王勇和陈森林, *Guojia anquan wiji guanli yanjiu* 国家安全危机管理研究 [National Security Crisis-Management Research] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2011), cited in Johnston, 32.

48. “Zhongguo Zhengfu Teshi, Wajiao Fubuzhang He Ya Fei Fangwen Yindu” 中国政府特使，外交副部长何亚非访问印度 [Chinese Special Envoy and Vice-Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs He Yafei Visit India] *People's Republic of China Embassy in India*, January 1, 2009, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjwb\\_673085/zjzg\\_673183/xwsw\\_674681/xgxw\\_674683/t530426.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjwb_673085/zjzg_673183/xwsw_674681/xgxw_674683/t530426.shtml); “He Yafei Fangwen Yindu Zhongfang Wangnanya Diqu Baochi Heping Yu Wending” 何亚非访问印度 中方望南亚地区保持和平与稳定 [He Yafei Visits India, China, and South Asia, Maintaining Peace and Stability] *Zhong Guo Wang* 中国网 [China Net], January 6, 2009; and Mengxiang Lin 孟祥麟, “Zhongguo Zhengfu Teshi He Ya Fei Fang Bajisitan Guanzhu Yindu Lianxi” 中国政府特使何亚非访巴基斯坦关注印度关系 [China Special Envoy He Yafei Visits Pakistan, Expresses Concern About India-Pakistan Relations] *Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报 [Global Times], December 29, 2008.

49. For an example of reporting at the time on China's approach to the 2008 Mumbai crisis see, “Yin-Ba Jianba Nuzhang, Beijing Ruanying Jianshi,” 印巴剑拔弩张，张北京软硬兼施 [Tension Escalates Between India and Pakistan, Beijing Adopt Both Hard and Soft Approach] *Taiyang Bao* 太阳报 [The Sun], December 31, 2008.

50. Atul Aneja, “China: Pathankot Attacks Aimed at Disrupting India-Pakistan Ties,” *The Hindu*, January 4, 2016.

51. Lu Kang, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, “China Urges India, Pakistan to Exercise ‘Restraint’ after Uri Attack,” *Financial Express*, September 21, 2016.

Evaluating whether a fifth period in Chinese third-party involvement in South Asian crises has emerged will require further study of ongoing developments in China's global rise and in the emerging strategic competition in Southern Asia.<sup>52</sup> In the following concluding section, we lay out factors that may precipitate China's possible involvement in a future India-Pakistan crisis and suggest further avenues for study.

## **China's Management Future on the Subcontinent: Potential for a Greater Role?**

Although Beijing values productive relations with both India and Pakistan and genuinely desires peace on the subcontinent, its long-term geopolitical vision is inevitably shaped by concern over India's regional ambitions and strategic alignment with the United States. As a result, China is unlikely to play a sole or even leading third-party mediator role in a future India-Pakistan crisis. Such a proposal would be rejected outright by India. An expanded role for China as a third party in a future India-Pakistan crisis would therefore likely involve cooperation with the United States.

China has a mixed attitude toward the U.S. role in India-Pakistan crisis management. It acknowledges that Washington and Beijing share a common interest in preventing escalation between two nuclear powers. However, China also views the U.S. position as consistently biased, favoring India while failing to accommodate Pakistan's legitimate security concerns. As a result, China tends to see the United States as the primary third party responsible for crises occurring in the first place—or at least the most culpable third party aggravating the root causes behind crises. Furthermore, many Chinese analysts highlight the United States' repeated failure in mediation attempts between India and Pakistan as evidence for why China should not adopt an institutionally fixated manager role that could saddle China with unwanted responsibilities. From this vantage, Washington should carry more responsibility in third-party crisis management than China. Though China's special relationship with Pakistan receives much attention, Beijing believed the United States still had stronger ties and influence in Islamabad during previous South Asian crises.

During the 1999 Kargil crisis, according to many Chinese diplomats, the United States took the initiative to reach out to China and requested that Beijing exercise its influence over Pakistan to urge de-escalation. From a Chinese perspective, although China was not able to directly tell Pakistan to withdraw its troops from Indian-administered Kashmir, its refusal to support Pakistan's position backstopped the U.S. demand for such a withdrawal and contributed to Pakistan's decision to do so. In the Chinese foreign policy lexicon, the case

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52. For more on these developments, see the 2017 joint *War on the Rocks*–Stimson Center series “Southern (Dis)Comfort” at <https://warontherocks.com/category/special-series/southern-discomfort>.

The case of Kargil is a successful example, and potential model, of the United States and China's joint efforts to halt escalation of a severe crisis in South Asia.

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Some in Washington's strategic community assume or hope that China's rise will result in it having a greater stake in ensuring stability in Southern Asia.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, China's stake in South Asian stability is diversifying and growing. Evidence for this ranges from Afghanistan, where China has shown increasing interest in reconciliation efforts, to pressuring Pakistan on sensitive issues like addressing certain domestic Islamist groups. This latter point bears special significance because such pressure has remained a sticking point for U.S.-Pakistan relations — particularly with respect to groups that target U.S. forces in Afghanistan and those that launch attacks in India. For example, in late 2016, Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper leaked a conversation in which Pakistani Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry admitted that China was beginning to question Pakistani leadership on the prudence of providing cover for Jaish-e-Mohammed leader Masood Azhar. Publicly, China has vetoed Azhar's inclusion on the U.N. sanctioned terrorist list for years. In February 2017, media analysis suggested that Chinese pressure was behind the arrest of Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed.<sup>54</sup> Taken together with the downturn in Pakistan's relations with the United States and the implementation of CPEC, China's all-weather friendship may give it the "upper hand" over the United States to influence Pakistan.<sup>55</sup> This could mean that Beijing will be better positioned to bring Pakistan to a negotiating table in a future India-Pakistan crisis. Beyond diplomatic leverage to compel stabilizing behavior, China's growing exposure on the subcontinent, both in personnel and economic and infrastructure investments, may accidentally involve it in a future crisis.<sup>56</sup>

53. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 219; and Jennifer Chang, "China's Kashmir Policies and Crisis Management in South Asia," (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2017).

54. Michael Kugelman, "China, Not America, Likely Behind Hafiz Saeed's House Arrest," *Dawn*, February 1, 2017.

55. Ashley Tellis, *Are India-Pakistan Peace Talks Worth a Damn?* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 51.

56. For analysis on possible future scenarios in South Asia, see the essay by Iskander Rehman in this volume, "New Horizons, New Risks: A Scenario-based Approach to Thinking about the Future of Crisis Stability in South Asia."

Lessons on Chinese third-party crisis behavior in South Asia are not easily applied to other areas of the world — whether nearby on the Korean Peninsula or further west. Nevertheless, trends in Chinese engagement in India-Pakistan crises do shed light on broader developments in China's role as a global power — and how China's approach to core versus peripheral interests differs from that of the United States. Understanding these differences can help scholars and policymakers think about future crises and their management.

For the United States, personnel exposure increases risks and U.S. stakes in a country, making that location part of U.S. core interests.<sup>57</sup> U.S. personnel being targeted in a terrorist attack or imprisoned by a foreign government has the potential to trigger diplomatic tension. Historically, Chinese citizens killed abroad are typically portrayed by the Chinese government as dutiful workers spreading China's economic vision that knowingly chose to accept risk in pursuit of economic gains. Thus, the death of Chinese nationals abroad has not served as a trigger for tension unless those countries were already sensitive areas in close proximity to China's core interests (e.g., on China's eastern seaboard). In Pakistan, for example, official Chinese responses were muted after three Chinese engineers were killed in Hub (near Karachi) in 2006 as well as after three Chinese nationals were killed in a terrorist attack on Gwadar port in 2004.<sup>58</sup> The scale of Chinese nationals exposed to risks abroad, however, is expected to grow exponentially under BRI. Estimates for Chinese living in Pakistan in 2007 were around 5,000.<sup>59</sup> As of September 2017, there were an estimated 30,000.<sup>60</sup> Housing is currently being developed for 500,000 incoming Chinese professionals in Gwadar alone by 2023.<sup>61</sup> As China's exposure to the infrastructure and personnel risks associated with Pakistan's instability challenges with domestic terrorism expands, so too does its exposure in the event of an India-Pakistan war.<sup>62</sup> What kind of Chinese response would emerge from an Indian attack on Gwadar during an India-Pakistan crisis that inadvertently resulted in the death of Chinese citizens?

For now, China seems to be satisfied with continuing to play the role of a semi-passive encourager, utilizing shuttle diplomacy to push for dialogues and peace when a severe crisis emerges between India and Pakistan. Without a doubt, China leverages its influence to discourage the most escalatory of Pakistan's behaviors. Today, many Chinese officials and military officers are confident that without China's approval, Pakistan may prod and test New Delhi but it will not

57. Consider, for example, Afghanistan's importance to the U.S. strategy prior to and since troop deployment.

58. "China Workers Killed in Pakistan," *BBC*, February 15, 2006; and "Pakistan Car Bomb Kills Chinese," *BBC*, May 3, 2004.

59. "Peshawar Killing Evokes Fear among Foreigners," *Dawn*, July 10, 2007.

60. "Massive Chinese Investment Is a Boon for Pakistan," *The Economist*, September 9, 2017.

61. Murtaza Ali Shah, "Chinese Company Invests \$500m in Gwadar Residential Project," *Geo TV*, October 20, 2017.

62. After 9/11 in late 2001, Chinese residents in Pakistan began to leave out of concern for exposure to a different possible war. See "Danxin Dazhan Baofa, Bajisidan Huaren Fenfen Hui" 担心大战爆发 巴基斯坦华人纷纷回[Worrying that War Will Explode, Chinese in Pakistan Go Home One by One], *People's Daily*, September 27, 2001.

risk a major confrontation with India.<sup>63</sup> Short of an imminent nuclear exchange, China may not even see the need for an overbearing intervention to restrain Pakistan during a future India-Pakistan crisis.

A key variable that could tip the scale in China's pragmatic cost-benefit analysis on the utility of playing a more active management role is whether the United States advocates Chinese involvement in a future India-Pakistan crisis. If the United States engages China with concerted political will and diplomatic capital, it would enhance China's willingness to be more involved. Such a move by the United States would acknowledge Chinese leadership, to some extent giving it peer-status with the United States. Moreover, by offering China the opportunity to give the United States something it wanted, China would gain leverage in dealing with its largest competitor and the greatest threat to Chinese security. Chinese fear of U.S. mismanagement resulting in a significantly weakened Pakistan might also prompt greater Chinese involvement.<sup>64</sup> It is key to note, however, that were both China and the United States to engage as third-party managers in a future India-Pakistan standoff, it is unlikely that this shared work toward crisis de-escalation would resemble a re-emergence of the failed Obama-era G2 vision.<sup>65</sup> Instead, we might see an Asia further stratified than it already is, with a widened divide between U.S. strategic alignments with India, Japan, Korea, and Australia, and growing Chinese geoeconomic entrenchment in Western Asia and the Pacific Ocean.

Despite myriad challenges, China's manager role could become critical in a future India-Pakistan crisis if Islamabad becomes even further estranged from Washington (as political developments under the Trump administration suggest it may). China may be necessary to bring Pakistan to the negotiating table if the United States can no longer present itself to both parties as an honest broker. Considering the cost of escalation on the subcontinent, it is critical to lay the groundwork for this type of coordination early — from mechanisms, including bilateral diplomatic and military discussions, to high-level political signaling.<sup>66</sup> In particular, bilateral military-military discussions between China and the United States but also between each third party and India and Pakistan could facilitate helpful conversations about pragmatic planning for inadvertent or unauthorized nuclear escalation during a future crisis.

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63. Author Yun Sun's interviews with anonymous Chinese officials, Beijing, January 2017.

64. See for example Mohan Malik on China's concern over U.S. (mis)management of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis: "Describing the US diplomatic moves (i.e., the dispatch of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in early June 2002) to defuse the India-Pakistan military stand-off as 'too little too late,' the state-run media accused Washington of showing 'no genuine desire to resolve the Kashmir issue.'" Quoted in Mohan Malik, "The China Factor in the India-Pakistan Conflict," *Parameters* (2003): 35-50.

65. Elizabeth Economy and Adam Segal, "Foreign Policy: The Demise of the G-2," *NPR*, May 25, 2010.

66. For a practical overview of one way a bilateral U.S.-China dialogue could be set up, see Sun, "Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia." Sun "proposes a senior-level (subcabinet or vice-ministerial) routine dialogue between American and Chinese officials, either annually or bi-annually, dedicated to preventing a potential crisis and facilitating crisis management on the subcontinent."



# CRISIS INTENSITY AND NUCLEAR SIGNALING IN SOUTH ASIA

*Michael Krepon & Liv Dowling*

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Every crisis between India and Pakistan since the mid-1980s, real or imagined, has been connected in some way to nuclear weapons. The specter of nuclear warfare on the subcontinent has, to date, succeeded in deterring the least likely but most consequential contingencies: a major conventional war and a crossing of the nuclear threshold in conflict. Offsetting nuclear capabilities have not deterred lesser contingencies, including limited conventional war and acts of cross-border terrorism that have sparked serious crises. The conditions for another crisis remain in place, as is evident from the intensity of firing along the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Kashmir, the level of public disaffection among Kashmiri Muslims under Indian governance, suicide attacks against Indian military posts and bases by Muslim extremist groups, and, most notably, publicized “surgical strikes” across the LoC announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government in September 2016. If Modi’s action was meant to shore up domestic support, he succeeded. If his action was meant to stop the pattern of low-level violence across the LoC and the actions of anti-India extremist groups, he has failed to do so.

The focus of this essay is crises between India and Pakistan, which have a far greater potential for escalation than crises between India and China or between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The next crisis between India and Pakistan could arise from a dramatic act of terrorism, a prolonged deterioration in bilateral relations marked by increasingly violent military clashes, or a pattern of increasingly bold strikes by cadres based in Pakistan that champion the Kashmir cause. Conversely, a serious crisis could occur through the actions of spoilers that seek to disrupt efforts by Indian and Pakistani leaders to improve ties. Whatever the scenario for another nuclear-tinged crisis, there will be a pressing need for crisis management to avert warfare and unintended escalation.

Given the deterioration of India-Pakistan relations, negative trend lines on the subcontinent, and the degree of difficulty involved in improving bilateral relations, conditions are ripe for another crisis. This essay begins by briefly reviewing five crises between India and Pakistan: (1) the 1987 Brasstacks crisis, (2) the 1990

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Compound crisis, (3) the 1999 Kargil War, (4) the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis, and (5) the 2008 Mumbai crisis. We suggest reasons why these crises re-occur on the subcontinent. In a second section, we assess nuclear signaling in the five crises and the intensity of such signaling. In a third section, we examine how evolving nuclear capabilities might affect the subcontinent's crises and future crisis management efforts. In our final section, we consider changes in the international environment, particularly with regards to changes in U.S. and Chinese relations with India and Pakistan, that may alter future crisis management dynamics. We conclude that a careful examination of these factors will be critical to informing, tailoring, and implementing effective crisis management strategies on the subcontinent.

## Crises and Limited Warfare under the Nuclear Shadow

There have been five crises so far between India and Pakistan under the shadow of nuclear weapons. The first was sparked by Operation Brasstacks in 1986-87, during which an adventurous Indian army chief, Gen. K. Sundarji, carried out large-scale military exercises near Pakistan's border. Some analysts viewed these maneuvers as a last-ditch attempt to prompt a war that would allow India to destroy Pakistan's nascent ability to produce nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup> For this case to be persuasive, there must be evidence that Sundarji's troops were fully equipped with supplies and ammunition sufficient to carry out a successful campaign.

All subsequent nuclear-tinged crises have been prompted by actions originating from within Pakistan. The Compound crisis of 1990 drew its name from multiple intertwined security challenges: a large-scale Pakistani military exercise — planned by another risk-taking army chief Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg — along with significant unrest fostered by Pakistan's intelligence services in the Kashmir Valley and the Indian state of Punjab. The Indian government responded with military countermoves, prompting high-level U.S. crisis management that dovetailed with decisions by leaders in both countries to de-escalate.<sup>2</sup>

A harrowing crisis between India and Pakistan took place within one year of the 1998 nuclear tests, sparked by the decision of Pakistan Chief of Army Staff Gen. Pervez Musharraf and a few military confidantes to seize ground across the Kashmir divide. Operating in winter, when Indian forward posts were unmanned, Pakistan's Northern Light Infantry troops advanced to the heights above Kargil, whereupon discovery, their ground positions were contested

1. Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to Be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000), 322-24; S.S. Gill, *The Dynasty: A Political Biography of the Premier Ruling Family of Modern India* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1996), 474-80; P.N. Hoon, *Unmasking the Secrets of Turbulence* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2000), 102-12; George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 280; Ravi Rikhye, *The War that Never Was* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1988); and P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 46-47.

2. For more on the 1990 Compound crisis, see Zachary S. Davis, ed., *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff: Crisis and Escalation in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Other useful sources include Michael Krepon and Mishi Faruqee, eds., *Conflict Prevention and Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia: The 1990 Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 1994); and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 80-117.

by Indian infantry, artillery, and airpower. Leaders in both countries sought to keep the Kargil War limited in geographic scope and intensity. U.S. crisis management was also instrumental in reinforcing the limited nature of this conventional conflict and in orchestrating the reestablishment of the status quo ante.<sup>3</sup>

In December 2001, an attack on the Indian Parliament building by cadres belonging to either Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant groups (or both) sparked another intense crisis, prompting large-scale mobilizations. Another attack five months later on housing facilities for Indian troops in Jammu resulted in a second spike of significant tension, hence the name of the Twin Peaks crisis. U.S. crisis management proved critical in reinforcing Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's decision not to go to war.<sup>4</sup>

A period of six years passed before the next significant crisis, triggered this time in Mumbai by attacks on luxury hotels, the central train station, and a Jewish community center. The perpetrators belonged to LeT. Following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, there were no troop mobilizations. Once again Pakistan was widely criticized for providing safe havens for groups engaged in cross-border terrorism, being unwilling or unable to prevent them, and failing to successfully prosecute those who aided in the planning and execution of these attacks. While U.S. officials again helped with crisis management, their task was simplified by the evident reluctance of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his close advisers to risk India's economic growth prospects in a war with Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

As of this publication, there has not been another major crisis since the 2008 Mumbai crisis.<sup>6</sup> There has, however, been a pattern of continued violence along the LoC as well as sporadic attacks on Indian military posts and bases by extremist groups committed to the Kashmiri cause. In January 2016, suspected JeM militants stormed an Indian Air Force base in Punjab, killing seven security personnel.<sup>7</sup> Eight months later, another attack on an Indian Army base in

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3. Recommended readings for the Kargil crisis include the contributors in Peter R. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Neil Joeck, "The Kargil War and Nuclear Deterrence," in *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behavior and the Bomb*, ed. Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur (New York: Routledge, 2009), 117-143; Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999); Jasjit Singh, ed., *Kargil 1999: Pakistan's Fourth War for Kashmir* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1999); V.K. Sood and Pravin Sawhney, *Operation Parakram: The War Unfinished* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003); and Bruce Riedel, *American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002). For perspective on how Kargil could serve as a paradigm for future conflict, refer to Bruce Riedel, "Tensions Rising Dangerously in South Asia," Brookings Institution, October 19, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/10/19-tensions-rising-dangerously-south-asia-riedel>.

4. For perspectives and analyses of the Twin Peaks crisis, see Praveen Swami, "A War to End a War: The Causes and Outcomes of the 2001-2 India-Pakistan Crisis," in *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*, 144-162; Kanti Bajpai, "To War or Not to War: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2001-2," in *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*, 162-82; Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); and Davis, ed., *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff*.

5. For assessments of the 2008 Mumbai crisis, see Seth G. Jones et al., *The Lessons of Mumbai* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009); Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*; and B. Raman, *Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2012).

6. This assessment uses a different definition of "crisis" than the essay by Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland in this volume, "Anatomy of a Crisis: Hypotheses on India-Pakistan Crisis Onset."

7. Rama Laskshmi, "Indians Battle Militants at Key Airforce Base," *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2016.

Growing nuclear weapon stockpiles and a succession of new Indian and Pakistani missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons have neither stabilized deterrence nor backstopped diplomatic initiatives to improve bilateral relations. Instead, diplomacy has stagnated while nuclear capabilities have steadily advanced.

Kashmir killed 19 Indian soldiers, making it the deadliest attack on Indian forces in over two decades.<sup>8</sup> In response to these provocations, Prime Minister Modi gave a speech advocating strategic restraint, privileging a diplomatic approach over military action.<sup>9</sup> Modi had, however, already authorized “surgical strikes” led by special forces troops against militant camps across the Kashmir divide, a strategy that seemed to indicate Modi’s intent to send a warning signal while wishing to prevent uncontrolled escalation.<sup>10</sup> This sequence of events suggests the pattern of violence that preceded the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis, when a series of small-scale attacks was followed by a truck bombing of the State Assembly building in Srinagar and then an attack on the Indian Parliament building.

### *Crises Without End*

The 1987 Brasstacks crisis and the 1990 Compound crisis unfolded against the backdrop of offsetting nuclear capabilities that were presumed to exist but very hard to assess. After the 1998 tests that brought Indian and Pakistani bombs out of the basement, some analysts offered confident predictions of deterrence stability in the expectation that offsetting capabilities for mass destruction would temper risk-taking.<sup>11</sup> These hopes were quickly dashed. Growing nuclear weapon stockpiles and a succession of new Indian and Pakistani missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons have neither stabilized deterrence nor backstopped diplomatic initiatives to improve bilateral relations. Instead, diplomacy has stagnated while nuclear capabilities have steadily advanced.<sup>12</sup>

Several conclusions seem warranted from the substantial literature on crises

8. Prakash Nanda, “Uri Terror Attack: Three Lessons for India from One of the Worst Strikes This Century,” *Firstpost*, September 19, 2016; and Rama Laskshmi, “Indian Army Suffers Worst Strike in Years to Militants, as 17 Soldiers Die in Kashmir,” *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2016.

9. Praveen Swami, “In PM Modi Kozhikode Speech, a Powerful Case for Strategic Restraint,” *The Indian Express*, September 26, 2016.

10. Shishir Gupta, “Mission LoC: How India Punished Pakistan with Surgical Strikes,” *Hindustan Times*, October 3, 2016.

11. See Michael Krepon, “The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia,” in *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012), 3-6.

12. *Ibid.*, 10.

between India and Pakistan in the three decades following Operation Brasstacks. First, *crises continue to occur because they do not resolve issues in dispute*. The last “successful” war on the subcontinent (from India’s vantage point) greatly exacerbated Pakistani grievances against India, setting the stage for subsequent crises. “Successful” wars now appear inconceivable with the advent of significant offsetting nuclear capabilities. However, limited wars remain possible and — as was evident in the Kargil conflict — have the potential to escalate. If a limited war does not escalate, then it is more likely to result in a stalemate than to prompt important changes to the status quo. And if the outcome of a limited war reinforces the status quo, it would only reinforce mutual grievances, as was the case with the Kargil conflict.

Second, *crises have not prompted intensive and sustained diplomatic effort to reconcile differences*. Absent a commitment to diplomacy to resolve issues in dispute, grievances and the potential for crisis will remain.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as noted above, crises have reoccurred because they have added to, rather than diminished, underlying grievances. Consequently, India and Pakistan have been stuck in an extended negative feedback loop of grievances and crises without resolution.

At the same time, *the frequency of crises is hard to predict*. Sometimes they follow closely after each other; at other times, there can be a long hiatus between crises. There is, as of yet, insufficient evidence about the frequency of crises to draw confident conclusions. Lastly, *crises have provided an impetus to nuclear modernization programs, upping the stakes for the next crisis*. However, there is no evidence that an accelerated nuclear competition has affected the outcome of any crisis, in part because the contestants remain largely in the dark as to each other’s actual capabilities.

## Intensity of Crises on the Subcontinent

Indicators relating to conventional and nuclear forces merge during crises on the subcontinent in part because some combat aircraft and missile types can deliver both conventional ordnance as well as nuclear weapons. Moreover, increased readiness related to conventional forces can sometimes trigger steps to increase the readiness of nuclear capabilities. Thus, for our purposes, the intensity of a crisis includes actions related to both conventional and nuclear arms. Signaling by means of conventional military forces could range from preparations for limited military action to significant troop mobilization. As conventional indicators intensify, nuclear indicators are likely to intensify as well.

These steps have had, and could have in the future, clear escalatory potential. Because large-scale troop mobilizations can be precursors to war, they are clear indicators of the severity of a crisis. Large-scale military exercises could also

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13. See Riaz Khan’s assessment on what is required diplomatically to change this cycle of recurring crises in his essay in this volume, “Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management: Challenges in Pakistan-India Relations.”

mask preparations for war, prompting countermoves. Key indicators for mobilizations and large-scale military exercises include canceling leaves, requisitioning trains to move troops and heavy equipment toward fighting corridors, moving entire strike corps to forward holding areas, and moving ammunition to supply forward-deployed troops. When these indicators are evident, a very serious crisis is unfolding.

A serious crisis can also be marked by missiles movements and, if the crisis extends long enough, by missile flight tests conducted to send deterrent messages. In a serious crisis, steps will be taken to increase the readiness of nuclear-capable delivery vehicles in visible ways. For example, missiles and their accompanying security and equipment needs can be moved out of garrisons and storage facilities. While these steps might not conclusively indicate the intentions of an adversary, in the heat of a crisis, these indicators are more likely to be viewed through the prism of a worst-case scenario — as preparations for launch rather than as defensive measures. Likewise, the mating of warheads to delivery vehicles — if they can be identified — would be an extremely serious development in a deep crisis.

