Event Transcript

Restoring Deterrence: Coercion and Crises in Southern Asia

August 3, 2022
The Stimson Center

Featuring:

Colin Jackson, Chair, Strategic and Operational Research Department, U.S. Naval War College

Shuja Nawaz, Distinguished Fellow, Atlantic Council

Sushant Singh, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Ketian Zhang, Assistant Professor, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University

Zeba Fazli, Research Associate and Strategic Learning initiative Lead, Stimson Center (Moderator)

Elizabeth Threlkeld, Senior Fellow and Director, South Asia Program, Stimson Center (Convenor)

Event Description

Panelists Colin Jackson, Shuja Nawaz, Sushant Singh, and Ketian Zhang discussed the current state of deterrence stability in Southern Asia, its interplay with great power competition and technological advancements, and how the concepts of coercion, compellence, and deterrence are applied and understood in the region.

More information and event video available at: https://www.stimson.org/event/restoring-deterrence-coercion-and-crises-in-southern-asia/

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Welcome to this morning's webinar. This is one that I have been looking forward to for quite a while for a couple reasons that I will get into in just a bit. I think it is a timely topic to be looking at deterrence. We certainly didn't plan it this way, but I've noticed that deterrence is one of those words that's been back in the headlines recently with the ongoing visit in Taiwan and the responses to it. Obviously, today, we'll be focusing a little bit more on Southern Asia, which is a region where I think we're also seeing the impact of US-China competition playing out.

We've seen a strategic chain of competition developing that's linked the US, to China, to India and Pakistan, and this fantastic panel of experts that we've assembled today is going to be diving into those issues and answering your questions. The other thing we're doing this morning, and it's something I'm quite proud of, is we are launching our latest online course. It's called Restoring Deterrence: Coercion and Crises in Southern Asia. You'll hear a little bit about that later from my colleague Zeba Fazli, but my job today is just to give a sense of why we started building out these courses and what we're aiming to achieve with them.

I'm cognizant that I was very fortunate sitting here in Washington to have had the education that I did, the opportunities that I did to study issues of deterrence and compellence and coercion in an academic setting. I think probably many of you have done the same, but that's certainly not an opportunity that's available to everyone and these are issues that impact everyone and increasingly so. We began our Strategic Learning initiative a few years back in order to build out online courses that would make these strategic issues more accessible and more legible to a wider audience.

They're free for everyone and they always will be and you can sign up on our website. You'll hear more about that in a bit. This latest course that we're launching today, it delves into the theory and practice of coercion in clear language. It has really engaging content and only takes about three hours to get through and you'll get a certificate at the end. We also have courses on the history and development of strategic issues on the subcontinent, including nuclear doctrines and postures. We also have a longer form course on deterrence, so if you really like the short version that's a great resource if you want to learn more.

We wouldn't be here today without the generosity of our funders, without the insights of the experts that we interviewed in building out these courses and, of course, without the dedication of our team, so really congrats and hats off to my colleagues, primarily Zeba Fazli, Betzalel Newman and Uzair Sattar. I'm very, very grateful for all their hard work and looking forward to launching the course today and also to hearing from this fantastic panel of experts that we've assembled. They're going to be diving into these issues and taking your questions. Really looking forward to the conversation. Thanks, again, for joining us and without further ado, I will hand things over to Zeba.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you so much, Elizabeth, and hello to everyone joining us from around the world. Again, my name is Zeba Fazli, I'm a Research Associate here at Stimson and the Project Leader for the Strategic Learning initiative. I'm so thrilled to be able to be here with you all to celebrate the launch of our newest online course Restoring Deterrence, and to moderate what's sure to be a really engaging and wide-ranging panel discussion.

First allow me to introduce our fantastic panelists. They're from across Southern Asia and the US, and they have a variety of backgrounds and experiences thinking about, working on, and really helping us all better understand and analyze strategic dynamics in Southern Asia and beyond and we're really excited to have them with us today. First up we have Colin Jackson who is the Chair of the Strategic and Operational Research Department at the Naval War College. We also have with us Shuja Nawaz, who is a Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center.

Thirdly, we have Sushant Singh who is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi. Last, but by no means least we have Ketian Zhang, an Assistant Professor at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. I should add that Ketian and Sushant are both good friends of the Strategic Learning initiative and are featured in Restoring Deterrence, but we're really excited to have everyone today with us to have a broad discussion about strategic dynamics and deterrence.

Before we get into the discussion, I do want to say a little bit more about the course. As Elizabeth mentioned, the intent behind it, which we spun off of our 2020 long form course on Deterrence in Southern Asia, is to give students no matter who they are, what their level of knowledge is, the