The weight attached to nuclear signaling depends significantly on the status of conventional forces during a crisis. The movements of nuclear delivery vehicles are far more worrisome when accompanied by large-scale mobilizations and military exercises. Only the extended Twin Peaks crisis was accentuated by flight tests.<sup>14</sup> The absence of missile flight tests during the 1990 Compound crisis and 1999 Kargil War helped prevent these events from becoming more severe. The 2008 Mumbai crisis was too short to accommodate the preparations necessary for missile flight testing.

While we argue below that three of the five crises examined exhibit more credible forms of signaling with nuclear capabilities, the import of these signals is subject to debate. Feroz Khan, for example, notes that while conventional forces have been placed on high alert and mobilized in crises, there has been “no evidence of increased nuclear alert status” or operational deployment in the manner of the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> We acknowledge difficulty in determining with exactitude the intensity of nuclear signaling, in part because officials in Pakistan — having more reason to send such signals than India, which enjoys conventional military advantages — have hyped nuclear dangers during crises in order to engage U.S. crisis managers only to downplay nuclear dangers once the crisis has passed to convey

14. For more on missiles and nuclear risk reduction, see Toby Dalton and Jaclyn Tandler, *Understanding the Arms “Race” in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012); Feroz H. Khan, “Nuclear Signaling, Missiles, and Escalation Control in South Asia,” in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon, Rodney W. Jones, and Zaid Haider (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2004), 75-100; W.P.S. Sidhu, “India’s Security and Nuclear Risk-Reduction Measures,” in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 1-46; and Kent L. Biringir, “Missile Threat Reduction and Monitoring in South Asia,” in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 59-82.

15. Khan, “Nuclear Signaling,” in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 75-100.

the message of responsible nuclear stewardship.<sup>16</sup> It is also quite possible that readiness levels for the use of nuclear weapons might differ from one state to the next, making it hard to assess the status of nuclear forces, including for intelligence agencies, which may well have been the case during the 1990 Compound crisis.<sup>17</sup>

We also acknowledge the difficulty for U.S. nongovernmental researchers to gain a granular appreciation for the intensity behind nuclear signaling during a crisis. However, decision-makers in India and Pakistan found themselves in similar straits, lacking sufficient national technical means to assess the status of opposing nuclear capabilities. Information that was shared during crises by U.S. officials has subsequently been contested, and most of those who have been in positions to know the intensity of signaling have been unwilling to share their impressions. Moreover, these impressions might have changed with the passage of time. Despite these uncertainties, decision-makers were impelled to factor nuclear dangers into their assessments during a crisis, as do we in this essay.

Public statements — or “verbal pyrotechnics” in the apt phraseology of P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen — are not reliable indicators of the severity of crises.<sup>18</sup> These veiled and sometimes not-so-veiled threats might be employed to mollify a domestic audience, speed the intervention of crisis managers, or simply serve as a device to let off steam.<sup>19</sup> In states like India and Pakistan with raucous media and combative political parties, there are costs for appearing “soft” on an adversary and presumed benefits for employing heated language.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, not all officials are on the same page during a crisis, and disconnects between civil and military authorities are not uncommon on the subcontinent. While public rhetoric is not a reliable indicator of intensity, we do factor it into our assessments, as do other analysts.<sup>21</sup> But it is important to keep in mind that rhetoric is less meaningful than conventional military moves and signaling with nuclear-capable delivery vehicles.

Finally, actions taken by third parties could serve as indicators of crisis severity. For example, issuing travel warnings or evacuating nonessential staff at diplomatic missions can clearly communicate the perceived severity of a crisis and can help (knowingly or unknowingly) in crisis management, as was the

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16. Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan’s Nuclear Posture and South Asian Stability,” *International Security* 34, no. 3 (2009/10): 38-78.

17. Seymour H. Hersh, “On the Nuclear Edge,” *The New Yorker*, March 29, 1993, 64; and “Conflict Prevention and Risk Reduction: Lessons from the 1990 Crisis,” in, *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon and Chris Gagné (New Delhi: Vision Books, 2003).

18. P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *The Compound Crisis of 1990: Perception, Politics, and Insecurity* (Urbana: Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security, 2000), 111.

19. See Samuel Black, *The Changing Political Utility of Nuclear Weapons: Nuclear Threats from 1970-2010* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2010). See also Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 194-96.

20. See James D. Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *American Political Science Association* 88, no. 3 (1994): 577-92.

21. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 174.

case with the evacuation of nonessential personnel from the U.S. and British Embassies in May 2002 during the Twins Peaks crisis.<sup>22</sup>

### *A Hierarchy of Dangerous Indicators*

The following typology of dangerous indicators constitutes a list of ingredients rather than a recipe. New ingredients could be added as new military capabilities and tactics evolve. A “playbook” of indicators has gained its content from previous crises, but its application is likely to reflect the particulars of the crisis at hand. Multiple indicators of the severity of a crisis are likely to be present, while others could be held back for signaling purposes as a crisis unfolds.

Among the measures that indicate the top-most tier of intensity in a crisis between India and Pakistan are the following: limited warfare between significant units of their armed forces, indications that missiles and nuclear warheads have been mated in the field, deployment in the field or in fighting corridors of missiles armed with nuclear weapons or dual-capable missiles, movement of nuclear-capable aircraft to satellite bases and positioned on runway alert, the stand-down of aircraft and other front-line equipment to prepare for combat, the mobilization of offensive and defensive units to fighting corridors with combat equipment and ammunition, and the cancellation of leaves.

These indicators are unlikely to be singular; if a crisis has reached this level of extreme intensity, multiple indicators are likely present, suggesting a significant risk of escalation. Leaders wishing to signal their interest in restraint even when many indicators of an intense crisis are present can do so by *not* taking additional steps associated with readiness for nuclear weapons use. Under these harrowing circumstances, crisis management is still possible and urgently necessary.

Among the indicators of a very serious crisis — but one that offers more room for creative de-escalatory crisis management — we would include large-scale military exercises in sensitive areas, the movement of some but not many missiles out of garrisons and some nuclear-capable aircraft to satellite bases, the movement of warships presumed to carry nuclear weapons out of port, and threatening statements by national leaders suggesting increased readiness to use nuclear weapons.

A third rung of crisis intensity might include indicators like small-unit skirmishes between troops along the Kashmir divide characterized by an accentuated tempo of overrunning posts amid higher casualty counts, additional publicized cross-LoC raids and nationalistic media campaigns accompanying them,<sup>23</sup> intensified small arms, rocket, and artillery fire across the Kashmir divide, an increased tempo of operations by anti-India groups linked to Pakistan’s military and intelligence

22. Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2014), 10-48.

23. For a discussion on the role of media in crisis escalation see the essay by Ruhee Neog in this volume, “Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises.”

services, public statements by national leaders conveying veiled or open nuclear threats, and an increased tempo of missile flight tests. These conditions are partly present in India and Pakistan at the time of this publication.

This typology is dynamic rather than static. Leaders can take steps to “jump” rungs in response to triggering events. New indicators could be employed as nuclear capabilities and military tactics evolve. Of special note are the development and induction of short-range “tactical” nuclear weapons in Pakistan and nuclear-capable ground- and submarine-launched cruise missiles by both countries. The signals associated with these weapon systems have yet to appear, and when they do, they could be hard to read.

Early on, it was difficult for Indian and Pakistani decision-makers to read each other’s signals because they did not possess the technical means to observe readiness measures. They relied on information gleaned by U.S. intelligence to fill information gaps, with the understanding that Washington could impart useful information as well as overreact to such indicators. The development and induction of new nuclear capabilities could well add to difficulties in assessing nuclear signals.

### *Signaling in the Brasstacks Crisis (1986-87)*

The most serious stage of the Brasstacks crisis was marked by aggressive military maneuvers that could have been interpreted as either a prelude or provocation to conflict. The crisis began in 1986 during one of India’s triennial military exercise programs, Operation Brasstacks, in the western state of Rajasthan. According to some accounts, India and Pakistan shared a “semi-formal understanding” regarding large-scale military maneuvers and exercises and that letters formalizing this agreement were exchanged on a “semi-official basis.”<sup>24</sup> However, one senior Indian military official noted that Gen. Sundarji might have been unaware of this agreement at the time of the Brasstacks crisis.<sup>25</sup>

The initiation of the crisis centered on the mobilization of some 250,000 Indian troops and 1,300 tanks — according to Pakistani estimates — along the India-Pakistan border in a way that caused sufficient concern within Pakistan that India could reorient its forces to bisect the country.<sup>26</sup> Some Indian railway routes were commandeered to move troops and heavy equipment, and strike corps carried ammunition with them to forward posts.<sup>27</sup> While lines of communication remained open on both sides through multiple channels, Indian information sharing was “uncooperative and evasive.”<sup>28</sup>

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24. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 41.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 44.

27. *Ibid.*, 49.

28. *Ibid.*, 52.

Pakistan responded by moving two strike corps closer to the border dividing the Pakistani state of Punjab and crossed the Sutlej River in January 1987 in a move that “seriously alarmed” Indian policymakers, as this mobilization simultaneously threatened both Kashmir and the Indian state of Punjab.<sup>29</sup> India immediately took counter-defensive positions along the border, reinforced by a substantial airlift, and set off “war hysteria” in each country’s national media.<sup>30</sup> When the potential severity of the crisis became clear to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, he took actions clarifying India’s non-hostile intent — including the transfer of Sundarji’s closest civilian confidante, Arun Singh, away from the Ministry of Defense. Experienced diplomats on both sides — with an assist from Pakistan’s leader, Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, who visited India to attend a cricket match — worked out the phased return of soldiers to their barracks. Third parties, especially the United States, did not appear to overreact, nor did they play a significant crisis management role.

Neither state possessed nuclear weapons during this crisis, so nuclear signaling was inferential at most. There were, however, aspects of this crisis with nuclear connotations. According to one chronicler, Sundarji subsequently conveyed his intent “to defeat Pakistan by conventional arms before the latter acquired a nuclear deterrent that would make all-out war impossibly dangerous for both sides.”<sup>31</sup> This characterization has been disputed. If this was indeed Sundarji’s intention, his plan appeared to depend on Pakistan’s striking the first blow prior to indicators of an imminent attack. If the idea behind Operation Brasstacks was to be a prod, the Pakistan Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi declined to overreact.

For this characterization of the crisis to be convincing, Sundarji would have had to transport sufficient stocks of supplies and ammunition to engage in a war of choice rather than a large-scale military exercise. One of Sundarji’s close aides during the crisis denies this to have been the case.<sup>32</sup> The Indian government has not shed light on this matter, nor have individuals in a position to know gone on the public record with respect to this crucial indicator of intent.<sup>33</sup> The presence of sufficient supplies and ammunition would confirm what has become conventional wisdom about the escalation dangers associated with Operation Brasstacks. If ammunition in sufficient quantities to carry out an offensive did not accompany Sundarji’s troops in the field, however, then conventional wisdom is overblown. Indeed, if Sundarji’s troops were equipped to train but not to fight, and if this information had been conveyed to Pakistani leaders, it could have diminished the intensity of this crisis much earlier.

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29. *Ibid.*, 39, 54.

30. *Ibid.*, 55.

31. *Ibid.*, 67.

32. Michael Krepon’s interview with a close Sundarji aide, New Delhi, August 10, 2017.

33. Accounts of live ammunition involved in Operation Brasstacks include Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 49; John H. Gill, “Brasstacks: Prudently Pessimistic,” in *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*, 40; and P.N. Hoon, *Unmasking Secrets of Turbulence: Midnight Freedom to Nuclear Dawn* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1999), 109.

As this matter remains hazy three decades after Operation Brasstacks, it is difficult to assess the actual intensity of this crisis. Lingering impressions offer florid accounts of Pakistani messaging with strong nuclear overtones. In a January 1987 meeting between Pakistan's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Zain Noorani and the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad S.K. Singh, Singh recalled being warned that Pakistan was "capable of inflicting unacceptable damage" not just on northern India but also beyond. In Singh's recollection, Noorani "made no attempt to deny that he was implying an attack on Bombay (now Mumbai), where India's premier nuclear facilities are located."<sup>34</sup>

The second instance of messaging was haphazard. During the crisis, Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar interviewed A.Q. Khan, the garrulous head of Kahuta Research Laboratories, Pakistan's uranium enrichment facilities. Their meeting appeared to have an impromptu character, rather than one arranged to send a purposeful signal. In any event, one of Khan's messages — "[w]e are here to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened" — was not privately conveyed to Indian leaders during the crisis or, for that matter, to the reading public until after the crisis was over, when Nayar placed his piece in a London paper.<sup>35</sup>

In Operation Brasstacks, nuclear signaling was more bravado than fact. Pakistan did not yet appear to possess an operational capability to deliver nuclear weapons, and India lagged behind Pakistan in this regard. However, the Brasstacks crisis did set a template for subsequent crises in that it served as a prod to accelerate nuclear capabilities. As the dean of Indian strategic analysts, K. Subrahmanyam, later observed, Sundarji's grand military exercise backfired. It "provided a very convenient cover for Pakistan to unveil its nuclear weapons to the world."<sup>36</sup> The unveiling actually occurred a decade later, after India tested its nuclear devices.

### *Nuclear Signaling in the 1990 Compound Crisis*

Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty noted that the 1990 Compound crisis constituted a "bridge" between the pre-nuclear and post-nuclear eras in South Asian history.<sup>37</sup> Like Brasstacks, the Compound crisis was also instigated by a large-scale military exercise, this time by the Pakistani army chief. This mobilization — combined with internal unrest in Punjab and Indian-administered Kashmir fomented by Pakistani intelligence services — led to another tense military standoff. By 1990, both states appeared to have nuclear weapon capabilities, with Pakistan possessing more of an operational capability than India.<sup>38</sup> According to Raj Chengappa's heavily sourced

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34. Varun Sahni, "A Dangerous Exercise: Brasstacks as Non-nuclear Near War," in *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*, 21.

35. Kuldip Nayar, "We Have the A-bomb Says Pakistan's Dr. Strangelove," *The Observer*, March 1, 1987, 13.

36. K. Subrahmanyam, "Indian Nuclear Policy — 1964-98 (A Personal Recollection)," in *Nuclear India*, ed. Jasjit Singh (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 1998), 42.

37. Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 82.

38. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 99. Emphasis in original.

account, Indian intelligence sources gave Prime Minister Gandhi “incontrovertible evidence” that Pakistan possessed an operational nuclear weapon delivery capability in October 1988.<sup>39</sup> Air Commodore Jasjit Singh dates this capability one year earlier.<sup>40</sup> The Kargil Review Commission, led by Subrahmanyam, reported that “in August 1990, Indian intelligence obtained information that Pakistan had developed a policy of using [nuclear] weapons as a first resort in case of war.”<sup>41</sup>

Subrahmanyam recollected that “in the period 1987-1990, India was totally vulnerable to the Pakistani nuclear threat.” But around the time of the 1990 Compound crisis, India was on the cusp of having nuclear weapon delivery capabilities. Subrahmanyam confirmed in his personal recollections published in 1998 that “the first Indian nuclear deterrent came into existence in early 1990.”<sup>42</sup> However, during the crisis Pakistani leaders talked in ways that reflected more confidence in their nuclear program.

In the middle of the crisis, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yakub Khan visited New Delhi and spoke in extravagant terms to Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh and Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral, hinting that the tense situation in Kashmir could get far worse and that extreme dangers could be in the offing. (Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto made matters worse by visiting Muzaffarabad and calling for a “holy jihad” over Kashmir.) Yakub Khan subsequently downplayed his messaging in New Delhi, while the Kargil Review Commission report relays that V.P. Singh and Gujral took the Pakistani Foreign Minister’s *démarche* “as an ultimatum.” Subrahmanyam notes that, “[t]he Indian Air Force was put on alert,” although whether this was done in response to Yakub Khan’s *démarche* is not clear.<sup>43</sup>

An important book-length account of India’s nuclear program written by George Perkovich assesses that India had two dozen or more fissile material cores ready for mating by the time of the Compound crisis. India apparently possessed no dedicated means of delivering these cores because of dysfunctional relations between its nuclear enclave and its military leadership.<sup>44</sup> They would have been inserted into bulky devices of unproven design only deliverable by improvised means.<sup>45</sup> Raj Chengappa’s account suggests that an improvised deterrent could have been readied during the crisis.<sup>46</sup> Another account by civil servant B.G. Deshmukh suggests that Indian planning during the crisis proceeded on the basis of not using nuclear weapons.<sup>47</sup>

39. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, 331.

40. Jasjit Singh, “Why Nuclear Weapons?” in *Nuclear India*, 20.

41. Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, 66.

42. Subrahmanyam, “Indian Nuclear Policy,” in *Nuclear India*, 44; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 100.

43. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 45. Also see Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, 65; and Gaurav Kampani, “New Delhi’s Long Nuclear Journey,” *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 79-114.

44. Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 293.

45. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, 357.

46. *Ibid.*, 357.

47. B. G. Deshmukh, *A Cabinet Secretary Looks Around* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998), 70.

Whatever the state of India's deterrent in 1990, it most certainly lagged behind Pakistan's — although some Indian leaders might well have disbelieved this. V.P. Singh, for example, stated that if Pakistan were to deploy nuclear weapons, India would follow suit.<sup>48</sup> However, Pakistan's advantages were quite real: Rawalpindi had in its possession a functional and deliverable first-generation bomb design courtesy of China.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, in 1990 — perhaps related to the Compound crisis — Pakistan apparently resumed enriching uranium to weapons-grade, breaking its pledge to the Reagan administration not to do so.<sup>50</sup> In former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley's recollection, after possibly down-blending highly enriched uranium in response to earlier U.S. *démarches*, Pakistan resumed 90 percent enrichment “in early 1990” just as the tensions peaked during the Compound crisis.<sup>51</sup>

It was not surprising, then, that signaling during the Compound crisis was mostly one-sided, reflecting both a reasonable Pakistani assumption of its advantageous nuclear posture and its concerns over the outbreak of a conventional war. During the crisis, Pakistani decision-makers took visible steps to indicate heightened readiness to use nuclear weapons, although the extent of such preparations is subject to debate.<sup>52</sup> Seymour Hersh wrote an overheated account of this crisis in *The New Yorker*, which was subsequently recycled by William Burroughs and Robert Windrem.<sup>53</sup> Hersh reports that Pakistan ostentatiously placed nuclear-capable F-16 aircraft on runway alert and carried out unusual activity around the Kahuta enrichment complex. While some of Hersh's details appear overdramatized, there seems little doubt that Pakistan sought to exploit the presumption of its having nuclear weapon capabilities during the crisis to apply leverage on New Delhi and to seek Washington's intervention.<sup>54</sup>

This interpretation of Pakistan's actions during the Compound crisis aligns with what Vipin Narang terms a “catalytic” nuclear posture — one relying on nuclear moves aimed at “catalyzing” a third party — in this case, the United States — to de-escalate the crisis.<sup>55</sup> Narang considers the Compound crisis the

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48. Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 93.

49. Feroz H. Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 157.

50. Nayar, “We Have the A-bomb.”

51. See remarks by Ambassador Robert Oakley in “Conflict Prevention and Risk Reduction: Lessons from the 1990 Crisis,” in *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, 196; remarks by Ambassador Abdul Sattar in *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, 231; remarks from Robert B. Oakley in Krepon and Faruqee, eds., *Conflict Prevention and Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia*, 45. Also see Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 293-308; Devin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 133-70; Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 125-30; Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 100-7; and Hersh, “On the Nuclear Edge,” 64.

52. For more on this debate, see Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 99-108; and Krepon and Faruqee, eds., *Conflict Prevention and Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia*, 45.

53. Hersh, “On the Nuclear Edge,” 56-73; and William E. Burrows and Robert Windrem, *Critical Mass: The Dangerous Race for Superweapons in a Fragmenting World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

54. Krepon and Faruqee, eds., *Conflict Prevention and Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia*, 45. According to Feroz Khan's account in *Eating Grass*, the promised delivery of 28 F-16 fighter aircraft from the United States would have provided Pakistan with its first “operationally reliable” method of delivery of nuclear weapons in the early 1980s. However, the transfer was halted in 1990 by the imposition of the 1985 Pressler Amendment.

55. Narang, “Posturing for Peace.”

“most explicit example” of Pakistan’s utilization of a catalytic posture.<sup>56</sup> Namely, Pakistan “triggered” a U.S. intervention by deliberately signaling to the United States — more so than to India — that it was increasing its nuclear readiness.

The signal was certainly effective in galvanizing a U.S. diplomatic intervention. Hersh’s account reflected deep concerns by some in the U.S. intelligence community concerning Pakistan’s nuclear preparations during the Compound crisis. He quotes the recollection of Richard J. Kerr, then the deputy director of the CIA, as saying:

It was the most dangerous nuclear situation we have ever faced since I’ve been in the U.S. government. It may be as close as we’ve come to a nuclear exchange. It was far more frightening than the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>57</sup>

This is a striking statement and one that Kerr subsequently and privately acknowledged to one of the authors as being overly dramatic. The U.S. intelligence community was new to the business of assessing nuclear dangers during crises on the subcontinent and might have had difficulty assessing the degree to which Pakistan’s “nuclear antics” — an Indian characterization — were real or embellished.<sup>58</sup>

Subrahmanyam recalls that “[t]here was a top-secret analysis in India on the probability of the Pakistani nuclear threat and it concluded that it was not very significant.”<sup>59</sup> Apparently, however, Pakistan’s signaling was deemed sufficient to warrant placing the Indian Air Force on alert. George Perkovich’s account also confirms that India was not “worrying explicitly about a nuclear threat from Pakistan” at that time and was unaware of the Pakistani activities detected by U.S. intelligence.<sup>60</sup>

The Compound crisis, like Brasstacks, provided an impetus to both countries to further advance their nuclear capabilities, with the development and flight testing of missile programs taking on greater urgency. Pakistan took the brunt of U.S. disapproval. After the crisis, the George H.W. Bush administration invoked Pressler Amendment sanctions, as it was no longer able to certify that Pakistan was not in possession of a nuclear bomb. The resumption of Pakistan’s production of highly enriched uranium around the time of the Compound crisis removed the last fig leaf that had allowed the Reagan and Bush administrations to continue military support to Pakistan during the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union.

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56. Ibid.

57. Hersh, “On the Nuclear Edge,” 56.

58. Nirupama Rao, then Minister of External Affairs spokeswoman, used this phrase on May 26, 2002, during the Twin Peaks crisis as noted in Khan, “Nuclear Signaling,” in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 75.

59. Subrahmanyam, “Indian Nuclear Policy,” in *Nuclear India*, 45.

60. Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 10.

## *Nuclear Signaling in the Kargil War*

The nuclear shadow hung heavily over the Kargil War, which undeniably laid to rest predictions by South Asian leaders and analysts that offsetting nuclear capabilities would help stabilize the subcontinent. Instead, the stability-instability paradox seemed clearly applicable to the subcontinent, as many have noted.<sup>61</sup> While deterrence optimists like Kenneth Waltz have argued that nuclear-armed states will avoid military escalation at all costs, Peter Lavoy argued otherwise. In his view, the Kargil experience proves that India and Pakistan “will fight where they think they can” and seek the capacity to fight limited, conventional wars.<sup>62</sup> As the semi-official Indian Kargil Review Commission report concluded:

Did the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998 rule out a major conventional war between them? Possibly not; but only up to a given threshold, which margin was exploited by Pakistan.<sup>63</sup>

Increased missile readiness — but not flight testing — played an important role in signaling during the Kargil crisis, although some accounts may be overstated. Raj Chengappa’s account, based on heavy sourcing within India’s nuclear enclave, asserts that:

India activated all three types of nuclear delivery vehicles and kept them in what is known as Readiness State 3 — meaning that some nuclear bombs would be ready to be mated with the delivery vehicle at short notice. The air force was asked to keep Mirage fighters on standby. DRDO scientists headed to where *Prithvi* missiles were deployed and at least four of them were readied for possible nuclear strike. Even an *Agni* missile capable of launching a nuclear warhead was moved to a western Indian state and kept in a state of readiness.<sup>64</sup>

U.S. accounts of the Kargil War have not independently confirmed these steps. If taken, they suggest that India’s leaders and its nuclear enclave were chastened by Pakistan’s advantages and their own lack of preparation during the 1990 Compound crisis. However, Chengappa’s sources might have overstated India’s ability to sustain nuclear readiness. At the time, the *Prithvi* missiles were liquid-fueled, and thus inherently difficult to maintain in a readiness status

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61. For more on the stability-instability paradox, see Glenn H. Snyder, “The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror,” in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), 184-202; Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 226; Robert Jervis, *The Illlogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 30-31; Michael Krepon, “The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation-Control in South Asia,” in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 261-79; and S. Paul Kapur, “Revisionist Ambitions, Conventional Capabilities, and Nuclear Instability: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe,” in *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, ed. Scott D. Sagan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 184-218. Also see V.R. Raghavan, “Limited War and Nuclear Escalation in South Asia,” *Nonproliferation Review* 8, no. 3 (2001): 82-98; P.R. Chari, “Nuclear Restraint, Risk Reduction, and the Security-Insecurity Paradox in South Asia,” in Michael Krepon, ed., *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19-42; Krepon, Jones, and Haider, eds., *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option in South Asia*; Khan, *Eating Grass*, 235; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 206. Also see Peter R. Lavoy, “Why Kargil Did Not Produce General War: The Crisis Management Strategies of Pakistan, India, and the United States,” in Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare*, 176.

62. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare*, 176.

63. Kargil Review Committee, *From Surprise to Reckoning*, 22.

64. Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, 437.

for nuclear attack because of liquid fuel's corrosive properties and other maintenance challenges associated with such missiles. A more reliable and flexible option was the solid-fueled Agni, which had been successfully flight tested three times before the Kargil War. India also possessed a first-generation bomb design proven in the 1998 tests and presumably the means to deliver it by specially equipped aircraft.

The U.S. intelligence community was closely following increased nuclear-related readiness during the Kargil War, presumably comparing these moves against the admittedly unclear baselines established during the Compound crisis. President Bill Clinton used the information gleaned by U.S. intelligence to place Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was in the dark over increased nuclear readiness measures, in an untenable position during the Pakistani prime minister's desperate trip to Washington over the July 4th holiday in search of an exit strategy.<sup>65</sup> Former Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh recounts that the Indian side had indeed received some information that Pakistan was operationalizing its nuclear weapons, but it was considered a "desperate gambit."<sup>66</sup> Gen. V.P. Malik, India's army chief during the Kargil crisis, claims that U.S. accounts of Pakistani nuclear preparations were an exaggeration.<sup>67</sup> To add to the confusion, Malik's successor, Gen. S. Padmanabhan, publicly stated Pakistan had activated a nuclear base and threatened a nuclear attack on India.<sup>68</sup>

The Kargil crisis was accompanied by rhetorical volleys affirming readiness to use nuclear weapons, if the need arose. For example, Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad asserted, "[w]e will not hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity."<sup>69</sup> For its part, India also did not rule out the use of nuclear weapons during the Kargil crisis. As then National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra later noted, "[c]rossing the Line of Control (LoC) was not ruled out, nor was the use of nuclear weapons."<sup>70</sup>

After the crisis, Pakistani spokespersons denied undue readiness, and Feroz Khan has offered reasons why Washington might have overreacted by not being able to distinguish between offensive and defensive moves of nuclear-capable missiles.<sup>71</sup> It would certainly be in Pakistan's interest to downplay nuclear signaling after the Kargil War, as this would serve a national narrative of responsible nuclear stewardship. But again these denials are hard to accept fully. If Pakistan increased its readiness posture for the Compound crisis, which

65. For more on U.S. diplomatic pressure during the Kargil crisis, see Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Khan, "Nuclear Signaling," in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*; Khan, *Eating Grass*; Riedel, *American Diplomacy*; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 118-48.

66. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 136.

67. *Ibid.*, 141.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Celia W. Dugger, "Atmosphere Is Tense as India and Pakistan Agree to Talks," *The New York Times*, May 31, 1999.

70. "India Was Ready to Cross LoC, Use Nuclear Weapons in Kargil War," *Business Standard*, December 3, 2015.

71. Khan, "Nuclear Signaling," in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 86-87.

entailed large-scale military exercises in fighting corridors but no fighting, it presumably would have increased nuclear readiness even more in the run-up to and during a limited conventional war with India.

### *Nuclear Signaling in the Twin Peaks Crisis (2001-2)*

The 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis was the longest-lasting crisis in South Asian contemporary history, with both militaries facing off at the border for almost a year.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the duration of the crisis, both sides engaged in deliberate nuclear signaling. The attack on the Indian Parliament building in December 2001, coming on the heels of the Kargil War, prompted a vigorous Indian response. Five days after the Parliament attack, the Prime Minister Vajpayee-led government launched Operation Parakram, moving entire strike corps with equipment and ammunition to fighting corridors. Satellite airfields were readied, and the Eastern Fleet was repositioned in the event of an order to blockade Karachi Harbor. Rawalpindi scrambled to move forces from its western border with Afghanistan to take blocking action.

Rhetorical volleys accompanied the troop movements. On the occasion of Pakistan's National Day in March 2002, President Musharraf's speech warned that India would be taught an "unforgettable lesson" if it started a war, a statement that Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes characterized as "childish."<sup>73</sup> For good measure, in an interview for the April 6, 2002, issue of the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, Musharraf stated that, as a factual matter, "as a last resort, the atom bomb is also possible."<sup>74</sup> New Delhi's pointed rejoinder came in the form of a flight test of the Agni missile.

The George W. Bush administration's approach to crisis management entailed seeking to play for time by choreographing high-level visitors and eliciting promises from President Musharraf to clamp down on violent extremist groups.<sup>75</sup> This strategy appeared to be working but did not lead to troop demobilizations, in part because there was no obvious de-escalatory device to walk back readiness levels. In addition, India had "snapped communications" between the two countries.<sup>76</sup>

The crisis peaked again in May 2002 when militants in Jammu struck at housing facilities for mobilized Indian troops and their dependents. A procession of threatening statements, missile moves, and missile flight tests followed. The situation appeared dire when Vajpayee visited the front and told his soldiers, "[t]he time has come for a decisive battle, and we will have a sure victory in this

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72. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 150.

73. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "Nuclear Doctrine, Declaratory Policy, and Escalation Control," in *Escalation Control and the Nuclear Option*, 105-6.

74. "Im Notfall Auch Die Atombombe" [As a Last Resort, the Atom Bomb Is Also Possible], *Der Spiegel*, April 8, 2002.

75. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 37-45.

76. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 149.

battle.<sup>77</sup> But Vajpayee followed his threat by traveling to a remote hill station for an official function and a “vacation.” The Bush administration again scrambled to renew crisis management efforts. The crisis petered out in the fall, when successful elections in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir provided an exit strategy for Indian troop mobilizations.<sup>78</sup>

By the time of the Twin Peaks crisis, there could be no doubt that both India and Pakistan possessed nuclear weapons capable of delivery by missiles as well as aircraft. Nuclear signaling was very purposeful during this crisis, befitting its intensity. Provocative public statements were exchanged inferring readiness to cross the nuclear threshold. Given the length of the crisis, missile flight testing figured prominently in signaling strategies. India tested the “Pakistan-specific” Agni II on the day of the Parliament attack (reflecting earlier preparations), followed by the Agni I and the BrahMos missile.<sup>79</sup> Pakistan flight tested the Ghauri, Ghaznavi, Abdali, and Shaheen missiles.<sup>80</sup>

Very high readiness levels for conventional warfare were presumably accompanied by readiness for nuclear weapon use. Early in the crisis, Indian Minister of Defense Fernandes noted publicly that India’s “missile systems are in position.”<sup>81</sup> Whatever the nuclear readiness levels deemed necessary by Indian and Pakistani leaders were, their status was not publicly characterized during the crisis. Elements of missile readiness, including forward deployments of missiles lacking extended range — the Prithvi and the Hatf I and II — were evident for U.S. satellites to observe.<sup>82</sup> However, Feroz Khan argues that Pakistan did not feel the need to put its nuclear forces on alert; rather, the crisis “gave Pakistan confidence in its nuclear deterrent and provided important lessons for nuclear planners.”<sup>83</sup>

The most telling evidence of rising nuclear dangers during the Twin Peaks crisis was the directive issued by U.S. Ambassador to India Robert Blackwill for nonessential embassy personnel to leave the country.<sup>84</sup> Blackwill’s directive was issued 17 days after the second spike of the Twin Peaks crisis. Removing large numbers of U.S. citizens in India in a shooting war with the potential of crossing the nuclear threshold was a logistical nightmare. Blackwill’s purpose was quite straightforward: to begin this process as soon as possible. Blackwill and others

77. Luv Puri, “Be Ready for Decisive Battle, PM Tells Jawans,” *The Hindu*, May 23, 2002.

78. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 37-45; and Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 159-160.

79. For more on Indian missile tests, see Dalton and Tandler, *Understanding the Arms “Race”*, 21-24; articles on individual Indian missiles on *IHS Jane’s Aerospace, Defence, and Security* website at <https://www.ih.com/products/janes-international-defence-review.html>; and “Nuclear-Capable Missile Called ‘Flawless’ in Test,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2001.

80. For more on Pakistani missile tests, see Dalton and Tandler, *Understanding the Arms “Race”*, 21-24; and articles on individual Pakistani missiles on *IHS Jane’s Aerospace, Defence, and Security* website.

81. “India’s Missile System in Position: Fernandes,” *The Hindu*, December 27, 2001.

82. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 173.

83. Feroz H. Khan, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Force Posture and the 2001-2002 Military Standoff,” in *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff*, 137-38.

84. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks Crisis*, 35-36.

in the Bush administration believed that the second spike of the Twin Peaks crisis would likely lead to war. The removal of nonessential embassy personnel was therefore a prudent precautionary measure — and a signal to those contemplating a trip to India to stay away.

Blackwill's directive turned out to be an important de-escalatory measure, clarifying New Delhi's difficulties in keeping the heat on Pakistan while trying to welcome foreign travelers and corporate investors to India. Prime Minister Vajpayee's stirring speech to the troops in Jammu to be prepared for a decisive battle might have been hyperbole for the benefit of the Bush administration's crisis managers, but this level of tension in an unresolved crisis lasting almost a year was also damaging to Indian prospects for economic growth. By inadvertently but successfully calling New Delhi's bluff, Blackwill identified an important tool for future U.S. crisis managers.

### *Nuclear Signaling in the 2008 Mumbai Crisis*

After six years without a major crisis, a terrorist attack at the heart of India's largest city threatened to propel India and Pakistan toward nuclear escalation once again. Senior U.S. officials — veterans of the Twin Peaks crisis — again mobilized for crisis management, their task made easier by the clear unwillingness of Indian Prime Minister Singh to mobilize troops or engage in escalatory rhetoric. The Mumbai crisis was extremely embarrassing and frustrating for India, as the lack of preparedness of Indian security forces and the cruelty of the attackers played out in real time before a transfixed, horrified, and outraged domestic audience. The crisis also deeply embarrassed Pakistan, as phone conversations between the perpetrators and their handlers became publicly accessible after being intercepted by the Indian government. The perpetrators and their handlers were affiliated with LeT, a by-now familiar militant group with a history of support from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. LeT continued to enjoy considerable freedom of action despite then President Musharraf's pledges to clamp down on the group during the Twin Peaks crisis.

Conventional wisdom after the 2001 Parliament attack held that “another terrorist outrage could easily trigger an Indian response.”<sup>85</sup> But the response of the Singh-led coalition government to the deadly and spectacular Mumbai attacks was notably restrained. Pakistan's Inter-Service Public Relations, the media wing of the armed forces, issued no press releases about heightened alert levels after the Mumbai attacks. To the contrary, the Pakistan Army let it be known to journalists that the Indian Army had not mobilized and that the ceasefire along

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85. See Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 205. Bruce Riedel and Teresita Schaffer make similar predictions in “Expert Says US Should Help Revive India-Pakistan Peace Talks,” *Voice of America News*, January 20, 2011; and Teresita Schaffer, “Is There Life After Cricket?” *South Asia Hand*, April 1, 2011, <http://southasiahand.com/pakistan/india-pakistan-is-there-life-after-cricket>.

the Kashmir divide, instituted after the Twin Peaks crisis, was still holding.<sup>86</sup> In December 2008, as with the Twin Peaks crisis, Pakistani troops along the western border with Afghanistan were moved toward the India-Pakistan border. However, a Pakistani defense official characterized the movement as a simple redistribution of troops from “snowbound areas and places where operational commitments were less.”<sup>87</sup>

Somewhat heightened measures were apparently taken after a hoax phone call when someone posing as Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukerjee was directly connected to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s widow who had come to power in the 2008 elections as the standard bearer of the Pakistan People’s Party.<sup>88</sup> Pressures for escalation built over the last two weeks of December when Pakistan’s new weak civilian government proved incapable of deflecting hawkish critiques, receiving little assistance from Rawalpindi. The Pakistani press reported air space violations by the Indian Air Force, with denials reported in the Indian media.<sup>89</sup> Both sides canceled military leaves and implemented increased air force and air defense alert postures as the Indian Army conducted seasonal exercises.<sup>90</sup> These steps were modest compared to previous crises. They were accompanied by a notable absence of reports of missile movements and telling preparations for conventional warfare. Unlike previous crises, direct official communication between Indian and Pakistani leaders continued, interspersed with rhetorical volleys.

In the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, Prime Minister Singh appeared intent not to repeat Vajpayee’s decision to mobilize for war without the benefit of a “plan B.” Given the civil-military divide in Pakistan, President Zardari was as unable to influence the course of events in Pakistan as was Prime Minister Sharif during the Kargil War. Once again, U.S. crisis managers rose to the occasion, helped by much-improved ties with India as a result of the George W. Bush administration’s championing of a civil-nuclear deal for India. Pakistan was on the back foot throughout due to its inability or unwillingness to follow through with previous pledges that its soil would not be used to facilitate such attacks.

The Bush administration’s crisis managers found it far easier to defuse the Mumbai crisis than the Twin Peaks crisis. New Delhi’s restraint served India well; Pakistan’s international standing and prospects for economic growth continued to decline while India’s continued to rise, backstopped by closer ties to the United States.

86. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 41; and Syed Irfan Raza, “Govt Convenes All Party Conference,” *Dawn*, December 1, 2008.

87. Saeed Shah and Maseeh Rahman, “Pakistan Deploys Soldiers to Indian Border,” *The Guardian*, December 26, 2008.

88. “A Hoax Call That Could Have Triggered War,” *Dawn*, December 6, 2008; and Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 12-13, 44-45.

89. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 45; and Bibhudatta Pradhan and Khalid Qayum, “India Denies Its Planes Violated Pakistani Airspace (Update2),” *Bloomberg*, December 14, 2008.

90. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 45-6; Richard A. O’Connell Jr. and Salman Masood, “Pakistan Moves Troops amid Tension with India,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2008.

### *Assessing the Intensity of Nuclear-Tinged Crises*

Measuring the intensity of the five nuclear-tinged crises covered in this essay is an imprecise art, partly because some of the key steps taken by Pakistan and India have been difficult to ascertain. In addition, public reports and published studies of these crises may not be entirely correct. Nuclear deterrence rests on ambiguity, and some of the signals sent during crises were purposefully ambiguous. In particular, the mating of warheads with missiles during crises — an extreme indicator of intensity — can be hard to assess, as is whether nuclear weapons have been loaded on aircraft during a crisis. Mobilizations, on the other hand, cannot be ambiguous; they send a clear signal of the severity of a crisis. Uncertainties also extended to the state of adversarial nuclear capabilities, especially in the Compound crisis and the Kargil War. On balance, ambiguity likely has reinforced deterrence in past crises. As the authors of *Four Crises and a Peace Process* wrote, “mutual worst-case analyses ensured that for both sides the opponent’s capabilities loomed even larger than objective circumstances strictly warranted.”<sup>91</sup>

Looking back over these crises chronologically, miscalculation accompanying Operation Brasstacks could have led to war given how little New Delhi did to alleviate Pakistani concerns as the crisis built. The Compound crisis appears in retrospect to be less dangerous than some thought at the time. A limited war between two nuclear-armed states, as occurred in the heights above Kargil, was extremely dangerous even though India and Pakistan exercised significant measures of operational restraint to avoid escalation. The Twin Peaks crisis was also extraordinarily dangerous. For all the fireworks associated with the 2008 Mumbai crisis, its level of intensity was not high, as India’s leadership clarified early on that war was not an option.

Rajesh Rajagopalan has argued that crises between India and Pakistan do not progress in a linear fashion.<sup>92</sup> This essay reaffirms Rajagopalan’s assessment. Focusing on measures that indicate the intensity of nuclear signaling, as noted in *Table 1*, a rank ordering of the five crises covered in this essay would place the Kargil War and the Twin Peaks crisis in the top tier, followed by Operation Brasstacks and the Compound crisis in the second tier, and the 2008 Mumbai crisis in the third tier. As more details emerge about these crises, this rank ordering could be subject to change. If, however, our rank ordering is correct, the high-water mark for risk-taking on the subcontinent since the advent of nuclear weapons occurred within the first three-to-four years of the 1998 nuclear tests. However, this too could change depending on the risk-taking behavior by Indian political and Pakistani military leaders in the future.

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91. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 102.

92. Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Second Strike: Arguments about Nuclear War in South Asia* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005), 127.

## Evolving Nuclear Capabilities and Future Crises

No one can rest easy that the worst of South Asia's nuclear-tinged crises is in the rearview mirror. Grievances have not been addressed as military capabilities as well as tactics continue to evolve. Major events on the subcontinent have a way of surprising leaders — including the onset and conclusions of wars — and could be beyond their capacity to control. Another risk-taking army chief in Pakistan or anti-India militant groups based in Pakistan could spark another serious crisis. A bold Indian prime minister could decide to escalate matters. If the Pakistan Army turns against anti-India groups, these groups might retaliate against targets in India as well as Pakistan, seeking to spark a catalytic war.<sup>93</sup> Disaffected Muslims in India could spark a crisis, as might aggrieved Muslims in Kashmir facing severe police crackdowns. Extended protests, especially violent protests, could draw a higher level of support from across the Kashmir divide — a familiar escalatory pattern. Additional surgical strikes could lead to retaliation in kind or escalation. Alternatively, Indian and Pakistani leaders might decide to seek reconciliation, prompting a fierce backlash from irreconcilables.

### *The Impact of Nuclear Modernization on Crisis Intensity*

The modernization, expansion, and development of new nuclear capabilities might significantly alter the nature of nuclear signaling in the next intense crisis on the subcontinent. Pakistan's embrace of "full-spectrum deterrence" signals a confirmation of open-ended nuclear requirements to deter the possibility of Indian conventional warfare.<sup>94</sup> For example, retired Pakistani Air Commodore Adil Sultan indicated Pakistan's development of the Hatf IX or Nasr short-range delivery capability, first successfully tested in April 2011, would grant Pakistan "flexible deterrence options" to counter the conventional threat from India.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, both India and Pakistan's pursuit of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles could further fuel vertical proliferation in the region. As accuracies improve, the lure of counterforce targeting could also increase.<sup>96</sup> Both countries are building out nuclear triads with the development and testing of submarine-launched missiles.<sup>97</sup> India successfully launched its K-4 ballistic missile from a submerged barge in May 2014 with Pakistan successfully testing its first submarine-launched, nuclear-capable cruise missile, the Babur-3, in January 2017.<sup>98</sup> India could also employ the BrahMos and Nirbhay cruise

93. C. Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra, and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Islam, Militancy, and Politics in Pakistan: Insights from a National Sample," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010); and Steve Coll, "Lakshar-e-Taiba," *The New Yorker*, December 1, 2008.

94. Toby Dalton and Michael Krepon, *A Normal Nuclear Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), 15.

95. Mansoor Ahmed, *Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Their Impact on Stability*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016).

96. Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler, and Shane Mason, eds., *The Lure & Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2016), 13-14.

97. Dinakar Peri, "India's Nuclear Triad Finally Coming of Age," *The Diplomat*, June 12, 2014.

98. "Pakistan Fires 'First Submarine-launched Nuclear-capable Missile,'" *Reuters*, January 9, 2017.

**Table 1: India-Pakistan Crisis Intensity Indicators**

		CRISES				
	Indicator	Brasstacks (1986-87)	Compound (1990)	Kargil (1999)	Twin Peaks (2001-2)	Mumbai (2008)
Extreme intensity	Limited warfare			X		
	Missiles, warheads mated			X		
	Nuclear weapons or dual-use missiles deployed to field/ fighting corridors			X	X	
	Nuclear-capable aircraft moved to satellite bases/ positioned on runways		X	X	X	
	Preparing aircraft, frontline equipment for combat		X	X		
	Mobilization of offensive/ defensive units to fighting corridors with ammunition	X	X	X	X	X
	Cancellation of leaves	X		X	X	X
Severe intensity	Large-scale military exercises in sensitive areas	X	X			
	Movement of missiles out of garrisons and some nuclear-capable aircraft to satellite bases			X	X	
	Movement of warships out of port				X	
	Rhetoric from national leadership suggesting heightened nuclear readiness	X	X	X	X	X
Moderate intensity	Small unit skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC)			X		
	Publicizing LoC raids and accompanying national media campaigns					
	Intensified small arms, rocket, and artillery fire across LoC			X		
	Increased tempo/boldness of Pakistan-supported anti-India militant groups				X	X
	Missile flight tests				X	

missiles from its sea-based deterrent and choose to deploy ballistic missile defenses, which would provide further impetus to Pakistan's nuclear capabilities while adding another factor in crisis management calculations.<sup>99</sup>

As both countries' nuclear capabilities expand and diversify, nuclear signaling during crises could evolve as well. A broader spectrum of missile delivery systems would grant policymakers a wider range of options by which to engage in nuclear signaling. Where some previous crises were marked by the movement of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, leaders in future crises could also employ longer-range missiles and sea-based capabilities to signal nuclear readiness.

Several nuclear-capable delivery vehicles — such as Pakistan's Nasr short-range missile and India's supersonic cruise missiles — have yet to play roles in a crisis scenario. Rules of engagement could be of critical importance in the event of limited warfare, as both systems are dual capable and could be considered high-priority targets for air force pilots. The timeframe for decision-making regarding nuclear signaling and responses could well be compressed in a future crisis. Uncertainty regarding the deployment and alert level of varied nuclear-capable assets could prompt leaders to make rapid decisions based on partial information and incorrect inferences, resulting in significant escalation. Alternatively, great uncertainty and extremely high stakes could reinforce caution if decision-makers in both countries have internalized the risks of escalation control and seek assistance to de-escalate the crisis.

## The Shifting Regional Context of Crisis Management

The most consequential trends affecting crisis management on the subcontinent are significant improvement in U.S.-India relations, significant deterioration in U.S.-Pakistan relations, and China's far greater stake in Pakistan, as reflected in its "One Belt, One Road" investments across Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. As Washington's penalties have become increasingly severe in response to Rawalpindi's tightrope walking with respect to Afghanistan and anti-India extremist groups, Pakistan has turned increasingly to China for diplomatic support and military assistance. Beijing has willingly thickened ties with Pakistan as India accepts, albeit guardedly, an open invitation for closer cooperation with the United States.

Other trends within the region also affect the realities and perceptions of crisis management. China-India relations have become more competitive, as reflected in occasional flare-ups — absent fighting — along both countries' non-settled border regions. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi seeks a rupture in relations. India is on the rise but is slow to carry out essential reforms. Pakistan has taken

99. "India's Ballistic Missile Defence System: All You Need to Know," *The Times of India*, February 12, 2017; "India Claims Missile Defence Milestone," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2006; and Franz-Stefan Gady, "India Successfully Tests Prithvi Defense Vehicle, A New Missile Killer System," *The Diplomat*, February 15, 2017.

important steps to address internal security threats but at this writing remains tethered to poor choices of the past. Pakistan does not enjoy good working relations with any of its neighbors, with the exception of China, whose support in an intense crisis with India cannot be assumed. The United States wishes to “rebalance” toward the Pacific but has insufficient agility and resources to do so because of its commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. China has adopted a more muscular approach to its regional security concerns along its periphery; whether it chooses to do so on the subcontinent in the event of a crisis between India and Pakistan remains an unanswered question with important ramifications for crisis management.

Prime Minister Modi is a well-established incumbent with significant political support, while Pakistan again faces political turbulence. India’s conventional capabilities are growing relative to Pakistan, while Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities are growing relative to India.<sup>100</sup> U.S. crisis management proved quite helpful in the two most intense crises examined above. However, China’s rise and the United States’ waning influence in Pakistan could affect how crisis management plays out in the future.

### *China’s Role in Crisis Management*

Fostering a positive approach by Beijing toward crisis de-escalation has become increasingly important as Islamabad and Rawalpindi no longer view Washington as an “honest broker.”<sup>101</sup> Nor does New Delhi expect Washington to play this role in the future. If Modi decides to push back against Pakistani provocations, New Delhi would expect U.S. diplomatic support. In past crises Beijing has exercised influence primarily by its unwillingness to come to Pakistan’s assistance in a crisis sparked by its own actions (or nonactions in terms of restraining extremist groups). Consequently, despite Beijing’s notional messages of support, Pakistan has not received material support during past crises, thereby clarifying its isolation. Beijing now has other means to convey cautionary messages, as its mere expression of concern over Chinese investments and the protection of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan are likely to carry greater weight in Islamabad and New Delhi.

Beijing could seek to influence Indian behavior in a future crisis by veiled threats and by repositioning ground, naval, and missile forces. There would be precedent for such actions, most notably the movement of the U.S.S. *Enterprise* and its task force into the Bay of Bengal on two occasions — to signal Washington’s interest in Chinese restraint during the 1962 India-China War and Indian restraint in the 1971 India-Pakistan War. However, comparable actions by Beijing in the event of an intense crisis between India and Pakistan could risk emboldening Rawalpindi

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100. For more on this see Dalton and Krepon, *A Normal Nuclear Pakistan*. Also see, Shane Mason, *Military Budgets in India and Pakistan: Trajectories, Priorities, and Risks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2016).

101. For more on the history and possible future of China’s role in South Asian crises, see See Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland’s essay in this volume, “China and Crisis Management in South Asia”.

and strengthening opposition to Beijing's actions elsewhere around its periphery, where neighbors are already concerned about a more muscular China.

A China that “throws its weight around” would likely result in even closer ties between the United States and other countries around China's periphery, including India. Plus, if Beijing comes to Pakistan's military assistance in a crisis that is widely viewed as having been triggered by the actions of violent extremist groups based in Pakistan, China could be viewed as abetting state-sponsored terrorism, which it strongly opposes. Nonetheless, if an India-Pakistan crisis spills over to limited conventional warfare in which India takes the offensive, Beijing might resort to signaling to help bring an end to hostilities.

For Beijing to become a co-equal partner with the United States in crisis management, it would have to be prepared to accept greater responsibility for regional security and more intense diplomacy geared to war prevention and de-escalation. This could entail greater risks for uncertain benefits, however. In the past, Beijing has felt comfortable watching Washington do the “heavy lifting” of crisis management, contributing only supplementary efforts. While China's stakes in another serious crisis have grown, it is unlikely, in the view of Yun Sun, that Beijing would be eager to embrace a co-equal partnership role with the United States in crisis management.<sup>102</sup>

Even though U.S. influence on Pakistan's choices has waned, Pakistan still has no better option than Washington in seeking to de-escalate a crisis with India — even if Washington is not viewed as an “honest broker.” Washington still likely retains more influence on Pakistan's decisions than Beijing has on India's. Beijing's support for de-escalation remains essential, however, with China focusing primarily on Pakistan and the United States focusing primarily on India in an intense crisis.

### *U.S. Crisis Management*

In the event of another intense crisis on the subcontinent, U.S. crisis management would again be a top-down exercise. A senior U.S. official would need to be found to lead these efforts — ideally someone with experience in the region and in crisis management. If there is no such person available, the Trump administration might consider “deputizing” someone possessing these credentials. Washington might again argue against precipitous action and seek to buy time by choreographing high-level visits to the region. If, however, New Delhi preempts this familiar playbook by taking quick military action in response to a provocation, Washington would likely be understanding, if not supportive. The focus of crisis management would then pivot quickly to limiting further escalation. The U.S. intelligence community would again play a key role in helping leaders in India and Pakistan assess the disposition and readiness levels of

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102. Yun Sun, “Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia,” Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, August 10, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/create-channel-us-china-dialogue-south-asia>.

conventional and nuclear capabilities, in rebutting unfounded rumors, and in tracking the activities of violent extremist groups.

U.S. talking points might vary somewhat from previous crises, but key messages would likely remain constant. If New Delhi were to resort to “Cold Start” operations to seize and hold territory,<sup>103</sup> this would be unlikely to compel concessions from Pakistan. If successful, Cold Start operations would leave Indian forces stranded among hostile locals awaiting withdrawal orders.<sup>104</sup> In this event, New Delhi’s image could shift from victim to aggressor, drawing international pressures away from Pakistan.

In addition, launching even a limited Indian ground and air campaign would pose risks of nuclear use and uncontrolled escalation due to accidents, pressures on command and control networks, and the possibility of inadvertent detonations by warheads without adequate safety measures. Even in the absence of uncontrolled escalation and mushroom clouds, another war with Pakistan could diminish the rate of India’s economic growth — and distract from the task of managing a more assertive China.

The risks to Pakistan of another limited war with India are equally great. A limited war with India could accentuate Pakistan’s diplomatic isolation (if New Delhi does not pursue seize and hold tactics), its domestic insecurity, and its economic difficulties. While China would likely support Pakistan in a crisis, at least notionally, Beijing would also be concerned about its growing investments in Pakistan. These investments could be jeopardized by another war with India. Beijing has assumed a standoffish posture in previous crises sparked by Pakistan, while Washington has moved into India’s “camp.” Pakistan might well find itself on the defensive if its actions — or failures to act against violent extremist groups — result in another war with India. Consequently, decision-makers in Pakistan, no less than India, have good reason to avoid another intense crisis and the prospect of another war with India.

As in the past, these circumstances and arguments provide the basis for successful crisis management. In every crisis since the 1990 Compound crisis, Washington has abrogated to itself the role of principal crisis manager. In the past, leaders in both India and Pakistan were quite willing to support this role, welcoming U.S. crisis managers seeking to stay their hands. Washington still retains the ability to play the role of “extricator-in-chief” — with China’s help — if both countries seek to avoid uncontrolled escalation. Conversely, Washington will have great difficulties in crisis management if the contestants are not on the same page regarding de-escalation.

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103. Walter C. Ladwig III, “A Cold Start for Hot Wars?” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007/08): 158-90.

104. Ajai Shukla, “Why General Bipin Rawat Acknowledged the Cold Start Doctrine,” *The Wire*, January 20, 2017.

### *Ramifications of the War in Afghanistan*

The U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan figured prominently during the 2001-2 Twin Peaks and 2008 Mumbai crises, serving as one basis for Indian restraint. At the time of the December 2001 Parliament attack, the United States had recently deployed an expeditionary force of 2,500 soldiers to Afghanistan. The George W. Bush administration argued to the Vajpayee government that a war with Pakistan would damage the coalition war effort in Afghanistan. This was not the primary reason for Indian restraint, but it may have been a contributing factor.<sup>105</sup> At the time of the crisis, U.S. troops were bearing down on the presumed hideout of Osama bin Laden in the Tora Bora cave complex, which was being bombed by the U.S. Air Force. When Indian forces mobilized after the Parliament attack, Pakistani forces on the Afghan border shifted east to take blocking positions. Whatever the likelihood was of Pakistani troops helping to corral or kill the Taliban leadership at the Afghan border, it ended with the Parliament attack.

At the time of the 2008 Mumbai attack the United States had an expeditionary force of almost 31,000 troops in Afghanistan. Pakistan's logistical support through the port of Karachi, and thence overland through Pakistan, was essential to the prosecution of this war. Again, the Bush administration argued that by going to war with Pakistan, New Delhi would do grave harm to a war effort that served India's national security interests.<sup>106</sup>

These circumstances have changed. U.S. and allied force levels in Afghanistan are greater than during the Twin Peaks crisis and far below those during the Mumbai crisis. The requirement for Pakistani logistical support remains, but U.S. coalition support funding for Pakistan is dwindling. Moreover, Washington's expectations that Rawalpindi can help "deliver" Afghan Taliban leaders to a negotiated settlement are low. Consequently, if there is another crisis on the subcontinent, U.S. interests in Afghanistan are neither unlikely to buttress Pakistan's position nor complicate India's choices as much as in the Twin Peaks and Mumbai crises.

### *Assessing the Prospect of Another Serious Crisis*

For every reason to hope that severe nuclear-tinged crises might be in the rear-view mirror, there is a corresponding reason to expect another one. Indian Prime Ministers from both Bharatiya Janata Party- and Congress-led coalitions have looked hard at the precipice of escalating warfare under the nuclear shadow and have walked away, deciding the gains would be ephemeral and pains long-lasting. They have instead chosen the path of restraint and the acceptance of temporary embarrassment. Prime Minister Modi might well

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105. Nayak and Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 38-39.

106. Nayak and Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis*, 29.

**The potential for new crises exists because the pall cast by nuclear weapons has not yet encouraged sustained efforts to improve ties between India and Pakistan...In the near-decade since the last intense crisis, diplomatic efforts to normalize ties have been easily blocked by minor provocations that have not even risen to the level of a crisis.**

think and act differently — but this does not mean that uncontrolled escalation would necessarily follow.

The primary sources of crisis stability within India to date have been the priority New Delhi has placed on economic growth, the paucity of important targets within Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the high sensitivity of striking important targets elsewhere, and its concerns over uncontrolled escalation. We do not know the extent to which Rawalpindi has internalized how much Pakistan has been hurt by previous crises, even when New Delhi has decided to stand down. Nor do we know whether a nearly decade-long record of non-intense crises can be attributed to private understandings between Pakistan's military and intelligence services and violent extremist groups to avoid high-profile events that would spark a serious crisis. If these considerations are in play, then additional factors militating against uncontrolled escalation exist on the Pakistani side. If Rawalpindi takes visible and nonreversible steps against anti-India extremist groups, Pakistan's claims of innocence will receive a fair hearing and the potential to defuse a crisis and escalatory moves will grow. Conversely, until Rawalpindi clarifies responsible policies toward anti-India groups, presumptions of collusion and the potential for uncontrolled escalation will remain.

There is reason to hope that Rawalpindi has internalized the lessons of Kargil as well as the Parliament and Mumbai attacks. The Kashmir cause has not been advanced by these dangerous misadventures. Whenever Rawalpindi has sought to change the status quo in Kashmir by such methods the status quo has been reaffirmed, while Pakistan's standing has been deeply diminished along with its economic prospects. Rallying to the Kashmir cause has advanced neither Pakistan's well-being nor that of Kashmiris. Instead, New Delhi's position in Muslim-majority areas has been undermined by its own heavy-handed approach to governance in Kashmir. Breathing room can only be found in a relaxation of tensions between India and Pakistan as well as in a relaxation of New Delhi's grip on the valley. And yet, the moral imperative of associating

with the Kashmir cause and the instinct to inflame India's Achilles' heel have been staples of Pakistan's existence.

The potential for new crises exists because the pall cast by nuclear weapons has not yet encouraged sustained efforts to improve ties between India and Pakistan. Nor has it yet concretized the "ugly stability" short of warfare predicted by noted analyst Ashley Tellis.<sup>107</sup> In the near-decade since the last intense crisis, diplomatic efforts to normalize ties have been easily blocked by minor provocations that have not even risen to the level of a crisis.

The recent absence of intense crises at this writing provides no surety for the future. Modi has upped the ante by publicizing the common practice of attacking posts across the Kashmir divide. By setting the precedent of publicizing a sharp response after an attack by cadres from anti-India extremist groups, Modi would appear to be obliged to respond in similar fashion in the future, calibrated to the provocation. The next time this occurs Rawalpindi is likely to be ready with a "befitting" response. The fourth step in this ladder will be crucial in determining the extent to which escalation could be controlled.

Chari, Cheema, and Cohen predicted in 2007 that the next crisis on the subcontinent would be unique but would also share earlier elements of surprise and danger.<sup>108</sup> The 2008 Mumbai crisis confirmed their prediction. The next major crisis could evolve from the dynamics of hostility along the Kashmir divide as noted above. Another route to an intense crisis could be yet another attack against an iconic structure in or near a metropolitan area in India. Those that hate India enough to carry out such an attack hate its promising rise, so the target of their attack might again symbolize India's rising power and connectivity to the world.

There is no shortage of soft targets in India, no shortage of means to inflict damage, and no shortage of recruits to carry out attacks. Would another dramatic attack against a symbol of India's rising power or an equivalent outrage prompt a strong military response? As noted by one of the authors five years ago: "[t]he reasons for India's prior restraint despite severe provocations remain in play and in some cases have become more pronounced."<sup>109</sup> This remains the case, but the prospects for escalatory actions are greater now than five years ago.

New Delhi might again choose to exercise escalation control, in part due to the absence of significant military targets across the Kashmir divide.<sup>110</sup> Significant targets associated with violent extremist groups in Pakistan's southern Punjab remain obvious but continue to pose serious risks of escalation. At the end of

107. Ashley J. Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001), 131.

108. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, 205.

109. Michael Krepon, "Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences," in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nathan Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, September 2011), 11.

110. George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace?: Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 165-68.

the day, fighting Pakistan continues to remain a detour to India's rise. And yet, Indian forbearance, especially in the Modi government, cannot be taken for granted. Nor can escalation control, no matter how strongly desired. Another big explosion could occur at any time, whether by accident, a breakdown in the chain of command, extremely rash acts by risk-taking decision-makers, or the provocations of wild men. Unrest in Kashmir could spiral into another major crisis. In the event of these scenarios, external crisis management will again be sorely needed.

## Conclusion

Before the advent of nuclear weapon capabilities on the subcontinent, unresolved grievances over Kashmir resulted in wars. With the advent of the bomb, unresolved grievances have led to mass casualty terrorism, crises, and one limited conventional war. Crises have reoccurred because underlying grievances have not been addressed. In this essay, we have reviewed five crises over a three-decade period. Some crises were preceded by ambitious diplomatic overtures, others by diplomatic lethargy. Notably, there have been no significant crises on the subcontinent since 2008. The most serious of the crises covered in this essay — the Kargil War and the Twin Peaks crisis — occurred in 1999 and 2001-2. As such, it is possible that the worst nuclear-tinged crises on the subcontinent are a reflection of a more troubled past.

This sanguine future cannot be confidently presumed, however. The conditions for another major crisis — widespread disaffection in Kashmir, spoilers in Pakistan, risk-taking personalities, accidents, breakdowns in command and control, or some other form of misfortune — remain present. Since the 2008 Mumbai crisis, Indian leaders have been unwilling to seek sustained and dramatically improved ties with their western neighbor, and since 2008, Pakistan's leaders have given them scant reason to try. Under these circumstances, the next severe crisis could happen at any time.

While some factors in crisis management have changed, the fundamentals of the U.S. crisis management playbook have not. New Delhi has more conventional military options, but these options could lead to quagmires or uncontrolled escalation. Rawalpindi has more nuclear options — including the option of using short-range missiles and perhaps other kinds of “tactical” nuclear weapons to blunt an Indian conventional offensive — but the dangers of doing so would be severe and open-ended. Pakistan would also be perceived as a pariah state, having first prompted another limited war with India and then crossing the nuclear threshold first.

Another limited conventional war between India and Pakistan would leave far more to chance than the Kargil War. Cautious leaders in India and Pakistan will

try very hard to avoid uncontrolled escalation. Two key questions are whether Pakistan's decision-makers will work equally as hard in avoiding actions that could trigger another crisis and whether India's leaders will seek sustained diplomatic efforts to improve relations. Because the spark for every crisis since Operation Brasstacks has come from within Pakistan, the burden of crisis avoidance falls primarily on Rawalpindi.

If another intense crisis occurs, there are compelling reasons for national leaders in India and Pakistan to once again seek to control escalation. Crisis management by the United States can again help defuse a crisis and prevent a war that leaders in India and Pakistan do not want. If, however, another limited war occurs on the subcontinent, intense diplomacy and crisis management will be required to prevent further escalation.



# NEW HORIZONS, NEW RISKS

## A Scenario-based Approach to Thinking about the Future of Crisis Stability in South Asia

*Iskander Rehman*

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A “tinderbox,” “flashpoint,” or “nuclear nightmare,” no region — barring, perhaps, the Korean Peninsula — has garnered quite as many grim headlines as South Asia.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, President Bill Clinton famously described the Indian subcontinent as “the most dangerous place in the world today.”<sup>2</sup> Over a decade later, *New York Times* reporter David Sanger recounted the Obama administration’s frequent anxiety over the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal.<sup>3</sup> More recently, President Donald Trump described Pakistan as being a “very, very vital problem...because they have nuclear weapons and they have to get a hold of the situation.”<sup>4</sup> Many of these concerns are tied to the “stability-instability paradox,” or “ugly stability” that has characterized Indo-Pakistani strategic interactions in the 21st century.<sup>5</sup> To borrow a metaphor from the British strategist Sir James Cable, the nuclearization of the subcontinent may have forestalled the risks of large-scale conventional war, but it has also “provided a kind of greenhouse in which lesser conflicts...can flourish,” and in which spurts of subconventional violence continue to present severe escalatory risks.<sup>6</sup> This judgement has been borne out over the past two decades as a number of nonstate cross-border incidents precipitated nuclear-tinged crises on the subcontinent.

Rather than a more common method of examining past crises on the subcontinent, this essay models and probes two potential future types of South Asian crises. The opening section of each scenario offers some of the motives and methods for crisis modeling by teasing out a plausible trigger event, establishing

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1. For a sampling of such commentary over the years, see Jessica Matthews, “Tinderbox in South Asia,” *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1996; “Nuclear Fears in South Asia,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2015; Dan Twining, “Pakistan and the Nuclear Nightmare,” *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2013; and Pakistan and India: A Rivalry that Threatens the World,” *The Economist*, May 19, 2011.

2. Clinton made these remarks during a visit to the region in March 2000. See Ramesh Chandran, “Clinton Finds LoC Most Dangerous Place in World,” *The Times of India*, March 11, 2000, 1.

3. David E. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama’s Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2012), chap. 3.

4. See “Nuclear Pakistan is a Very, Very Vital Problem,” *The Indian Express*, March 30, 2016.

5. Glenn Snyder first grappled with the concept of the stability-instability paradox, whereby the Soviets could engage in a range of potentially destabilizing “minor ventures with impunity,” under the protective shield of their retaliatory nuclear capabilities. See Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). Describing essentially the same phenomenon, Ashley Tellis coined the term “ugly stability” in reference to South Asia. See Ashley J. Tellis, *Stability in South Asia* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1997).

6. James Cable, “Surprise and the Single Scenario,” *RUSI Journal* 128, no. 1 (1983): 33-38.

background conditions and trends, reviewing moves and countermoves within the scenario, and considering the crisis aftermath. The essay concludes by distilling some implications and lessons drawn from the crisis modeling.

## Scenario Modeling and Methods

Many studies or games exploring crisis instability in South Asia follow a familiar trajectory. A major act of urban terrorism leading to mass casualties and widespread chaos is committed within Indian territory.<sup>7</sup> The attack is subsequently traced back to patrons nested within Pakistan's byzantine security apparatus, and New Delhi finds itself obliged — in the face of rising domestic pressure — to respond in a visible fashion.<sup>8</sup> In most cases, the hypothesized response is largely terrestrial and conventional and involves a “proactive” Indian military response in the form of a limited mechanized thrust across the Line of Control (LoC). Pakistan then engages in nuclear signaling and/or coercion in order to offset India's alleged conventional superiority.<sup>9</sup> There is good reason to concoct and play out such scenarios. After all, considering recent patterns of Indian and Pakistani behavior, they remain some of the most likely “screenplays” for confrontation.<sup>10</sup>

Scenarios, however, should not only examine the most likely futures.<sup>11</sup> As one famed business strategist observed,

[s]cenarios serve two purposes. The first is protective — anticipating and understanding risk. The second is entrepreneurial — discovering strategic options of which one was previously unaware.<sup>12</sup>

If done properly, scenario building can help states and organizations refine their anticipative thinking, manage risk, and hedge against uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> Regularly engaging in such mental exercises can fulfill a vital function by providing a form of mental “wind tunneling” or “stress testing” for overly cautious and reactive

7. An exception would be the work conducted by the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, which has conducted a series of games in partnership with the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency. These workshops have drawn on a wide variety of crisis scenarios and trigger events. For a detailed summary of the most recent game, see Feroz Hassan Khan et al., *South Asian Stability Workshop 2.0: A Crisis Simulation Report* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2016).

8. For an excellent recent overview of these dynamics, see George Perkovich and Toby Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace? Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

9. For a good discussion of these dynamics, see Evan Braden Montgomery and Eric S. Edelman, “Rethinking Stability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and the Competition for Escalation Dominance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 1-2 (2015): 159-82.

10. See, for example, the useful study, Daniel Markey, *Terrorism and Indo-Pakistani Escalation* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010). For a discussion of the role of “scripts” in the concoction of strategy see Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 607-31.

11. For an overview of the utility of scenario-based planning, see P. H. Liotta and Timothy E. Somes, “The Art of Reperceiving Scenarios and the Future,” *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 4 (2003): 121-32. See also Gill Ringland, *Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998); Kees van der Heijde, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1996); and Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

12. Pierre Wack, “Scenarios: Shooting the Rapids: How Medium-term Analysis Illuminated the Power of Scenarios for Shell Management,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 1985, 34.

13. The management of uncertainty remains at the heart of defense planning. As Stephen Fruhling notes, “[u]ncertainty and threat are integral components of the concept of the risk, and it is in reaction to strategic risks—risks that arise from, or could be reduced by, the use of armed force—that most countries maintain a defense force.” See Stephen Fruhling, *Defense Planning and Uncertainty: Preparing for the Next Asia-Pacific War* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1. For a broader discussion on the management of uncertainty in defense planning, see Colin Gray, “Coping with Uncertainty: Dilemmas of Defense Planning,” *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 4 (2008): 324-31.

**If done properly, scenario building can help states and organizations refine their anticipative thinking, manage risk, and hedge against uncertainty. Regularly engaging in such mental exercises can fulfill a vital function by providing a form of mental ‘wind tunneling’ or ‘stress testing’ for overly cautious and reactive bureaucracies.**

bureaucracies.<sup>14</sup> The challenge lies in devising scenarios that are both *creative* and *plausible*.<sup>15</sup> As two defense analysts recently noted, scenarios are not meant to be prescriptive so much as diagnostic,

...assisting decision-makers to better understand the security environment by enabling them to examine a set of plausible but different futures that capture the inherent uncertainty in planning efforts, while incorporating predetermined elements.<sup>16</sup>

This essay aims to provide such a diagnostic assessment by briefly laying out two hypothetical crisis scenarios. The first scenario involves an armed confrontation between India and Pakistan that subsequently expands to include China. The (accidental) death of a dozen People’s Armed Police (PAP) personnel in an Indian cross-border artillery barrage into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) triggers Beijing’s direct military involvement following a bloody terrorist attack on the shores of Dal Lake at the height of the tourist season.<sup>17</sup>

The second scenario unfolds in the Arabian Sea and describes Pakistan’s decision to engage in nuclear first use against an Indian carrier strike group steaming toward Karachi. This action — framed by Pakistan as an attempt to “escalate to de-escalate” — occurs amid a state of conflict, with India having conducted a series of standoff airstrikes on Pakistani military positions. New Delhi’s offensive occurs following months of tension during which both nations mass mobilize forces along the LoC. The *trigger event* for this particular crisis becomes the grisly televised execution of ten Indian Para-SF commandos in a village near the Pakistani border town of Kathai.

14. See Paul de Ruijter and Henk Alkema, *Scenario-Based Strategy: Navigate the Future* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

15. As one military historian has noted, “[t]oday as well as in the past, wargame scenario developers draw a fine line to achieve a proper balance of realism and educational relevance. Their conundrum is that the most realistic and detailed scenarios produce results and lessons that are only narrowly applicable. But the broader and more high-level a scenario, the less concrete information can be drawn from it to guide player actions.” See John M. Lillard, *Playing War: Wargaming and U.S. Navy Preparations for WWII* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 8.

16. Andrew Krepinevich and Jacob Cohn, *Rethinking Armageddon: Scenario Planning in the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2016).

17. For more analysis on Chinese perspectives on and historical role in South Asian crises, see Yun Sun and Hannah Haegeland, “China and Crisis Management in South Asia” in this volume.

A tripartite methodology has been utilized as a means of injecting both inner coherence and a certain degree of plausibility. Both scenarios are thus set in the near future (circa 2019/2020) and are grounded in what scenario designers call *predetermined elements*, i.e., preexisting strategic realities that are deemed likely to endure. They also incorporate *ongoing disruptive trends* and detail the various *potential implications* of these evolutions for crisis stability. An overview of the respective structures and assumptions undergirding both scenarios can be found in the two following tables.

**Table 1: The Two-Front Threat Merges into an Extended One-Front Threat**

PREDETERMINED ELEMENTS	ONGOING DISRUPTIVE TRENDS	POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS
A tense Sino-Indian relationship.	Increased Chinese assertiveness leads to heightened tensions. Meanwhile, India's growing proximity to the United States and various Asian democracies becomes a major irritant for Beijing.	A relationship that becomes more openly rivalrous along the Line of Actual Control and in the Indian Ocean.
Pakistan is China's closest military partner.	China invests ever more human and economic capital into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.	The Sino-Pakistani axis becomes more overtly militarized, with China deploying military and paramilitary units within Pakistan to help protect its investments and trade routes.
China enacts repressive policies in its western border regions.	Beijing adopts an ever more iron-fisted mode of governance in Xinjiang, the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and Tibetan ethnic regions in Sichuan and Yunnan.	This exacerbates public hostility toward China in India, where the plight of Tibetans remains an emotive issue. China deploys a growing number of People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police units along its Western borders and intensifies its joint counterterrorism activities with Pakistan.
The Indian Army retains a "two-front" planning construct.	With the growing presence of Chinese forces in Pakistan, this two-front threat is progressively merging into a more unified theater of operations.	With the co-location of Pakistani and Chinese military personnel in certain border regions, it may be harder for India to distinguish between actors when conducting cross-border artillery or stand-off strikes.
China plays an important role as a third party in South Asian crises.	Due to its heightened physical and economic presence in Pakistan, there is a greater degree of Chinese diplomatic involvement than ever before.	This could have both positive and negative externalities for India.

**Table 2: Nuclear First Use and the Quest for Escalation Dominance at Sea**

PREDETERMINED ELEMENTS	ONGOING DISRUPTIVE TRENDS	IMPLICATIONS
There is a conventional power asymmetry between India and Pakistan	This asymmetry will continue to grow and will become particularly stark in the naval domain.	India will increasingly rely on its superior naval power and standoff capabilities for purposes of compellence and/or coercion.
Pakistan relies on battlefield nuclear weapons to offset India's conventional superiority	Pakistan is moving toward the nuclearization of its navy.	Naval interactions between both South Asian neighbors will take place under a nuclear shadow.
Doctrinally, Pakistan favors ambiguity as a means of enhancing its deterrence.	For both practical and deterrence-related reasons, Pakistan puts a growing emphasis on commingling.	This will pose major challenges in terms of target discrimination, and could lead to inadvertent escalation.
Some Indian security managers dismiss Pakistan's threat of first use as a "mere bluff."	Doubts are growing over the sanctity of India's no-first-use pledge, which Pakistan never really believed to begin with. Certain statements by former high-ranking Indian officials suggest India may in the future be moving toward a launch-on-warning posture, raising the possibility in Pakistani minds of Indian nuclear preemption.	Nuclear demonstration strikes at sea may increasingly seem appealing to Pakistani security managers in the event of a crisis, due to the relative absence of collateral civilian and infrastructural damage.
Pakistan seeks what it calls "full-spectrum deterrence," with the ability to range all of India's territories, and conduct a "third strike."	Pakistan's concerns over the second- or third-strike survivability of its arsenal have been amplified by (perceived) Indian strides in ballistic missile defense and space technology, as well as by its intensified cooperation with the United States.	Sea-based vectors of attack and low-flying submarine-launched cruise missiles will appear increasingly attractive to Pakistani nuclear planners.

## Scenario One: The Two-Front Threat Merges into a One-Front Threat

### *The Trigger Event*

On a balmy summer evening in Srinagar, columns of vacationers slowly thread their way around Dal Lake. It is the height of tourist season, and crowds of middle-class Indians seek — like their former British colonial overseers — to escape the scorching heat of the plains for the crisp mountain air. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, with its famed natural beauty and short flight distance from New Delhi, provides a natural holiday destination for thousands of overworked Delhiites and their families. Although the growing influx of tourists has somewhat dented the valley's pre-independence image as a Himalayan Shangri-La, it has also proved to be a stabilizing factor and a major boon to the local economy.<sup>18</sup> Despite spurts of unrest pitting stone-throwing Kashmiri youth against Indian paramilitary and police forces, summer tourism has continued to thrive, particularly in the vicinity of Dal Lake. Dense clusters of city dwellers amble along its shores while packs of local street food and handicraft salesmen jockey for their attention.

18. Over 130,000 tourists visited the state of Jammu & Kashmir in 2016—and this despite an extended period of unrest. See "Nearly 13 Lakh Tourists Visited JK in 2016: Govt," *Kashmir Observer*, April 14, 2017.

Shortly after the call for evening prayer, a detonation echoes across the lake. In some areas, the cries of the hawkers are so loud that survivors later report having not heard the first explosion or having mistaken it for a firework. However, it is soon followed by a second loud explosion and a fiery conflagration, and the grim reality of the situation sets in. A tide of panic washes over onlookers, leading to a frenzied stampede. Meanwhile, four men armed with assault rifles start firing with a cold, methodical precision into the crowds. By the time local police forces succeed in neutralizing the terrorists, over 50 civilians, including 8 young children, are dead. An additional dozen bystanders are wounded, some grievously, in the resulting stampede.

Night falls over Srinagar, and television crews descend like swarms of locusts on the location of the attack. As guttering flames reflect off the inky blackness of the lake, endless scenes of carnage — along with lingering shots of small bodies being carried away on stretchers — play out on Indian television sets.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Indian police and Intelligence Bureau officers comb through the meager possessions of the terrorists. They find a scorched smartphone in a shredded rucksack near one of the bombsites. The following morning, a National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) team dispatched from Delhi discovers that the assailants had been communicating via an encrypted messaging system with an individual they trace back to a Pakistani military facility in Rawalpindi.<sup>20</sup> After demanding that the NTRO specialists reconfirm this information by running another forensic test, India's Cabinet Committee on Security sanctions — as a preliminary retaliatory step — an immediate artillery barrage against a Pakistani military outpost located thirty kilometers across the border. The standoff strike buys India's leadership some precious time as it determines its next course of action.

*The targeted location, assures Research and Analysis Wing officials, is a hidden Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) launchpad. Recent satellite imagery may show the construction of what appears to be a logging camp in the forest nearby, but this is a traditional deception method employed by the ISI — notes one veteran Indian intelligence official — which is simply trying to hide terror camps under the guise of civilian installations.*<sup>21</sup> At dawn, five howitzers and two multiple launch rocket systems open fire in a deafening barrage. Before the smoke has even cleared, a high-altitude Indian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) confirms that three barracks-like structures have been leveled and that several fading human heat signatures have been detected among the ruins. India's leadership

19. For a discussion of how South Asia's rapidly morphing media landscape could affect crisis dynamics, see Ruhee Neog, "Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises" in this volume, as well as the panel discussion, Toby Dalton, Shashank Joshi, Smita Sharma, Huma Yusuf, "Wars of Words? Media and Conflict in South Asia" (panel held at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, Washington, D.C., March 20, 2017), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/20/concurrent-session-ii-wars-of-words-media-and-conflict-in-south-asia-pub-67989>.

20. The National Technical Research Organization is an Indian intelligence agency formed in 2004 and charged primarily with technical and signals intelligence.

21. On the Lashkar-e-Taiba's extensive network of facilities within Pakistan, as well as a discussion of its transnational connections, see Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011).

is in a self-congratulatory mood — the LeT camp has been almost completely destroyed, and a strong message had been sent to its patrons in Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Moreover, the UAV video footage of the strike provides visual proof to the Indian people that their elected representatives are not sitting idle in the wake of yet another act of subconventional aggression.

This sense of satisfaction is short-lived, however. Only an hour or so after the retaliatory strike, a nervous aide enters the Indian prime minister’s office clutching a laptop. Opening the device on the prime minister’s desk, the aide proceeds to play a segment from a Pakistani cable news show. The video shows a young reporter gingerly stepping through the smoking wreckage of the encampment. Her accompanying cameraman suddenly swivels to focus on a twisted cadaver, zooming in on its Asiatic features. As the camera pans out, the Indian prime minister realizes to his horror that the victim is wearing what appears to be a Chinese PAP uniform. Chyrons flash across the screen in Urdu claiming that *in an act of unprovoked savagery, India has killed 12 of Pakistan’s Chinese brothers engaged in peaceful construction activities*. For the first time since a bloody border skirmish in 1967, Indian troops have opened fire on their Chinese counterparts. This time, however, it is wholly accidental.

### *Background and Context: China’s Growing Presence in Pakistan*

This scenario occurs against the backdrop of a growing Chinese presence in Pakistan and under the aegis of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative. With CPEC constituting the flagship project of its grand design for Eurasian connectivity — the Belt and Road Initiative — Beijing has poured ever more resources into Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> These resources are both financial — in the form of vast loans — and physical, via the detachment of large contingents of Chinese workers and paramilitary forces. While Chinese state-owned enterprises operate somewhat differently than they do in Africa, agreeing to employ large numbers of Pakistani workers, they still overwhelmingly prefer to hire their own countrymen for skilled labor and mid-level managerial positions.<sup>23</sup>

This preferential treatment had already generated racial tensions on construction sites and anti-Chinese sentiment in certain regions of Pakistan, where hopes that CPEC infrastructure projects would more directly benefit rural communities have been cruelly dashed. In addition to importing waves of Chinese civilian expatriates, Beijing has decided to increase its paramilitary presence,

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22. For a recent analysis of China’s Belt And Road Initiative, see Nadège Rolland, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Underwhelming or Game-Changer?” *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2017): 127-42.

23. It is estimated that there are approximately one million Chinese citizens in Africa, of which perhaps one-third or more are temporary labor migrants working for and sponsored by Chinese (and in some cases, African) companies on fixed-term contracts of usually one to three years. African labor unions have repeatedly raised concerns over Chinese companies’ preference toward importing large numbers of low-skilled Chinese workers in Africa. When African workers are employed by Chinese state-owned enterprises, they are often poorly treated by their foreign overseers. For a recent and nuanced discussion of China’s economic presence in Africa, see Yoong Jung Park, “One Million Chinese in Africa,” Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), SAIS Perspectives, May 12, 2016, <http://www.saisperspectives.com/2016issue/2016/5/12/n947s9csa0ik6krmkm0bzb0hy584sfo>.

dispatching hundreds of PAP troops to assist in construction efforts and provide better security along key transport and communication lines. These units, often composed of recently decommissioned People's Liberation Army (PLA) servicemen, are principally drawn from the PAP's dedicated capital constructional units or the Hydropower, Communications, and Forestry Corps.<sup>24</sup> Although Islamabad had repeatedly pledged that it will do its utmost to protect Chinese equities in Pakistan — dedicating thousands of armed personnel and raising new formations such as the Special Security Division — Beijing has grown increasingly frustrated with its junior partner following a series of particularly brutal attacks against Chinese engineers and workers in Baluchistan.<sup>25</sup>

After one such incident, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Chunying issues the following statement,

Although our Pakistani friends have made tremendous efforts in the fight against terrorism and extremism, they will require greater assistance from China in order to eradicate this scourge and move more decisively toward a China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny.<sup>26</sup> Following extensive bilateral discussions, we have decided to bring our counterterrorism cooperation to a new level. Under Article 71 of the Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, the Central Military Commission has assigned additional Chinese personnel to assist their Pakistani counterparts in the pursuit of antiterrorism endeavors.<sup>27</sup>

Although the statement is purposely vague, it soon becomes apparent that China has sizably increased its military presence within Pakistan. In addition to the aforementioned paramilitary presence, rapid-reaction units of Snow Leopard commandos are now also stationed in areas deemed insecure for Chinese workers.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, rumors persist that Chinese unmanned systems based in Xinjiang and Aksai Chin have begun to engage in kinetic strikes against nonstate actors located within Pakistan. While such targeted assassinations remain relatively rare, there have been some disquieting instances when seemingly “nonmilitant” members of Pakistan's Uighur community have

24. On the role and composition of the People's Armed Police, see Xuezhong Guo, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Zi Yan, “The Chinese People's Armed Police in a Time of Armed Forces Restructuring,” *China Brief* 16, no. 6 (2016).

25. In May 2015, the Pakistani Parliament announced that a special budgetary allocation was being devoted to the raising of a new “special security division” of nine battalions protecting routes and facilities along the CPEC. This was followed in June 2016 by an announcement that recruitment was underway to raise a force of up to 17,820 personnel to ensure better security. See “Pakistan-Army,” *Jane's World Armies*, April 7, 2017; and “Special Security Division Established to Secure CPEC,” *The Express Tribune*, January 22, 2017.

26. This is a formulation often employed by Chinese officials when discussing CPEC. See, for example, “Congratulatory Messages from H.E. Xi Jinping, President of People's Republic of China to H.E. Mamnoon Hussain, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the Occasion of the 78th Pakistan Day,” Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, March 23, 2017, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng1zbgx/t1448456.htm>.

27. On the implications of China's new Counter-Terrorism Law, which entered into effect in 2016, see Mathieu Duchatel, “Terror Overseas: Understanding China's Evolving Counter-terror Strategy,” European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, October 26, 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/terror\\_overseas\\_understanding\\_chinas\\_evolution\\_counter\\_terror\\_strategy7160](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/terror_overseas_understanding_chinas_evolution_counter_terror_strategy7160).

28. The Snow Leopard Commando Unit is an elite counterterrorism unit of the People's Armed Police. They have been assigned to embassy protection in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq and are increasingly slated to engage in cross border or overseas operations. See Ojavi Goel, “China Seeks to Counter Militancy in Central Asia,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 22, 2016.

been rounded up in raids jointly conducted by Pakistani and Chinese Special Operations Forces (SOF).<sup>29</sup> In late 2018, a Chinese drone strike against an alleged Turkistan Islamic Party cell located in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas kills two high-ranking members of the Haqqani network that had been riding in the same pick-up convoy.<sup>30</sup> In this case, rumors indicate the operation was conducted on China's own initiative with the Pakistanis only informed two minutes before the strike. The growing frequency of such incidents begins to generate friction between Chinese intelligence agencies and certain wings of the Pakistani security establishment.

These tensions rise to the fore following a mass religious rally in Lahore in early 2019. Back in 2016, Hafiz Saeed, the former head of Jamaat-ud-Dawa — an outlawed organization affiliated with LeT — had already begun vocally criticizing Chinese government policies in Xinjiang.<sup>31</sup> Three years later, the Islamist leader, freshly released from house arrest, goes a step further, haranguing the crowd and declaring it *high time for Pakistan to teach our Chinese friends to respect our Muslim brothers and sisters, here and in China and in East Turkistan*. Beijing reacts with cold fury to Saeed's tirade. Over the course of a tense meeting, the Ministry of State Security station chief in Islamabad quietly tells his ISI counterparts to *rein in their barking dog*. Chinese officials appear particularly incensed by the cleric's decision to comment on developments in Xinjiang, along with his choice of wording (East Turkistan). For Pakistan, the confrontation is a reminder that its growing proximity with China presents certain challenges as well as opportunities. As analysts such as Daniel Markey have noted, Islamabad's end goal has never been to become a "junior partner in a tighter Sino-Pakistani alliance" but rather "to enjoy the generous affections of both Beijing and Washington for as long as possible."<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately for Islamabad, its ties with Washington — whether political, military, or financial — have frayed over the past decade, rendering any attempt at equidistance between the two great powers increasingly untenable.<sup>33</sup> As a result, there is a sense in some quarters that Pakistan has become excessively beholden and/or deferential to Chinese interests, particularly in the counterterrorism domain. Chinese operations against Uighurs based in Pakistan, often — but not always — with the cooperation of Pakistani security forces, are already generating domestic

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29. Over the past few years, Pakistan and China have intensified cooperation between their respective special operations forces units, with a particular focus on counterterrorism-related activities. See Fahran Bokhari, "China, Pakistan Complete Seven-Week Special Forces Drills," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, September 18, 2015.

30. On the Turkistan Islamic Party and its ties to South Asia terrorist groups, see Uran Butabekov, "China's Nightmare: Xinjiang Jihadists Go Global," *The Diplomat*, August 17, 2016. On China's approach to the issue, see Martin Purbrick, "Maintaining a Unitary State: Counter-terrorism, Separatists and Extremism in Xinjiang and China," *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 2 (2017): 236-56.

31. For Hafiz Saeed's critiques on Chinese government practices in Xinjiang, see "Hafiz Saeed Slams China after President Xi Jinping Asks His People to Shun Islam," *India Today*, May 31, 2016.

32. Daniel Markey, "The Strange Tale of Sino-Pakistani Friendship," *Asia Policy*, no. 21 (2016).

33. See Ismail Dilawar, "China, Not US, Is Pakistan's New Best Friend If You Go by These Investment Numbers," *The Economic Times*, April 13, 2017; and Pamela Constable, "Pakistan Pivots to China Amid Fresh Concerns over U.S. Ties with India," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2017.

backlash.<sup>34</sup> In August 2019, an open letter is published in *Dawn*, a prominent English-language newspaper. Signed by a dozen (anonymous) Pakistani military officers, it expresses their collective concern over the *increasingly unbalanced nature of the Sino-Pakistani relationship*.<sup>35</sup>

This mindset, however, is not universally shared within Pakistan's security community. In a much-discussed interview with *The New York Times* in late 2018, a recently retired director-general of the ISI, Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar, berates the *eternal fickleness of Washington* before declaring that *the sooner people here realize that China is the only game in town, the better it will be*. These remarks come a few days after a meeting between President Trump and Narendra Modi and a joint Indo-U.S. statement which calls for *a new era in the struggle against radical Islamic extremism, both in South Asia and beyond*.

Many of Mukhtar's colleagues are also of the opinion that a permanent Chinese military presence, particularly if stationed in relative proximity to the LoC, could act as a powerful deterrent to Indian military action in the event of a crisis. For these strategic planners, CPEC represents more than the promise of Pakistani economic rejuvenation. It is also an effective binding strategy that could permanently ensnare Chinese troops within the region.<sup>36</sup> Decision-makers in Beijing are hardly blind to the risks posed by this Pakistani line of thinking. At the same time, many Chinese thinkers take a somewhat different tack, suggesting for example that a deeper Sino-Pakistani relationship might enable Beijing to exert greater control over every aspect of their troublesome ally's security policy — including its relationship with India. Joint Sino-Pakistani patrols along the LoC, for example, could allow China to monitor and deter Pakistani provocative actions against India in real time.<sup>37</sup>

### *A Downturn in Sino-Indian Relations*

Even as China strengthens its security ties with Pakistan, its relations with India steadily deteriorate. The downward plunge in Sino-Indian relations can be explained by a variety of factors. First, certain broader geopolitical evolutions draw attention to widening fault lines in the Indo-Pacific region and exacerbate tensions between both rising Asian powers. India's growing military proximity to fellow Asian democracies has become a major source of irritation to Beijing, as has its increasingly vocal public stances on freedom of navigation. The revival

34. For concerns amongst Pakistan's Uighur community that such policies might materialize in the near-future, see Yuji Kuronuma, "Uighurs Wary as China's Vast Aid Influences Pakistan," *Nikkei Asian Review*, November 16, 2016.

35. For a masterful overview of the various strains Uighur-related issues have put on the Sino-Pakistani relationship, see Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 170-79. For a sense of the scope of China's CPEC-related ambitions, see Khurram Hussain, "Exclusive: CPEC Master Plan Revealed," *Dawn*, June 21, 2017.

36. For an academic discussion of some of these dynamics within asymmetric alliances, see James Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 904-33; and Patricia A. Weitsman, "Intimate Enemies: The Politics of Peacetime Alliances," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 156-92.

37. This counterintuitive point was raised by Indian military officers during conversations with the author. Pointing to the possibility of such patrols becoming a matter of routine, one colonel told the author that, "while it would certainly be of concern for us, it could also have a positive effect. The Pakistanis may behave better if the Chinese are watching." Author's interaction with Indian Army officers at the Center for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi, April 4, 2017.

of the so-called “quad,” or quadrilateral security dialogue, between Australia, Japan, India, and the United States has been greeted with seething hostility by the Chinese state-owned press, which denounces it as *little more than a blueprint for China’s containment*.<sup>38</sup> Tensions reach a head in early 2019 when all four nations decide to engage in extended antisubmarine warfare exercises in the South China Sea. Beijing reacts by dispatching a surface task group from its South Sea Fleet base on Hainan island. The Chinese flotilla aggressively shadows the quad’s naval assets for the duration of the exercise. At one point, a PLA Navy destroyer trains its fire-control radar on an Indian frigate, triggering an official protest from India’s Ministry of External Affairs.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, India’s government grows increasingly frustrated with China’s sustained campaign to deny India’s membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, as well as its refusal to label certain Pakistani jihadi groups as terrorist organizations.<sup>40</sup> The most sensitive bilateral issue, however, remains that of the Sino-Indian border, or Line of Actual Control (LAC). As relations with China become more openly confrontational, Indian security managers point to a marked recrudescence of PLA incursions along certain portions of the LAC, in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh in particular. These incursions, which have occasionally led to protracted standoffs involving hundreds of troops on each side, seem to follow a certain pattern and are timed during diplomatically charged moments. For example, one standoff in the Chumar district, which almost devolves into a minor skirmish, occurs during Prime Minister Modi’s trip to Japan in October 2018. Another large-scale incursion occurs in the middle of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s visit to New Delhi in early 2019. These staged confrontations appear, according to one observer, designed to *impress upon the Indians China’s dominance along the border*.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, China’s growing military strength along the LAC has become a major source of anxiety for Indian defense planners.<sup>42</sup> Concerns were already voiced in 2016 following Beijing’s decision to fold the former Chengdu and Lanzhou military regions into a unified Western Theater Command, with observers noting that these sweeping organizational reforms could enhance the

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38. On the “quad” and prospects for its revival, see Prashanth Parameswaran, “Return of Asia’s Quad Natural: US Defense Chief,” *The Diplomat*, April 9, 2016.

39. It is worth noting that such incidents involving Chinese and Japanese vessels have occurred in the past. See Martin Fackler, “Japan Says China Aimed Military Radar at Ship,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2013.

40. For recent Sino-Indian tensions over India’s bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group membership, see “India, China Trade Barbs over NSG,” *The Wire*, January 19, 2017. On China’s refusal to blacklist certain Pakistan-based militant groups, see “Why Is China ‘Protecting’ the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad Militant Group?” *DeutscheWelle*, February 8, 2017.

41. Former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon has hypothesized that the seemingly deliberate timing of past large-scale incursions (in September 2014 and April 2015) could be explained by China’s desire to establish “psychological dominance” over a new Indian government. See Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India’s Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 25-26.

42. On the evolving Sino-Indian military dynamic along the Line of Actual Control, see Iskander Rehman, “A Himalayan Challenge: India’s Conventional Deterrent and the Role of Special Operations Forces Along the Sino-Indian Border,” *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 1 (2017): 104-42.

PLA's combat performance in the event of a border conflict.<sup>43</sup> Retired Indian intelligence officials remarked that these evolutions could not be viewed in isolation from CPEC and from China's heightened military presence in Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, many of the highest-ranking military officials stationed in the Western Theater Command have jointly trained or exercised with their Pakistani counterparts.

Over the past two to three years, “mass incidents” — a Chinese euphemism for widespread unrest — became ubiquitous throughout China's western border regions. By mid-2019, the few Western journalists with access to Xinjiang describe the climate in ominous terms and as moving toward a *Chechnya-like situation*.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, China's repression in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) grows ever more severe, and smuggled videos of self-immolating monks inundate Indian social media networks.<sup>46</sup> These videos, along with a steady stream of reporting on the deteriorating human rights conditions throughout ethnic minority regions in China, cause widespread outrage in India, where many retain a deep attachment to the Tibetan cause. The Indian media's increasingly vociferous coverage of the situation in the TAR is deemed deeply offensive by the Chinese, however. During one cocktail reception held at the Chinese Embassy, the Chinese ambassador pulls India's foreign secretary aside and quietly exhorts him to *crack down on the Tibetan splittist elements in Dharamsala influencing the Indian media and perturbing the harmony of the India-China relationship*. When the foreign secretary, somewhat startled, explains that the Indian government has little control over the nation's media, the ambassador walks off in a huff, muttering that India is *playing dangerous games*.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Chinese have become increasingly convinced that New Delhi is being duplicitous in its dealings with Beijing over Tibet and that it wishes to exploit the uncertainties surrounding the 14th Dalai Lama's succession in order to weaken Chinese control in the Himalayan border regions.<sup>48</sup> These suspicions grow as the octogenarian monk's health falters in late 2018. They reach a crescendo following his decision to dispatch envoys to several monasteries in India — including Tawang Monastery in the contested state of Arunachal Pradesh — in order to begin the

43. On the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) most recent reforms, see Dennis Blasko, “Integrating the Services and Harnessing the Military Area Commands,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39, no. 5-6 (2016): 685-708. For a sampling of Indian concerns, see Monika Chansoria, “There's a Military Fallout of China-Pak Corridor,” *The Sunday Guardian*, March 11, 2017.

44. Author's interview with Jayadeva Ranade, New Delhi, April 3, 2017.

45. On China's ironfisted policies in its western border regions, see “China's Far West: A Chechnya in the Making,” *The Economist*, August 9, 2014; and Ben Hillman and Gray Tuttle, *Ethnic Conflict and Protest in Tibet and Xinjiang: Unrest in China's West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

46. These videos are often sent clandestinely from Tibet via WeChat, the Chinese social messaging system. Tibetans caught sharing such videos with family members or friends located outside of Chinese-controlled territory are severely punished by local authorities. Author's conversations with Tibetan refugees, Darjeeling and Ghoom, April 7 and 8, 2017.

47. China frequently relays its distaste of India's vibrant media in the course of bilateral discussions with New Delhi.

48. For a good recent analysis, see Ranjit S. Kalha, “The Politics of Reincarnation Will Be the Next Crisis in Sino-Indian Relations,” *The Wire*, April 14, 2017. Following a recent visit by the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh, China's Foreign Ministry castigated New Delhi for “obstinately arranging” the visit, warning that it had caused “serious damage” to bilateral ties. See Ellen Barry, “Dalai Lama's Journey Provokes China, and Hints at His Heir,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2017.

complex process of identifying his successor.<sup>49</sup> In a tersely worded statement, China's Foreign Ministry reiterates that

[t]he Dalai Lama's reincarnation has never been purely a religious matter or to do with the Dalai Lama's individual rights; it is first and foremost an important political matter in Tibet and an important manifestation of the Chinese central government's sovereignty over Tibet. For this reason, since historical times, the central government has never given up, and will never give up, the right to decide the reincarnation affairs of the Dalai Lama.<sup>50</sup>

A follow-up statement warns *foreign and domestic hostile forces...not to meddle in mass incidents in order to intensify contradictions*.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, Indian intelligence reports point to a growing influx of heliborne and mechanized PAP units in Tibet and to a series of "shock and awe" demonstrations of strength in and around Lhasa.<sup>52</sup> These displays of paramilitary strength, while aimed primarily at domestic audiences, raise eyebrows within India's security establishment. Indeed, these heavily armed and mobile units could easily be tasked elsewhere in the event of a cross-border conflict. In April 2019 during the 22nd round of Sino-Indian boundary talks, India's representatives tentatively broach the topic, along with the issue of Chinese paramilitary troop deployments in Pakistan. An Indian proposal to *exchange better information on the deployment of each nation's respective paramilitary forces, including in border regions outside the LAC*, is politely rebuffed by the Chinese, who nevertheless concede that such a proposal *might provide a good additional building block in future negotiations*.

### *The Crisis Unfolds*

Beijing's first reaction to the death of a dozen of its servicemen occurs half an hour after the footage of the incident hits international cable news channels. In a short one-paragraph statement, China announces that it is recalling its ambassador in New Delhi and convening the Politburo Standing Committee in order to *devise a suitable response* based on the recommendations provided by the newly revamped Central National Security Committee.<sup>53</sup> Indian officials' feverish attempts to reach their counterparts in Beijing prove unsuccessful, and their concerns grow when the recently established hotline between the Indian director-general of military operations and his PLA equivalent is

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49. On the complexities surrounding reincarnation politics, and its implications for future Sino-Indian relations, see Iskander Rehman, *Reincarnation Politics and the Tibetan Issue in Sino-Indian Relations* (forthcoming, 2017).

50. This quote is drawn verbatim from a statement made by a Chinese official on the issue in 2015. See, "China Sticks to Right to Decide Reincarnation of Dalai Lama," *Reuters*, November 30, 2015.

51. For a discussion of China's tendency to link ethnic tensions with foreign attempts at subversion, see Jonathan Walton, "China Plans for Internal Unrest: People's Armed Police and Public Security Approaches to Mass Incidents," in *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, ed. Andrew Scobell et al. (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015), 55-85.

52. For one such "shock and awe" demonstration, see "China Stages Another Mass Show of Military Force in Restive Xinjiang," *South China Morning Post*, February 19, 2017.

53. On the potential role of the newly formed Central National Security Committee, and on China's approach to crisis management in general, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 29-71.

abruptly disconnected.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the Chinese media and blogosphere go into nationalistic overdrive. As images of the 12 PAP members, along with their bereaved families, play in a continuous loop on China Central Television, a growing number of angry netizens call on their government *to teach India a lesson*. The young men had been part of the PAP's Hydropower Corps, assigned to provide protection on a hydroelectric power station construction site of the China Gezhouba Group Co. Ltd.<sup>55</sup> One hour after the artillery strike goes public, India's Ministry of External Affairs issues a formal apology for the *Chinese loss of life in this regrettable incident*, assuring the international community that New Delhi had intended to strike *at a group of state-backed mujahedeen* and had *no prior knowledge* of the PAP troops' presence in the area.

Within the Zhongnanhai compound, however, it is determined that such an action — even if unintended — cannot go unpunished. The Chinese people have reacted with intense anger, and Beijing police begin to report a crowd of nationalist protesters streaming into Liangmao Road, overturning some of the barriers the police had placed near the Indian Embassy.<sup>56</sup> Over the past few years, mass protests have grown ever more frequent in China, especially following a series of corruption scandals involving high-ranking party officials.<sup>57</sup> The Politburo Standing Committee is eager to see some of that seething frustration redirected elsewhere. Meanwhile, a new crop of hardliners within the party's ruling elite argue that even though China's response should be *just, advantageous, and restrained*, India's recent actions should not be viewed in isolation from its *hegemonic tendencies in South Asia* or from its recent *playing of games* with China's core interests, especially in places such as Tibet. This crisis, they argue, provides China with an opportunity to enhance the strength of its *overall situation vis-à-vis* its trans-Himalayan neighbor. Once certain punitive actions have been undertaken, high-level contacts could be reinitiated with New Delhi, with the aim of defusing the crisis *from a situation of strength*.<sup>58</sup>

Chinese security managers are confronted with some additional challenges pertaining to the management of their proto-alliance with Pakistan. Chinese intelligence officers have already begun to question why Rawalpindi had seemed so eager to host the PAP detachment in such a sensitive area and in such close proximity to the LoC. Some have even ventured that the ISI voluntarily put Chinese lives at risk in the hope of drawing China into an Indo-Pakistani border conflict. Moreover, Beijing has been made aware that shortly before the terrorist

54. See "China Positive on India Military Hotline Proposal," *Reuters*, April 18, 2016.

55. China Gezhouba Group Co. Ltd is already involved in a number of CPEC-related infrastructure projects. See "Pakistan Taps Chinese Firm for Dam Construction on Indus," *Business Standard*, March 9, 2017.

56. On the role of nationalism and popular protests in Chinese foreign policy, see Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

57. On the pervasive nature of corruption in contemporary China, see Minxin Pei, *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

58. China has often proven reluctant to initiate high-level communication in the early stages of a crisis, particularly when it pertains to perceived territorial issues. See Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analyses* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006).

attack in Srinagar the Pakistan Army's X Corps in Rawalpindi discreetly issued orders to heighten the military forces under its command.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, a battalion of SOF from the Special Services Group is forward-deployed to a forested area in POK abutting India's Poonch District. While it is common practice for Pakistan to strengthen its military presence along the LoC in the event of a terrorist attack on Indian soil, the timing of these movements raises Beijing's suspicions over the Pakistan military's complicity in the Srinagar killings.<sup>60</sup> In private, Chinese officials had previously begun to more forcefully urge Pakistan to abandon its "policy of a thousand cuts" against India, partly out of a fear that the People's Republic of China (PRC) could get sucked into a conflict not of its choosing.<sup>61</sup> Now that these fears have finally materialized, China is intent on asserting itself as the senior partner in the Sino-Pakistani axis and on exerting a great degree of control over the mechanics of the crisis. Pakistani military leaders are told in no uncertain terms that their troops — including the SOF positioned outside Poonch — are not to engage in cross-border operations *unless the situation so warrants it*. Military pressure could and should be applied by moving troops closer to the LoC, but now is not the time to jeopardize the future of the CPEC by turning it into a warzone. Furthermore, China wishes this crisis to remain *nuclear free* — a not-so-subtle means of dissuading Pakistan from engaging in potentially destabilizing nuclear signaling. When the Pakistanis point to the fact that India had also begun to move a strike corps out of Mathura, China assures them that their *deterrence would be buttressed by other additional conventional means*.

In the early morning hours of the following day, units from the PLA's 52nd and 53rd Mountain Infantry Brigades enter Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>62</sup> Accompanied by small heliborne detachments of SOF from the Tibet Military District, they attack several lightly defended Indian forward outposts, rapidly overcoming their small garrisons.<sup>63</sup> After razing the structures to the ground, Chinese forces continue to advance an additional 15 kilometers into Indian territory before setting up a series of makeshift fortifications. The images of PLA troops — some of whom have affixed GoPro cameras onto their helmets — advancing triumphantly into "Southern Tibet" are immediately broadcast on Chinese cable news channels. Set

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59. The X Corps headquarters in Rawalpindi commands units along the Line of Control (LoC) and in Siachen. An elite rapid reaction formation, the 111 Brigade, is placed under its direct command and tasked with countering internal threats or reinforcing frontline units.

60. Since 2012, the Pakistani Army has mandated that 25 percent of its reserves mobilize along the LoC in the event of a large-scale terror attack on Indian soil. See Pranab Dhal Samanta, "New Pak Doctrine: Deploy at Border If Terror Attack in India," *The Indian Express*, January 8, 2012.

61. According to some press reports, China has "indicated a preference for a change of course by Pakistan" in its handling of anti-India jihadi groups. See Tom Hussain, "Has Chinese Pressure Forced Pakistan U-turn on Anti-India Terror Groups?" *South China Morning Post*, October 16, 2016.

62. The 52nd and 53rd Mountain Infantry Divisions are based in Nyingchi in close proximity to Arunachal Pradesh. For a good overview of Chinese forces currently placed under the Western Theater Command, see Kevin McCauley, "Snapshot: China's Western Theater Command," *Chinafile* 17, no. 1 (2017).

63. Although India deploys a large number of troops along the "forward edge" of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), they are dispersed across a vast area, often in small "penny packet" units that cannot easily be reinforced in a timely manner due to the continued paucity of all-weather infrastructure. For "penny packets" and Indian defense officials' concerns over this "LoC approach" to "LAC defense," see Sushant Singh, "China Border Roads Hobbling, 12 Years Later, 21 of 73 Ready," *The Indian Express*, June 11, 2017.

against stirring Maoist anthems with Chinese flags fluttering on dawn-lit mountain ridges in the background, the footage engenders mass enthusiasm in China, with citizens applauding their government's decisive actions.

In the sandstone buildings of Lutyens' Delhi, officials are still reeling under the impact of the past day's events. In the space of a few hours, they have gone from deliberating how best to calibrate their response to an act of terrorism to planning for a full-fledged war against two highly capable adversaries.<sup>64</sup> Early reports suggest that up to 30 Indo-Tibetan Border Police *jawans* had been killed in the early morning assault.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, India's satellite imagery reveals that Pakistan has begun enhancing its border defenses and fueling an armored division in Multan. Even more alarming is the news that the PLA's Hotan-based mechanized infantry division is speeding along the expanded Karakorum highway into northwestern Pakistan. It is followed by Chinese S-300 air-defense batteries, which are being strategically positioned around Pakistani airfields and military installations. On the eastern front, the first troops from the PLA Air Force's 15th Airborne Corps have already landed via Y-20 heavy airlifters at the Lhasa Gonggar Airport, and Indian military planners project that an additional four divisions of ground forces could surge into the theater via high-speed rail within the next few days.<sup>66</sup>

Confronted with such a grim and rapidly evolving security situation, India orders its 17 Mountain Strike Corps, which recently moved its headquarters from Ranchi to Panagarh, to prepare its troops for *immediate hostilities*. Pointing to the large influx of PLA forces expected to soon arrive in theater, India's Air Force chief urges India's civilian authorities to conduct *targeted standoff strikes as soon as possible on select Chinese transportation nodes within the TAR*. India's leadership, however, hesitates to sanction early cross-border air or missile strikes for fear of irredeemably expanding the geographic scope of the conflict. Attention focuses, first and foremost, on how to prevent further enemy advances within Indian territory. In past wars, India had managed to swivel a portion of its forces from one theater to reinforce the other. In 1971, for example, the Soviets had pledged to initiate diversionary attacks against China if Mao decided to intervene directly in support of West Pakistan. This, along with the time of year and weather conditions (India initiated its large-scale military operations in East Pakistan when certain key mountain passes were still snowbound) had led New Delhi to — correctly — assess that the PLA was unlikely to come to

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64. On the tendency by some analysts to underestimate Pakistan's conventional capabilities, see Walter Ladwig, "Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 729-72.

65. The Indo-Tibetan Border Police, which has a total sanctioned strength of 89,340, currently mans 169 border outpost all along the LAC. *Ministry Of Home Affairs Annual Report* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2016), 175.

66. The Y-20, China's indigenous heavy airlifter, entered service in 2016. See Charles Clover, "China's Chubby Girl Transport Aircraft Enters PLA Service," *Financial Times*, July 6, 2016. On the potential role of the PLA Air Force's 15th Airborne Corps in a Sino-Indian conflict, see Iskander Rehman, "A Himalayan Challenge: India's Conventional Deterrent and the Role of Special Operations Forces along the Sino-Indian Border," *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 1 (2017): 111.

West Pakistan's aid.<sup>67</sup> The situation presently faced by India's decision-makers, however, is wholly unprecedented. Troops cannot be swung from one sector to buttress forces in another — the Indian military is facing what appears to be a unified, one-front threat spanning hundreds of miles. Moreover, it cannot rely on an external security guarantor in the vein of the Soviet Union in 1971. Although it has grown closer in recent years to the United States, the relationship remains far short of a formal alliance. The U.S. ambassador has made clear that while Washington would do *its utmost to help defuse the crisis by engaging vigorously with all parties involved*, its assistance to India — for the time being at least — would be limited to intelligence sharing.

Several factors explain the Trump administration's reluctance to come out in stronger support for New Delhi. Unlike in 1962 when President Kennedy had not hesitated to provide military aid to a country he viewed as a democratic counterweight to Chinese communism, it is not immediately apparent that Beijing is the aggressor.<sup>68</sup> For many in Washington, the situation appears a tad murky. After all, this particular crisis has been triggered by India's attack (albeit inadvertent) on a Chinese paramilitary installation. Although a bipartisan grouping of U.S. Senators led by John McCain issue a statement urging that the United States *stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our great democratic partner in Asia* and provide immediate logistical support, the White House remains reluctant to more overtly side with India. Having adopted a somewhat transactional and value-neutral approach to the conduct of statecraft, the Trump administration is less inclined to view the U.S.-India partnership as something that should be valued and nurtured for its own sake.<sup>69</sup> Progress had certainly been made on key issues — ranging from counterterrorism to naval cooperation — but there is a sense that the bilateral relationship has lost some of its former momentum. Meanwhile, rumors persist that the 45th president is frustrated by India's reluctance to rapidly commit to several multibillion-dollar arms deals and by New Delhi's decision to purchase additional French (rather than U.S.) fighter jets. Certain senior foreign policy advisors in the White House also hold out the hope that Beijing could be persuaded to more actively cooperate with Washington on thorny regional issues such as North Korea. They are reluctant to durably jeopardize the Sino-U.S. relationship in favor of some hypothetical grand strategic alignment they never placed much stock in to begin with.<sup>70</sup>

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67. See Anwar Hussain Syed, *China and Pakistan: Diplomacy of an Entente Cordiale* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 152; and Richard Sisson and Leo Rose, *War and Secession: India, Pakistan and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 233-34.

68. On the Kennedy administration's actions during and immediately after the 1962 India-China War, see Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

69. On the 45th U.S. President's transactional approach to statecraft, see Thomas Wright, "Trump's 19th Century Foreign Policy," *Politico Magazine*, January 20, 2016. On the recent de-emphasis of human rights and value promotion in U.S. foreign policy, see Ted Piccone, "Tillerson Says Goodbye to Human Rights Diplomacy," Brookings Institution, Order from Chaos, May 5, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/05/05/tillerson-says-goodbye-to-human-rights-diplomacy>.

70. On the uncertainties surrounding the U.S.-India relationship in the Trump era, see Dhruva Jaishankar, "Making Sense of Uncertain India-U.S. Relations," in "The Advent of the New Administration in the USA: Global and Bilateral Ramifications," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 12, no. 1 (2017): 1-41; and Kanti Bajpai, "Redraw the Triangle," *The Indian Express*, June 30, 2017.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, stress levels are rising. As India's service chiefs — looking increasingly nervous and haggard — struggle to formulate a list of viable military options, the phone rings. India's ambassador in Beijing reports that he just had a conversation with Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi. In the course of the conversation, Councilor Yang relayed the PRC's terms for an immediate ceasefire. First, India must issue another apology for the deaths of the PAP soldiers. Second, its leaders must pledge to restate India's support of the one-China policy at each bilateral meeting. Third, India should never again allow *leading Tibetan splittists* like the Dalai Lama to visit *contested territory such as Southern Tibet*. Last but not least, India should cancel its projected export of BrahMos cruise missiles to Vietnam.<sup>71</sup> Provided New Delhi accedes to all these conditions, Beijing is willing to withdraw all its forces from the occupied ridges in Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to this, Beijing pledges to increase private pressure on Pakistan and to exhort it to crack down on the various groups within Pakistan *that continue to perturb harmonious regional ties and socioeconomic stability*. Following brief deliberations amongst the members of the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security, India's ambassador is instructed to inform Yang Jiechi that New Delhi accepts China's demands on the sole condition that its details are never made public.

### *Aftermath of the Crisis*

Although a major conflict involving three nuclear-armed powers has been averted, India views its leadership's acceptance of China's ceasefire terms as a humiliating display of weakness. Indeed, despite the Indian government's best efforts to conceal the agreement from the broader Indian public, its details are revealed barely six months later in a sensationalistic and best-selling memoir. Penned by the recently retired Indian Air Force chief and entitled *Kowtow — The Day Our Great Nation Bowed to China*, the book savages India's civilian leadership for its alleged *cravenness in the face of Chinese aggression*. This lingering sense of humiliation, along with the feeling of powerlessness experienced by the beleaguered democracy during the two-day crisis, have a significant effect on New Delhi's security policy. In response to the accusations levied by the air force chief, India's national security advisor reveals that *the consensus view* within the Cabinet Committee on Security had been that *waging a protracted two-front war was an untenable proposition in light of India's circumstances*. Army generals point to critical ammunition shortages and to the parlous state of Indian air defenses. It is rumored that the most recent annual report on Indian military readiness estimates that the Indian Army only has enough ammunition for a week of high-intensity conflict.<sup>72</sup>

71. Both countries reportedly recently held talks on the possibility of New Delhi supplying Akash surface-to-air and Brahmos supersonic cruise missiles to Hanoi. See "India, Vietnam Hold Talks on Sale of Akash, Brahmos Missiles," *The Economic Times*, February 3, 2017.

72. On India's severe ammunition shortages see Surya Gangadharan, "Indian Army Fraught with Shortage of Arms, Ailing Fighter Planes," *The Quint*, September 23, 2016; and Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India Looks to Fast-Track Ammo Purchases Worth \$1 Billion," *Defense News*, November 10, 2016.

Meanwhile, Indian Air Force officers take issue with their former chief's bluster, arguing that due to chronic delays preceding the signing of a new medium multi-role combat aircraft deal, India's *remaining active fighter squadrons are simply not up to the task of prosecuting a two-front air campaign*.<sup>73</sup>

In the months following the crisis, leading Indian foreign policy pundits question certain traditional tenets of India's post-Cold War foreign policy, arguing in the columns of the *Indian Express* that the pursuit of strategic autonomy should not be equated with a *dangerous form of strategic solitude*. Although India continues to reject formalized alliance structures, it begins to draw much closer to Japan, Australia, France, and the United States and to entertain the notion of informal security guarantees. Meanwhile, certain aspects of India's nuclear doctrine are questioned.<sup>74</sup> In 2022, an *updated summary* of India's nuclear doctrine is issued to the public. The document makes a few amendments to the 2003 press release, the most noticeable of which regards India's no-first-use policy, which is now qualified in the following terms:

India's Nuclear Doctrine is characterized by a posture of "no first use." Nuclear weapons will be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces elsewhere...However, in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces elsewhere, by biological or chemical weapons, or in the event of a major attack deep within Indian sovereign territory, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons.

The addition of a *major attack deep within Indian sovereign territory* is immediately seized upon by both Indian and foreign analysts and portrayed as a major dilution of India's no-first-use pledge. When pressed on the matter a few years later at an international nuclear policy conference in Washington, D.C., a retired Indian Strategic Forces commander grudgingly concedes that *while India remained committed to no first use, such a change had been deemed necessary due to the transforming nature of the two-front threat*.<sup>75</sup>

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73. On the current challenges facing the Indian Air Force, see Ashley J. Tellis, *Troubles, They Come in Battalions: The Manifold Travails of the Indian Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016); and Rahul Bedi, "IAF's Depleting Assets Preclude Two-Front War Option," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, March 17, 2016.

74. For a detailed analysis of India's current nuclear doctrine, see Shashank Joshi, "An Evolving Indian Nuclear Doctrine?" in *Deterrence Instability and Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon, Joshua T. White, Julia Thompson, and Shane Mason (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2015), 69-95.

75. As S. Paul Kapur has provocatively noted, "India's NFU policy is well suited to a conventionally strong party that can deter, and if necessary defeat, its adversary without resort to nuclear weapons. It may, however, be less well suited to a conventionally weaker party that might need nuclear weapons to blunt a stronger opponent's conventional attack." S. Paul Kapur, "Possible Indian Nuclear Options in 2030," in *Defense Primer 2017*, ed. Pushan Das and Sushant Singh (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2017).

## Scenario Two: Nuclear First Use at Sea

### *The Trigger Event*<sup>76</sup>

The online video is slickly edited and excruciatingly long. Bloodied, seemingly dazed, and with their hands bound behind their backs, eight Indian Para-SF commandos are forced to their knees. An equal number of masked and black-garbed executioners line up behind them and read out a long diatribe in Urdu accusing the *infidels* of having *desecrated the sacred soil of the land of the pure*. Brandishing long knives, they then proceed to decapitate their captives. The ghoulish production — which clearly draws inspiration from the “torture porn” produced by the Islamic State — hits the Indian public like a sledgehammer. Despite New Delhi’s best efforts to scrub it from India’s most trafficked social media websites, the gory footage continues to resurface. Meanwhile, many Indian news channels, refusing to abide by government instructions or the pleas of the victims’ families, continue to show unedited segments of the execution, arguing that such troubling images need to be *shown in the interest of truth*.

This cross-border incident occurs amid an already volatile climate. Over the past three years, relations with Pakistan have reached their lowest ebb in almost two decades. Although this downward plunge could be attributed to a variety of factors, its principal driver has been the dismal state of affairs in Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, after months of mass demonstrations and unrest, things begin to spiral out of control, with some commentators warning that the situation is sliding back into *late 1980s and early 1990s levels of violence*.<sup>77</sup> With a growing number of young Kashmiris trading stones for AK-47s, New Delhi has repeatedly lambasted Pakistan, accusing it of fomenting chaos, infiltrating militants, and providing arms to the young insurgents. Pakistan, on the other hand, has systematically rejected all responsibility, arguing that New Delhi *brought the situation on itself* through its heavy-handed treatment of the local population and repeated human rights violations. This war of words is accompanied by ever-more-frequent artillery exchanges across the LoC. After one particularly intense shelling kills 10 Indian Army soldiers, a platoon of men from the 9th Para-SF battalion is sent across the border and charged with destroying the Pakistani artillery unit that *martyred* their fellow servicemen. Their operation proves a resounding success. Photos of Indian special forces standing over the smoking debris of three Pakistani howitzers are displayed the following day by India’s director-general of military operations, who proudly states that *these images provide indubitable proof that India has, once again, carried out a*

76. For more analysis on triggers and patterns of crisis onset, see Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, “The Anatomy of a Crisis: Explaining Crisis Onset in India-Pakistan Relations” in this volume.

77. At the time of writing, even retired Indian Army generals recognize that the situation in Kashmir is cause for grave concern. See, for example, former Northern Army Commander Lt. Gen. Panag’s commentary in H.S. Panag “Criticism is Needed in Order to Reform the Army,” *The Quint*, April 18, 2017; and Bhanu Mehta, “Sinking Valley,” *The Indian Express*, April 15, 2017. For an early warning of the risks of major unrest, see Sameer Lalwani, “Valley of the Brawls: Tensions Rise in Kashmir,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 11, 2016.

*successful strike against the enemy: a Mandhol 2.0.*<sup>78</sup> Although both countries had long used their SOF to engage in cross-border raids, the Indian government has grown particularly fond of publicizing such operations — provided they are successful — following the post-Uri “surgical raid” of 2016.<sup>79</sup> Despite some analysts’ warnings over of the perils of leveraging sensitive operations for political gain, India’s civilian leadership has come to view such public communication campaigns as an effective and low-cost means of satisfying their electorate’s rawest retributive impulses.<sup>80</sup> The staging of the eight Para-SF commandos’ public execution, barely two weeks after *Mandhol 2.0*, provides a stark and humiliating reminder of the perils of excessively relying on SOF for punitive thrusts across the LoC. Moreover, suspicions have already begun to grow over the identity of the soldiers’ killers after an intense examination of the footage reveals a small patch of colored cloth peering out from under one of the executioner’s black robes. The pattern of the fabric — in mottled green and light brown — appears almost identical to that of a Pakistan Special Services Group uniform. Panels of discussants and alleged “imagery analysis experts” materialize on Indian news shows, with many shouting that the Pakistani Army should be directly punished for what amounted to a serious war crime. A spokesperson for the Pakistani Army dismisses these accusations, claiming that *second-hand army uniforms can be purchased in almost every bazaar from Gilgit to the Kyber Pass* and that *Indian soldiers should not have been violating Pakistani territory in the first place*. Some Pakistani journalists even go as far as to claim that the entire video production is an elaborate false-flag operation by India’s intelligence agencies, which supposedly staged the executions in order to justify its *cycle of aggression against Pakistan and the people of Kashmir*.<sup>81</sup>

For the Indian government, it is clear that something needed to be done. Reluctant to send in any more SOF — for fear of another public relations debacle — the Cabinet Committee on Security approves a series of standoff airstrikes on “terror launchpads” in POK. An additional option of strikes against targets located deeper within the Pakistani heartland is presented to the Indian leadership and briefly considered before being rejected.<sup>82</sup> As night falls over Srinagar, three Su-30MKI aircraft take off from Halwara airfield in the Punjab.<sup>83</sup>

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78. Operation Mandhol was a successful Indian commando raid on a Pakistani artillery unit during the 1971 war. See Ajay Sural, “Operation Mandhol Forced Pakistan to Change War Plan,” *The Times of India*, December 16, 2013. On the 2016 “surgical” strike, see Sushant Singh, “Inside the Surgical Strike: Choppers on Standby, 70-80 Soldiers,” *The Indian Express*, October 1, 2016.

79. On the long and often brutal history of special operations forces cross-border raids, see Shashank Joshi, “Everything That We Know about India’s Cross-LOC Strikes before Uri,” *Scroll.in*, October 5, 2016. For a firsthand account of one such raid, see H.S. Panag “The Lost Operation Against Pakistan in Chorbat LA,” *NewsLaundry*, September 14, 2016.

80. For one such warning, see Abhijit Singh, “Why ‘Surgical Strikes’ Are a Slippery Slope for India,” *The Diplomat*, September 30, 2016. For an example of the enthusiasm expressed in some quarters for surgical strikes, see Arka Biswas, *Surgical Strikes and Deterrence Stability in South Asia* (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2017).

81. South Asia has long been a fertile ground for all sorts of conspiracy theories. On their prevalence in the Pakistani media, see Huma Yusuf, “Conspiracy Fever: The U.S., Pakistan and Its Media,” *Survival* 53, no. 4 (2011): 95-118.

82. On the differences between how Indian Air Force strikes against targets in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and in the heartland might be perceived, see Perkovich and Dalton, *Not War, Not Peace*, 104-34.

83. The Su-30MKI remains the Indian Air Force’s prime “deep strike” asset. A portion of India’s Su-30MKI are slated to be fitted with air-launched variants of the BrahMos missile for standoff strike missions. See Rahul Udoshi, “Indian Su-30MKI Makes Maiden Flight with BrahMos Missile,” *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, June 27, 2016.

Fitted with the air-launched variant of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, they are instructed to conduct standoff strikes on two positions in Pakistan's Bagh district from the edges of Indian airspace. Cruising at high altitude above the range of many of Pakistan's shorter-range air defense missile systems, the three aircraft unleash a volley of missiles at their targets before turning to head back south. Suddenly, one of the Su-30MKI experiences a mid-air engine failure, obliging it to begin a precipitous descent in an attempt to land at Srinagar airport on its one remaining engine.<sup>84</sup> As it descends to an altitude of 18,000 feet, it is hit by a surface-to-air missile (SAM), and its two pilots eject from the aircraft. Drifting with the wind currents, they are blown a few hundred meters into POK, where they are promptly shot by Pakistani Rangers. The SAM fires from a SPADA 2000 battery located one kilometer within Pakistani territory.<sup>85</sup> Even though an aircraft and two ground targets are destroyed and accompanied by the loss of several additional human lives, neither country has yet violated its neighbor's airspace. Although both countries begin mass mobilizing their armored forces along portions of the LoC, neither wishes to trigger actions that could lead to a full-scale ground conflict. Shortly after India begins moving its strike corps from the Indian interior toward its western border, Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations department issues a statement warning India that *any armored columns crossing the border will be immediately incinerated* and that Pakistan will not hesitate to use *all the means at its disposal* — both conventional and strategic — to prevent India from *fulfilling any hegemonic designs on our country*.<sup>86</sup> The heightened, nuclear-tinged rhetoric alarms the international community, and both Washington and Beijing dispatch high-ranking envoys to the region. In their conversations with their Chinese and U.S. counterparts, Pakistan's military leaders indicate a willingness to explore the terms of a ceasefire.

For Indian security managers, however, it is still too early to call it quits. The nation is still up in arms over the execution of the eight special operatives. And with the loss of an aircraft and two pilots, the airstrikes can hardly be framed as a success.<sup>87</sup> While the Indian Army Chief has thundered that it is time to *call Pakistan's bluff* and cross the LoC, there remains another, seemingly more limited, punitive option. Both during the 1999 Kargil War and during Operation Parakram in 2001-2, the Indian Navy had engaged in coercive maneuvering

84. See "Sukhoi Fighter Jets Have Faced Mid Air Engine Trouble, Says Parrikar in Lok Sabha," *The Indian Express*, May 6, 2016.

85. The SPADA 2000, developed by Italy's Alenia Marconi Systems, has a range of approximately 24,000 meters. The Pakistani Air Force selected the MBDA Spada 2000 for its medium air-defense requirements in 2007. See "SPADA," *Jane's Land Warfare Platforms: Artillery and Air Defense*, March 1, 2017.

86. For recent, similarly worded, warnings from the Pakistanis, see Kiran Stacey and Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistan Vows Nuclear Retaliation if India Attacks," *Financial Times*, January 19, 2017.

87. Research in the field of psychology has demonstrated the tendency of decision-makers to escalate commitment to previously decided courses of action even when this may prove unwise and/or irrational. This is commonly referred to as the "theory of sunk costs" in psychology or "escalation commitment" in management theory. See Hal R. Arkes and Catherine Blumer, "The Psychology of Sunk Cost," in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 35 (1985): 124-40; and Theresa F. Kelly and Katherine L. Milkman, "Escalation of Commitment," in *Encyclopedia of Management Theory*, ed. Eric H. Kessler (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 257-59.

in the Arabian Sea, surging elements from its Eastern and Western fleets in a show of force outside Pakistan's portuary hub of Karachi. The Indian Navy had subsequently argued that its "silent role" during the Kargil War demonstrated that it could translate its conventional superiority into coercive power and had provided it with the following precious insights:

Firstly, there will be space and scope to conduct conventional maritime operations below the nuclear threshold. Secondly, a window of opportunity would exist to influence the land battle.<sup>88</sup>

For Pakistani planners, on the other hand, India's blunt naval signaling is a grim reminder of their resource-starved nation's vulnerability to blockade and strategies of commodity denial.<sup>89</sup> Pakistan's growing energy shortages in particular have led to mass protests and widespread concern within the nation's leadership.<sup>90</sup> An unseasonably warm spring has already triggered riots in both Karachi and Islamabad. Only one month prior, angry mobs surrounded the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources, decrying incessant power cuts in the middle of a major heat wave. On the Indian side, there is an underappreciation of the gravity with which Pakistan views these issues. In 2013, a crisis simulation exercise involving both Indian and Pakistani participants was held in Colombo. Following a mass terrorist attack in India, subsequently traced back to Pakistan, the Indian players decided to implement a maritime exclusion zone (MEZ) off Pakistan's Makran coast. They considered this action to be "limited" and "restrained and justified." The Pakistanis, on the other hand, perceived the enforcement of the MEZ as being tantamount to an "act of war."<sup>91</sup> In order, perhaps, to address this lingering perceptual mismatch, Pakistan made a point of reemphasizing the red-line first drawn by Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai — then director of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division — when he had declared in 2002 that "economic strangulation of Pakistan" would constitute one of the conditions under which the nation would consider nuclear use.<sup>92</sup> In 2018, following the designation of two Agosta-90B submarines as *strategic assets*, a Pakistan Inter-Services Public Relations press release thus described the diesel-electric submarines — both equipped with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles — as being the *maritime guarantors of Pakistan's full-spectrum deterrence policy* and *as the protectors of its most vital economic*

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88. See *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Indian Navy, 2007), 23.

89. See, for example, Moeed Yusuf, "Pakistan's View of Security in the Indian Ocean," in *Deep Currents and Rising Tides: The Indian Ocean and International Security*, ed. John Garafano and Andrea J. Dew (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 142.

90. See, for example, Aamir Yasin, "PPP to Launch Countrywide Protest Against Energy Crisis," Dawn, April 19, 2017; and Michael Kugelman, *Pakistan's Interminable Energy Crisis: Is There Any Way Out?* (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 2015).

91. See the summary of the game in Ferroz H. Khan and Ryan W. French, *South Asian Stability Workshop: A Crisis Simulation Exercise* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2013).

92. The conditions under which Pakistan would envisage first use were presented by Khidwai in the following terms: "Nuclear weapons are aimed solely at India. In case that deterrence fails, they will be used if a) India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory, b) India destroys a large part of either its land or air forces, c) India proceeds to the economic strangling of Pakistan, or d) India pushes Pakistan into political destabilization or creates a large-scale internal subversion in Pakistan." Quoted in Paolo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini, *Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Stability, and Nuclear Strategy in Pakistan: A Concise Report of a Visit by Landau Network Centro Volto* (Como: Landau Network Centro Volto, 2002).

*interests.*<sup>93</sup> For many Indian observers, however, Pakistan's first use threats were only deemed credible in the event of a large-scale land war. A former Indian naval chief writing in *The Times of India* scoffs over the possibility that Islamabad *would be willing to break the nuclear taboo simply in order to break a blockade.*

### *Nuclear First Use at Sea*

There are a number of drivers behind Pakistan's establishment of a sea-based deterrent centered around the "Israeli model" of air-independent propulsion diesel-electric submarines (SSKs) equipped with nuclearized Babur cruise missiles.<sup>94</sup>

First, it provides a means of offsetting India's growing conventional superiority at sea. Indeed, according to some metrics, India's Navy now possesses a five to one quantitative advantage over its smaller South Asian neighbor.<sup>95</sup> With its historic focus on sea denial and anti-access, the Pakistan Navy still possesses the ability to blunt its Indian adversary's capacity to project naval power in certain limited quadrants of the Arabian Sea.<sup>96</sup> This ability, however, is rapidly diminishing over time. The threats posed by Pakistan's *maritime nuclear threat in being* along with the strategic ambiguity induced by the systematic commingling of nuclear weaponry with conventional naval platforms could help remedy this situation by eroding the Indian Navy's coercive edge.<sup>97</sup> Forced to operate under a constant nuclear shadow, India's mariners might thus find themselves less inclined toward aggressive action in the event of a crisis.

Second, it buttresses Pakistan's doctrine of "full-spectrum deterrence" by providing additional "second- or third- strike" platforms at sea.<sup>98</sup> Finally, Pakistan's concerns have grown over certain aspects of India's nuclear doctrine (with some former Indian officials seeming to have intimated that India might be moving toward a launch-on-warning posture) and over purported

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93. A number of Pakistani strategists have directly established a linkage in-between Pakistan's embrace of nuclearized naval platforms and their larger neighbor's exercises in naval coercion. For one recent example, see Feroz H. Khan, "The India-Pakistan Nuclear Rivalry at Sea," University of Nottingham, Institute of Asia & Pacific Studies (IAPS), IAPS Dialogue, June 16, 2017, <https://iapdialogue.org/2017/06/16/india-pakistan-nuclear-rivalry-at-sea>.

94. Pakistan recently conducted a successful test of the Babur-3 SLCM. For a succinct overview of some of its implications, see Ankit Panda and Vipin Narang, "Pakistan Tests New Sub-Launched Nuclear-Capable Cruise Missile. What Now?" *The Diplomat*, January 10, 2017.

95. The 5:1 comparison is made in "Pakistan — Navy," *Jane's World Navies*, March 24, 2017.

96. On the Pakistan Navy's sea denial and anti-access capabilities, see Iskander Rehman, "Tomorrow or Yesterday's Fleet? The Indian Navy's Emerging Operational Challenges," in *India's Naval Strategy and Asian Security*, ed. Anit Mukherjee and C. Raja Mohan (New York: Routledge, 2016), 40-45.

97. For more on the commingling challenges posed by Pakistan's quest for a sea-based deterrent, see Iskander Rehman, *Murky Waters: Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indian Ocean* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015); and Rory Medcalf and Brendan Thomas-Noone, *Nuclear-Armed Submarines in Indo-Pacific Asia: Stabilizer or Menace?* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2015), 8-10.

98. Diesel-electric submarines could prove difficult for the Indian Navy to detect and prosecute, particularly if they loitered within Pakistan's cluttered littoral waters. For more on the difficulties innate to antisubmarine warfare in India's underwater environment, see Iskander Rehman, "The Subsurface Dimension of Sino-Indian Maritime Rivalry," in *India and China at Sea: Strategic Competition in the Maritime Domain*, ed. David Brewster (forthcoming, 2017).

Indian advances in ballistic missile defense.<sup>99</sup> New Delhi's growing closeness with Washington has also generated anxiety in Rawalpindi's Strategic Plans Division, where some are convinced that the United States is providing India with geospatial intelligence on the location of its nuclear assets. Sea-based vectors of attack — in the form of low flying, submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) — thus began to appear increasingly appealing to Pakistani nuclear planners.<sup>100</sup>

By the time India steams the vanguard of its naval armada, composed of one aircraft carrier, the INS *Vikramaditya*, six destroyers, two frigates, and one nuclear attack submarine, into the waters surrounding Karachi, two Agosta 90B SSKs and one newly acquired Chinese-designed Yuan class SSK are lying in wait. All three undersea platforms have been recently fitted with Babur SLCMs by Pakistan's Naval Strategic Forces Command. Pakistani decision-makers grow increasingly concerned that India is moving toward escalation dominance. The Indian Army chief's statements on the need to *call Pakistan's bluff* cause anxiety, as does China's decision to begin evacuating its forces from Pakistan. Despite Islamabad's entreaties, China refuses to commit military forces to any large-scale confrontation with India and limits its aid to supplies in weaponry and ammunition. Meanwhile, Pakistan's nuclear-veiled threats are not met with any reduction in Indian troop presence along the border. To the contrary, India continues to mass its heavily armored strike corps along the areas of the LoC most conducive for mechanized assault.

A consensus emerges within Pakistan's National Command Authority. India needs to be sent a strong signal — one that will restore the *preexisting deterrence equation* and eternally dissuade India from any attempt at *dismembering Pakistan*. A nuclear *demonstration shot* at sea, argues the Pakistani army chief, would be *a form of localized escalation enabling a more generalized de-escalation of the situation*. He is staunchly supported by the head of the Pakistan Navy, who is eager to see his traditionally overlooked service take on a greater role.<sup>101</sup> Both men argue that such a move will revive the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear posture while avoiding some of the terrible collateral and fratricidal effects of nuclear

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99. These concerns were first mooted in the wake of a heated controversy surrounding passages of a book written by a former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon. On said controversy, see the remarks made by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Vipin Narang at the 2017 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, video footage available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/20/plenary-beyond-nuclear-threshold-causes-and-consequences-of-first-use-pub-64779>; the debate and prepared remarks on SAV, "#NukeFest2017 Hot Takes: Potential Indian Nuclear First Use?" *South Asian Voices*, March 20, 2017; and Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland, "The Debate Over Indian Nuclear Strategy Is Heating Up," *War on the Rocks*, April 5, 2017. For a different perspective on the issue, see Dhruva Jaishankar, "Decoding India's Nuclear Status," *The Wire*, April 3, 2017. On recent purported advances in India's tiered ballistic missile defense shields, see Rahul Bedi, "Indian Interceptors Complete Latest Trials," *Jane's Missiles and Rockets*, March 7, 2017.

100. High-speed cruise missiles may succeed in penetrating missile defense systems designed to counter more conventional ballistic missile threats. Low-flying cruise missiles pose a greater challenge for radar detection and can rapidly maneuver in order to dodge interception. For a good overview, see Thomas G. Manken, *The Cruise Missile Challenge* (Washington, D.C., Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2005).

101. The Pakistan Navy has historically been the most neglected of Pakistan's armed services. Although its financial allocation has marginally increased over the past few years, it still only captured 10.8 percent of the overall defense budget in 2017. Author's calculations derived from the data compiled in Craig Caffrie, "Pakistan: Defense Budget," *Jane's Defense Budgets*, June 20, 2017.

weapons use on Pakistan's own soil.<sup>102</sup> This strike, the army chief adds, could be both *devastating* and *tailored to prevent the mass loss of civilian life*.<sup>103</sup>

At 10:30 a.m. the following day, the Pakistan Navy issues a final ultimatum to the Indian armada, demanding that it lift its blockade within half an hour or *face the consequences*. At 11:01 a.m., a multi-azimuth cruise missile saturation strike, cued by Uqab II UAVs, is directed at the INS *Vikramaditya* and its two closest Rajput destroyer escorts. The *Vikramaditya's* Barak-I missile defense system is rapidly overwhelmed by the flurry of missiles and within five minutes the flagship suffers its first hit from a shore-based C-802 missile.<sup>104</sup> Then, at 11:07 a.m., amid a dense cluster of Harpoon missiles launched from two Pakistani frigates, the nuclear warhead of a Babur class SLCM detonates above the *Vikramaditya's* prow in a blinding flash of light.<sup>105</sup>

### *Aftermath*

The effects of Pakistan's nuclear strike are devastating. Although Indian defense planners have long recognized that a continental struggle could escalate beyond the nuclear threshold, they only had just begun to ponder the battlefield ramifications of Pakistan's naval nuclear program. Much of their planning for maritime combat was still predicated on the notion that a future naval conflict would remain conventional in its application. As a result, the Indian Navy had insufficiently exercised in simulated chemical, radiological, biological, and nuclear environments, and their capital ships — in many cases not fitted with any radiation-hardened electronic circuitry — failed to engage in the levels of “battlespacing” deemed suitable for operations against an opponent armed with tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>106</sup>

In a fraction of an instant, the nucleus of the densely concentrated Indian fleet formation is neutralized — with its ships either directly destroyed or

102. For a discussion over whether the potential collateral effects of Pakistan's reliance on tactical nuclear weapons renders their use less likely in a conflict, see Christopher Clary, Gaurav Kampani, and Jaganath Sankaran, “Battling Over Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 166-77.

103. Both Soviet and U.S. strategists frequently made this argument during the Cold War, assessing that limited nuclear war was more likely to occur at sea. See, for example, Henry Kissinger, “Limited War: Conventional or Nuclear? A Reappraisal,” *Daedalus* 89, no. 4 (1960): 800-17, and Desmond Ball, “Nuclear War at Sea,” *International Security* 10, no. 3 (1983): 3-31.

104. At the time of writing, the INS *Vikramaditya* has only been fitted with the Barak-1, a short-range, point defense system that most Indian naval officers deem highly inadequate to protect such a high-value target. See Rahul Bedi, “Indian Navy Launches Barak-1 From Carrier,” *Jane's Missiles and Rockets*, March 30, 2017.

105. Military operations analysts have referred to such saturation strikes as “haystack attacks,” whereby an adversary with relatively few nuclear weapons but a robust missile inventory could threaten even well-defended targets with nuclear strikes. By mixing nuclear-tipped weapons among a salvo of conventionally armed missiles of similar design, the adversary complicates the defender's ability to prioritize targets for interception. See Ryan Boone “Appendix A: Haystack Attack,” in Krepinevich and Cohn, eds., *Rethinking Armageddon*. For a detailed and still relevant overview of the effects of tactical nuclear weapon use, including at sea, see Samuel Glasstone and Philip J. Dolan, *The Effects of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Energy, 1977), available at <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a087568.pdf>.

106. For a good overview of the complexities of naval combat in the nuclear age, see Gordon H. McCormick, *Problems of Sea Control in Theater Nuclear War* (Arlington: System Planning Corporation, 1980), available at <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a090489.pdf>. For a discussion of these issues within a South Asian context, see Rehman, *Murky Waters*, 25-33.

rendered combat incapable through the irradiation of their electronics.<sup>107</sup> Only the Akula class attack submarine loitering outside of the Pakistani submarine base of Ormara further along the Makran coast remains operational. The INS *Vikramaditya*, the pride of the Indian Navy, is at the bottom of the ocean along with its wing of Mig-29K fighters and its crew of over 1,000 men. India's shell-shocked leaders begin to debate their nuclear options. After much deliberation and handwringing, New Delhi realizes that it has no good options. India's nuclear doctrine calls for massive retaliation and for counter-value strikes on enemy metropolises in the event of Pakistani first use. India's leadership cannot countenance responding to limited — albeit devastating — nuclear use against purely military targets with the mass slaughter of Pakistani civilians. Moreover, such an action immediately opens its own population to an equally apocalyptic Pakistani counterstrike. The infirmities built into the nation's nuclear doctrine have already been scrutinized by Indian thinkers such as the late P.R. Chari, who had argued a few years prior that,

The current nuclear doctrine dictates that nuclear retaliation against a first strike would be “massive” and designed to inflict “unacceptable damage upon the attacker.” This is an unrealistic certitude because, ethically, punishing large numbers of noncombatants contravenes the laws of war. Besides, threatening massive retaliation against any level of nuclear attack, which would inevitably trigger assured nuclear annihilation in a binary adversarial situation, is hardly a credible option. No doubt, it raises a ticklish question: would India then favor a counterforce or counter-city strategy? India's stated adherence to an assured and massive second strike suggests the latter.<sup>108</sup>

If India had built greater flexibility into its nuclear posture and force structure, it could have chosen to engage in a somewhat proportionate and equally “limited” strike against a set of Pakistani military targets in a geographically circumscribed area (maybe in a mountainous region so as to limit the blast effects and radioactive fallout or at sea). Its arsenal, however — whether in terms of delivery platforms or low-yield nuclear ordnance — is not configured for such a response. India is in effect stuck in a strategic impasse, teetering precariously on the highest rung of the escalation ladder.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, the international community, appalled by the first use of nuclear weaponry since World War II, exhorts India to back down before the

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107. For a summary of the various chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear survivability levels levied on U.S. surface combatants, see Department of the Navy, “OPNAV Instruction 9070. 1A: Survivability Policy and Standards for Surface Ships and Craft of the U.S. Navy,” 2012, <https://doni.daps.dla.mil/Directives/09000%20General%20Ship%20Design%20and%20Support/09-00%20General%20Ship%20Design%20Support/9070.1A.pdf>.

108. See P.R. Chari, “India's Nuclear Doctrine: Stirrings of Change,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 4, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/06/04/india-s-nuclear-doctrine-stirrings-of-change-pub-55789>.

109. During the Cold War, strategists famously dubbed this quandary the “suicide or surrender” dilemma. For more on this issue, see Stephen D. Biddle and Peter D. Feaver, eds., *Battlefield Nuclear Weapons: Issues and Options* (Boston: Harvard Center for Science and International Affairs, 1985).

subcontinent is vitrified and turned into a radioactive wasteland. Washington, Moscow, and even Beijing all privately promise New Delhi that Pakistan will be “hit with crippling sanctions” for having broken the nuclear taboo. Islamabad, they insist, will be the eternal pariah and India the responsible power. Short of options and fearful of the terrible consequences of what few choices remained, New Delhi reluctantly agrees to enter a negotiated ceasefire.

## Conclusion

It is this author’s hope that both of these scenarios will provide policymakers — whether in South Asia or beyond — with food for thought and hopefully not too many nuclear nightmares. Due to a desire for concision and limitations of space, they are both naturally somewhat circumscribed in their depictions of potential escalation dynamics. Furthermore — and to paraphrase Shakespeare — man cannot look into the seeds of time and determine which particular grain may grow and which may not.<sup>110</sup>

This exercise should therefore be viewed first and foremost as a point of departure for further reflection and as an attempt to grapple with two major evolutions in South Asia’s security architecture. The first is China’s rapidly enhanced presence and involvement in Pakistan via the implementation of CPEC. The second is the advent of rudimentary sea-based nuclear forces. As seen here, these two trends will have major ramifications for China’s management of its complex ties with Pakistan, Pakistan’s relationship with certain nonstate actors, India’s own relationship with China, and last but not least, regional nuclear doctrines and force postures.

Scenarios and wargames are used to develop insights rather than provide ready-made answers, and as a manner to escape the “intellectual tyranny of the present.”<sup>111</sup> The future is a river with an almost endless flow of tributaries, and one could naturally conceive of a number of “minority reports” in which one of the state actors depicted in this essay chooses to behave differently. One could certainly argue that if something approaching one of these scenarios were to materialize, India’s political leadership may well prove to be a lot less conservative in its decision-making and much more willing to incur escalatory risks. As specified in the introduction, the vignettes presented here are intended to be diagnostic rather than prescriptive and as forming a set of equally plausible yet different futures.

And indeed, the two futures presented in this essay were markedly different in many ways. One scenario presented a Kashmir that was still afflicted by terrorism but that remained stable enough to accommodate mass tourism, another depicted a state that had fallen into an endless spiral of violence and unrest. At the time of writing, both futures, sadly, seemed equally likely. The first scenario depicted a Sino-Pakistani axis that had morphed into a military proto-alliance,

110. See Act I, Scene 3 of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

111. Woody Wade, *Scenario Planning: A Field Guide to the Future* (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2012).

**Scenarios and wargames are used to develop insights rather than provide readymade answers, and as a manner to escape the 'intellectual tyranny of the present.'**

while its successor portrayed a Beijing somewhat less ensnared in the daily dysfunction of the Indo-Pakistani relationship. Both narrative efforts, however, point to a set of wider questions: will greater third-party security commitments in the form of an enhanced Chinese military presence reduce Pakistan's incentives for relying on the threat of nuclear first use, intensify Sino-Indian rivalry, or both? And what of the role of nonstate actors and proxies within this rapidly morphing regional security environment? As one Asia hand recently noted in an insightful study, the use of traditional militaries,

activates instrumental logics of either deterrence or battlefield efficiency between competitors. Intermediaries (in the form of proxies) by contrast, do not activate such logics as readily, which...is one of the reasons their presence can both "stack the deck" of interaction in favor of defender restraint and can generate distinct risks of miscalculation and blowback.<sup>112</sup>

As Beijing becomes increasingly enmeshed — both economically and militarily — within India's near-abroad, will it still be willing to tolerate such risks of miscalculation and/or blowback? Or will it add greater pressure on the Pakistani security establishment and more vigorously urge it to abandon its support of various malevolent nonstate actors? Will Pakistan's pursuit of sea-based deterrence lower its threshold for nuclear first use even further? Will it deter the Indian Navy from pursuing coercive strategies in times of conflict and/or crisis? How will naval friction play out in a newly nuclearized domain? How would another humiliating defeat against China along the LAC affect India's future conventional and nuclear force posture and planning? In each of these cases, it is impossible to provide any definitive answer. At best, one can aim to carefully think through some of the more likely — and in some cases troubling — possibilities.

In the course of the essay, different forms of escalation were thus explored — inadvertent, intentional, horizontal, and vertical. In one scenario, the nuclear-conventional firebreak was preserved, in the other it crumbled. In this author's mind, none of these differences render either of these potential futures somehow less likely or less worthy of examination.

At the end of the day, though, Yogi Berra had it right. It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future.

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112. Van Jackson, "Tactics of Strategic Competition: Gray Zones, Redlines, and Conflicts Before War," *Naval War College Review* 70, no. 3 (2017): 39-62.



# NEW CHALLENGES FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

*Michael Krepon*

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The risk of a serious crisis between India and Pakistan escalating into a major military conflict is ever present. Diplomatic relations between New Delhi and Islamabad are badly strained. Talks on crucial subjects are on hold, while nuclear capabilities are expanding. Indicators of concern include the high level of civil unrest in the Kashmir Valley, infiltration along the Kashmir divide, and regular fire fights between Indian and Pakistani forces, including the use of artillery, mortars, and small arms.

The refusal of Pakistan's military and intelligence services to shut down anti-India extremist groups, most prominently Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), further aggravates tensions and invites future flash-points for conflict. Pakistan's military and intelligence services deny complicity in JeM's and LeT's cross-border operations, but these professions of innocence lack credibility in foreign capitals because infiltrators often need diversionary fire and other kinds of help. Moreover, Pakistani military commanders are expected to be aware of what transpires in their areas of control.

A major terrorist attack on a soft Indian target — iconic government buildings or monuments, religious shrines or temples, international airports, luxury hotels, and other symbols of India's economic transformation — could spark another conflict. Alternatively, events in Kashmir, military clashes along the Line of Control (LoC) dividing the old princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, or a scenario that has not yet figured prominently in enmity between Pakistan and India could trigger the next crisis on the subcontinent. Whatever the triggering mechanism, another severe crisis would pose serious challenges to U.S. national security interests of preventing uncontrolled escalation and the detonation of nuclear weapons. A serious crisis could also interfere with Washington's interests in continuing the upward trajectory of its ties with India, while maintaining sound working relations with Pakistan where interests overlap.

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**U.S. crisis management might be envisioned as a “playbook” offering lessons and management techniques learned from previous crises.**

U.S. crisis management might be envisioned as a “playbook” offering lessons and management techniques learned from previous crises.<sup>1</sup> This playbook can take physical form, with an outgoing administration providing its successor with files of its best judgments on how to deal with another crisis and the possibility of uncontrolled escalation. Of course, an incoming administration has every right to revise this playbook as it sees fit. It can also question fundamental assumptions about obligatory active U.S. crisis management. Indeed, a playbook cannot be static because the underlying circumstances and context of the next crisis between Pakistan and India will likely be different than the last. U.S.-India relations are in the process of transformation, as are China-Pakistan relations. Adapting a playbook to account for these shifts would reflect sound statecraft. A crisis management playbook is not a public document. The one outlined below is wide-ranging and suggestive.

Section one of this essay outlines contingencies for future India-Pakistan crises and identifies indications and warning signs to focus on. Section two reviews how another crisis could affect U.S. strategic and regional interests. Section three catalogues mechanisms in a notional U.S. crisis management playbook that could be adapted for use in the next crisis.

## Contingencies and Warning Signs

One of the two most likely India-Pakistan crisis contingencies that could lead to war involves strikes against iconic targets in India by cadres of groups that have enjoyed safe havens in Pakistan. Severe crises in the past have been triggered by their attacks on the Indian Parliament building in 2001 and on several targets in Mumbai in 2008. There is no shortage of iconic targets within India, including government buildings and monuments, religious gathering sites, shrines and

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1. Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2014); Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *The Unfinished Crisis: US Crisis Management after the 2008 Mumbai Attacks* (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012); Michael Krepon, “Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences,” in *Crises in South Asia: Trends and Potential Consequences*, ed. Michael Krepon and Nathan Cohn (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, September 2011), 20-26.

temples, international airports, luxury hotels, and other symbols of India's economic transformation. Hindu extremists could also spark a crisis by attacking iconic Muslim religious edifices — like the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, which prompted bombings of the Bombay Stock Exchange and other targets the following year.

The second most likely contingency that could lead to a severe crisis and perhaps war is widespread violence in the Muslim-majority tinderbox of the Kashmir Valley. Public disaffection from Indian rule is extremely high, exemplified by stone-pelting youth and the firing of pellet guns by Indian security forces that have blinded demonstrators. India's coalition government in Jammu and Kashmir has ruled heavy-handedly and seems unable to make amends with the majority of the population. As civil unrest grows, militant cadres based in Pakistan whose *raison d'être* is to free "occupied" Kashmir usually increase their infiltration rates, and firefights could intensify between military units along the Kashmir divide.

When bilateral relations deteriorate badly, it is not unusual for firing along the LoC to escalate, for border posts to be increasingly overrun, and for violent extremist groups to engage in increasingly ambitious raids. To stem this progression, Prime Minister Narendra Modi authorized "surgical strikes" across the Kashmir divide in September 2016 after cadres belonging to JeM struck an Indian military base in Uri. In doing so, Modi appears obliged to react in similar fashion after due provocation, while Pakistan's armed forces are likely to feel obliged to respond with "befitting" responses.

Commando raids across the LoC are not new; publicizing them is. Perhaps caught off guard, Rawalpindi did not respond immediately to Modi's announcement. Instead, Pakistan questioned its veracity while upping the ante with artillery fire and small unit operations along the Kashmir divide. New Delhi responded in kind. For whatever reason, Rawalpindi was willing to give one "pass" to Indian surgical strikes. If New Delhi again reacts assertively to provocations in the future, Rawalpindi is very likely to as well, because not to do so would constitute a loss of face. The use of drones, helicopters, and perhaps even combat aircraft to accompany cross-LoC raids could enter the picture, complicating escalation control efforts.

Further up the escalation ladder is the Indian Army's "Cold Start" doctrine of shallow penetrations of Pakistani territory in places of India's tactical advantage and choosing. The mobilization of Indian integrated battle groups along attack routes into Pakistan would, at least according to Indian military plans, proceed quickly to pre-empt Rawalpindi's military and Washington's diplomatic countermoves.

Rawalpindi has demonstrated ways to foil the Indian Army's plans. It has flight tested capabilities to employ short-range — or (in Western parlance)

“tactical” — nuclear weapons to deter India’s Cold Start military plans. To illustrate the seriousness of its deterrent, Pakistan has announced its readiness to use nuclear weapons first, if necessary, even on Pakistani soil. Indian leaders, in turn, have articulated and reaffirmed a doctrine of massive retaliation. They assert that a single detonation on or near a battlefield could trigger a catalytic response.

A scenario that has not yet figured prominently in crises between Pakistan and India could also spark a major confrontation, such as deadly attacks on Indian consulates in Afghanistan or attacks carried out by deeply disaffected Indian Muslims — perhaps in collusion with Pakistan-based groups — in response to policies pursued by the Modi government. Pakistan has its own litany of complaint about India’s actions, particularly in Afghanistan and Baluchistan. To date, however, crises on the subcontinent have been triggered along the primary fault lines of India-Pakistan enmity, not in peripheral areas.

Warning indicators for the increased likelihood of the two primary contingencies — an attack on an iconic target in India and frustration by Kashmiri Muslims opposed to Indian governance boiling over — are virtually the same. These indicators are straightforward, readily monitored, and hard to miss. They include the number of attempted LoC crossings from the Pakistani side, the level and intensity of firing across the Kashmir divide, the extent of commando operations to overrun posts, the desecration of bodies, announcements of such operations after the fact (perhaps accompanied by dramatic footage), and “befitting” military responses. Several of these indicators are already evident.

The number and scope of attacks on religious processions, gatherings, temples, or mosques are important indicators of a downward spiral. The bloodier the attack, the more likely it could prompt a strenuous reaction. The most egregious, but far from the only, case of targeting a religious site was the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, by a mob incited by leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliates. Retaliatory attacks in Bombay the next year resulted in over 250 fatalities, including the bombing of the Bombay Stock Exchange. Further examples of soft targets include numerous religious temples in Varanasi, a holy city within the parliamentary district represented by Modi. Within India, there is a trend of increased targeting of places of worship, mostly directed at mosques.

The 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament building occurred after a progression of smaller-scale attacks culminating in the truck bombing of the State Assembly building in Srinagar. This attack did not elicit a reaction by New Delhi. The incidence and patterns of militant attacks against India can provide important indicators of bigger explosions to come.

**In the absence of active U.S. diplomacy seeking to improve India-Pakistan relations, the most useful tool for preventing another severe crisis on the subcontinent might well be U.S. intelligence collection and sharing.**

If a crisis becomes serious enough to trigger preparations for a limited conventional war, key indicators would include troop movements from garrisons and heavy equipment from storage areas. Military doctrines are spring-loaded to take offensive or blocking action. Time is of the essence to gain military advantage and to foil opposing military logistical gains. An intense crisis and perhaps warfare are in the offing if civil traffic on railways is subordinated to military needs and if ammunition accompanies troops to fighting corridors. Movements of nuclear-capable delivery vehicles to satellite bases or toward fighting corridors would be particularly ominous, as would the stand-down of aircraft operations to achieve peak readiness as a crisis builds.

Attempts to improve bilateral relations could also prompt explosive reactions. The most notable example so far was then Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's trip to Lahore to improve ties after the 1998 nuclear tests. Pakistan's military leadership's rejoinder was to send Northern Light Infantry troops across the Kashmir divide, triggering the 1999 Kargil War. On three occasions, Prime Minister Modi has tried to employ gestures to improve ties with Pakistan, only to be rebuffed by forays carried out by anti-India groups against Indian diplomatic and military outposts.<sup>2</sup> As long as Pakistan's security apparatus views a normal neighborly relationship with India as inimical to its interests, it can easily utilize proxies to disrupt diplomatic progress.

## **Implications for U.S. Interests**

Regardless of how a future crisis is sparked, the failure of escalation control could have dire consequences for the region, for reducing nuclear dangers globally as well as regionally, and for U.S. national security's regional and strategic interests.

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2. Prime Minister Modi's invitation to Prime Minister Sharif to attend Modi's inauguration (2014), India and Pakistan's joint statement condemning terrorism (2015), and Modi's surprise Christmas Day visit to Lahore (2015) were all followed by terrorist attacks against India within days. Michael Krepon, "Kashmir and Rising Nuclear Dangers on the Subcontinent," *Arms Control Wonk*, January 17, 2017.

**In theory, one way to prevent the next crisis on the sub-continent would be to assist in a diplomatic settlement of the Kashmir dispute. In reality, Washington has neither had the power nor the interest to do so.**

Great damage to U.S. strategic interests would result if escalation was uncontrolled and nuclear weapons were used on a battlefield for the first time since 1945. If the “nuclear taboo” were broken, the global nuclear order would be badly shaken. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is likely to suffer significant further weakening. A resumption of nuclear testing by several states could also follow. The environmental and humanitarian consequences of the battlefield use of nuclear weapons could be severe depending on how many and where the detonations occur, placing a premium on crisis managers to intervene quickly under extraordinarily intense pressures.

A second U.S. strategic interest is to prevent the theft and unauthorized use of nuclear materials and weapons. During intense crises, nuclear assets are likely to be moved to avoid being targeted, to signal Pakistan’s military resolve, and (from Pakistan’s perspective) to focus Washington’s attention on crisis management. Nuclear safety and security are subject to compromise when nuclear assets are moved. The theft of a nuclear warhead or fissile material by an extremist group could result in nuclear-armed terrorists targeting the United States and other states.

A severe crisis between India and Pakistan has the potential to worsen U.S. ties with both countries, as well as China. Alternatively, a crisis could reaffirm stronger ties with India, clarify further the costs of Pakistan’s ties to extremist groups, and deepen a pattern of cooperation with Beijing on regional crisis management. Maintaining strong ties to India, sound working relations with Pakistan on matters of mutual interest, and a crisis management partnership with China are important U.S. regional security interests.

Having strengthened its political and defense ties with Washington, New Delhi now expects the United States to be an ally rather than an “honest broker” in a future crisis, in addition to de-escalating tensions with Pakistan. Washington would, in turn, require Beijing’s help to defuse the crisis, rather than backing Pakistan in ways that make crisis management and de-escalation more difficult.

Strong and effective U.S. crisis management efforts could yield dividends elsewhere. Other allies in other regions would be monitoring U.S. crisis management efforts on the subcontinent to draw conclusions and set expectations in the event that a crisis erupts in their own regions.

### *The Limits of U.S. Diplomacy*

U.S. diplomatic initiatives have not laid the conditions for crisis prevention on the subcontinent, let alone conflict resolution. Nor have Indian and Pakistani diplomatic initiatives. In theory, one way to prevent the next crisis on the subcontinent would be to assist in a diplomatic settlement of the Kashmir dispute. In reality, Washington has neither had the power nor the interest to do so. If Washington were to wade into the Kashmir morass when conditions were not amenable for success, the situation on the ground would likely worsen — even if such an initiative were acceptable to New Delhi, which is extremely unlikely.

If Pakistani and Indian leaders do not have the interest or political will to resolve the Kashmir dispute, Washington will not be able to manufacture either commodity. The best preventive options for another serious Kashmir crisis are improved Indian governance and far more restrictive rules of engagement for Indian security forces. Although Washington could quietly encourage New Delhi to take positive steps in this direction, only New Delhi can pursue these initiatives.

Washington's leverage on Pakistan to take fundamental shifts away from violent anti-India extremist groups was never greater than immediately after the 9/11 attacks and the 2001 Parliament attack, but promises by Pakistan's military leader at the time, General Pervez Musharraf, to rein in these groups were short-lived. Pakistan's military and intelligence services have so far apparently concluded that the costs of cutting ties with perceived strategic assets remain greater than the reputational costs of maintaining existing links. (A very different calculus has been applied to the Tehrik e-Taliban Pakistan, which has trained its fire against the state.) The absence of a major attack on an iconic Indian target since 2008 suggests the possibility that Pakistan's military and intelligence services have worked out understandings with groups such as the JeM and LeT to conduct operations on a much lower scale. Scales of violence can, however, become sliding.

The success of previous U.S. crisis management efforts has been possible because Indian and Pakistani leaders have wished to avoid war and escalation. In the crucible of the 2001-2 Twin Peaks crisis and the deeply embarrassing (to Pakistan as well as India) 2008 Mumbai crisis, Indian prime ministers of two very different coalition governments concluded that the prospect of battlefield gains could not justify the risks of escalation and to national economic growth. In these two crises, New Delhi's decisions to stand down were facilitated by

pledges elicited by U.S. crisis managers from Pakistan's military leaders to shut down anti-India extremist groups. But there is no evidence that Indian leaders took these pledges seriously.

What, then, might be done to avoid the next serious crisis? Indian and Pakistani prime ministers are likely to want to encourage greater trade and cross-border investments but have been foiled by Pakistan-based spoilers. The advent of a newly elected Pakistani government in 2018 could provide another opportunity for Modi to seek improved relations. Private U.S. messaging to encourage Modi to try again would do no harm and could be helpful. If, however, Modi does try again, public as well as private messages directed at Pakistani audiences would be advisable, pointedly noting why Modi's previous initiatives have failed and placing the burden on Pakistan's military and intelligence services to prevent spoilers from once again taking blocking steps.

In the absence of active U.S. diplomacy seeking to improve India-Pakistan relations, the most useful tool for preventing another severe crisis on the subcontinent might well be U.S. intelligence collection and sharing. Washington might be able to prevent a serious crisis by obtaining timely warning of an impending attack and sharing this information with both Indian and Pakistani officials. Broader and deeper intelligence cooperation between the United States and India would be unsettling for Pakistan, but it could also have some useful deterrent effect in preventing crisis-triggering explosions.

What other moves by Washington might decrease the likelihood of another crisis on the subcontinent? The Trump administration has mostly dispensed with diplomatic nuance toward Pakistan, and the U.S. Congress has begun to impose heavy penalties for Rawalpindi's choices by reducing Coalition Support Funding and the denial of credits to help finance combat aircraft. Some also propose declaring, or threatening to declare, Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism. A renewed threat to do so might prompt temporary and cosmetic changes in Rawalpindi's actions, just as threats by the George W. Bush administration after 9/11 had this effect. If, however, the United States labels Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism, Washington would be without any levers to influence Pakistan's choices regarding nuclear weapons, proliferation, and counterterrorism — choices Washington cares about greatly. The United States as well as Pakistan would both lose by acting on this threat, and its hollow repetition diminishes U.S. credibility.

Withdrawing Pakistan's status as a "major non-NATO ally" could clarify its growing isolation from the West even if this decision no longer has practical effect. Congress already limits the types of military equipment available to Pakistan relative to India and denies favorable financing for arms sales.

The United States has tried to sensitize Pakistan and India to the dangers of an intensified nuclear arms competition. During a crisis in 1990 triggered by

**The primary task of crisis managers would then be to control escalation not after the initial provocation, as in previous crises, but after second- and third-order strikes.**

large-scale Pakistani military exercises, U.S. emissaries encouraged the adoption of confidence-building measures (CBMs) and nuclear risk-reduction measures (NRRMs). Regrettably, neither side has viewed these measures as having intrinsic value; instead, they are viewed as devices to adopt to fend off external pressures after crises or to trade for something deemed more important.

The last measure negotiated was in 2007 on procedures to reduce risks from accidents relating to nuclear weapons, which has been subsequently renewed. While Washington would ruffle feathers by calling out India and Pakistan on their lack of progress in reducing nuclear dangers by diplomatic means, no harm can come from private and public messaging that responsible nuclear stewardship can be demonstrated by adopting additional CBMs and NRRMs.<sup>3</sup> As for cooperation on preventing the theft of a nuclear device or fissile material, it would be very difficult for either country, after repeatedly downplaying this risk, to acknowledge security shortfalls or its occurrence. In particular, Rawalpindi would be concerned about triggering U.S. military operations within Pakistan — akin to the May 2011 raid on Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad — if they acknowledged the theft of a nuclear device or its key components.

### *The Trump Administration and the Increased Complexity of Escalation Control*

In the 1999 Kargil, 2001-2 Twin Peaks, and 2008 Mumbai crises, the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations had no indecision about taking the lead in crisis management. It is not obvious that the Trump administration would react in the same way. There is no obvious lead crisis manager within the administration, and it remains unclear how the application of an “America first” approach to the region would fare against the very substantial U.S. interests — including preventing uncontrolled escalation and nuclear weapons’ use — that could be

3. Frank O’Donnell, “Launching an Expanded Missile Flight-Test Notification Regime,” Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, March 23, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/launching-expanded-missile-flight-test-notification-regime>.

placed at risk in the event of another severe crisis. It remains possible that the Trump administration could adopt a lower profile during a crisis to place more of the burdens of crisis management on Indian and Pakistani decision makers. If, however, the Trump administration, like its predecessors, decides to play an active crisis management role, it would have a well-worn playbook to draw upon, as discussed below.

With very limited diplomatic leverage to prevent crises, U.S. crisis management has focused on mitigating the risks and dangers of escalation control. In the 2001-2 and 2008 crises, this meant trying to persuade the Indian prime minister not to respond to a grave provocation with the use of force. U.S. suasion barely succeeded after the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament; it was a far easier “sell” after the 2008 Mumbai attacks. U.S. crisis management succeeded in both cases because two very different Indian prime ministers came to the same conclusion — that no battlefield gains could justify risks to national economic growth and the uncertainties of another war with Pakistan.

Crisis management is now far more difficult. First, the promises elicited from Pakistani leaders in previous crises have not been honored, and new promises will have little credibility unless backed by highly unusual actions. Second, Prime Minister Modi has signaled that he will not be deterred from retaliating if warranted by the level of provocation — this was, after all, the reason why he authorized surgical strikes after the September 2016 attack at Uri. Consequently, Indian retaliation will be widely presumed if warranted by the provocation. Moreover, New Delhi would expect strong backing from Washington whenever and however it chooses to retaliate. Once India retaliates, a “befitting” response is likely from Pakistan’s military, which would otherwise lose face. And what then? The primary task of crisis managers would then be to control escalation not after the initial provocation, as in previous crises, but after second- and third-order strikes.

## **Possible Elements of a U.S. Crisis Management Diplomatic Playbook**

Every administration that has engaged in high-stakes crisis management on the subcontinent has learned lessons that have been passed down to its successors. This “playbook” includes the choreography of visits and phone calls by foreign leaders. In previous crises, U.S. officials have presumed that Indian leaders would not initiate conflict if a major world leader or top U.S. official were en route to the region. Regular high-level visits by senior U.S. officials were also deemed advisable, as they could prove useful after a crisis erupted. While it is true that decisions are made on the basis of perceived national interests and not on personal ties, personal relationships still matter, as they could provide insights to help defuse a severe crisis.

The absence of senior U.S. officials with knowledge of the region can become an obvious deficit during a deep crisis. If the Trump administration wishes to engage in an active crisis management role but has no seasoned crisis manager, it might consider “deputizing” someone from the outside who has the requisite skills and experience.

In the past, Beijing has played a subordinate and supportive role in U.S. crisis management efforts. As China’s stake in Pakistan grows, its role in crisis management could change. It might be wise to add an agenda item for high-level meetings with Chinese officials on contingency planning in the event of another severe crisis on the subcontinent.<sup>4</sup> Beijing might still be content to play a subordinate role, leaving the heavy lifting to Washington, but close collaboration would still be necessary.

Routinized intelligence cooperation prior to a crisis could be essential in the event that a crisis erupts. U.S. crisis managers usefully conveyed intelligence assessments of disastrous potential outcomes during the 1990 crisis triggered by large-scale Pakistani military exercises. This sobering information still has utility. In the 2008 Mumbai crisis, Washington assisted New Delhi by offering close cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation on matters of domestic terrorism and forensics. Making public new U.S.-Indian counterterrorism interactions could have modest deterrent benefit. This could be pursued on many fronts by different intelligence agencies and their Indian counterparts. In addition, it seems essential to continue to help Pakistan, to the extent possible, on its counterterrorism challenges.

There could well be value in sensitizing publics about the humanitarian, social, environmental, and food security consequences of nuclear exchanges. There are no downside risks to engaging scientific and environmental experts in both countries to join U.S. and international experts in assessing the modeling of the consequences of nuclear detonations on the subcontinent. Washington would do well to encourage both governments to allow their nongovernmental experts in climatology, environmental science, agriculture, and other disciplines to carry out joint studies on the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear exchanges.<sup>5</sup>

Some purchase might be gained at the front end of a severe crisis if leaders on both sides have invested political capital in trying to improve relations. Symbolic gestures by Indian leaders, however, are unlikely to be decisive in convincing Pakistan’s military and intelligence services to turn the page. If Modi tries once again to improve ties, Washington could provide reinforcement by privately as

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4. Yun Sun, “Create a Channel for a U.S.-China Dialogue on South Asia,” Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, August 10, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/create-channel-us-china-dialogue-south-asia>.

5. Arka Biswas, “A Joint India-Pakistan Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons,” Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, May 4, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/joint-india-pakistan-initiative-humanitarian-impact-nuclear-weapons>; and Saira Bano, “Convene a Joint Commission on the Consequences of a Nuclear War in South Asia,” Stimson Center, Off Ramps Initiative, October 17, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/content/convene-joint-commission-consequences-nuclear-war-south-asia>.

well as publicly placing Pakistan on notice that it would be held responsible for blocking actions taken by anti-India militant groups that enjoy safe havens.

One way to defuse escalation during a crisis might be to call for a ceasefire along the Kashmir divide. A generally accepted rationale for ceasefires is for the sake of innocent civilians who bear the brunt of violence along the LoC. However, it is hard to implement ceasefires when Kashmir is on the boil, and they are easily broken.

Washington could also let it be known that it is considering the removal of nonessential U.S. government workers and the issuance of travel advisories to the region as a severe crisis unfolds. The U.S. ambassador to India issued these directives in the latter half of the Twin Peaks crisis — not to be manipulative but out of genuine concern to remove large numbers of U.S. nationals from harm's way. The ambassador's decision had the effect of halting U.S. business delegations to India and prompting New Delhi to take steps to wind down this extended crisis.

An activist U.S. administration's playbook might also include steps to consider after a crisis has de-escalated. One step might be to publicly encourage the negotiation and adoption of new CBMs and NRRMs. Private messages and the talking points of U.S. government spokespersons along these lines have had little effect. Public statements by high-level officials might therefore be warranted. Leaders in both countries are sensitive to the argument that responsible nuclear stewardship requires steps to reduce nuclear dangers, especially when nuclear capabilities are advancing on several fronts. These messages would, however, be viewed as hypocritical unless Washington is also pursuing nuclear risk-reduction measures with Moscow and Beijing.

## Conclusion

In the past, U.S. crisis managers have succeeded because Indian leaders have wanted them to succeed. New Delhi has not retaliated against deeply embarrassing and horrific acts of violence initiated or abetted by Pakistan's military and security forces, prioritizing India's economic growth against the uncertainties of warfare and escalation control.

The dynamics of crisis management and escalation control are more complicated now. Indian Prime Minister Modi has in effect forecast surgical strikes in the event that provocations cross unspecified thresholds. Pakistan's military is likely to retaliate as it deems necessary, leaving the next decision in New Delhi's hands. Previous U.S. administrations adopted an activist crisis management approach; the Trump administration's approach remains unclear.

There are persuasive reasons for New Delhi and Rawalpindi to seek to control escalation. Pakistan's future depends increasingly on a stable climate for Chinese investments and India's growing power is directly linked to open-ended economic

growth. Uncontrolled escalation leading to a limited conventional war and the possibility of crossing the nuclear abyss would be ruinous to these plans.

Nonetheless, the conditions for another serious crisis exist between India and Pakistan, and will continue as long as powerful interests in Pakistan remain irreconcilable to a normal relationship with India — a condition reinforced by deep tensions between Muslim-majority Kashmir and New Delhi.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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# INVESTIGATING CRISES

**South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics,  
and Trajectories**

South Asia remains one of the most crisis-prone regions in the world with some of the highest levels of contested borders, militarized interstate disputes, and terrorist attacks. India and Pakistan's continued expansion of their fissile material stockpiles and nuclear arsenals and modernization of their conventional forces add layers of risk, especially in periods of power transitions. For over 25 years, the Stimson Center has closely studied the cadence and dynamics of South Asian crises to better inform policymakers in New Delhi, Islamabad, Washington, D.C., and even Beijing.

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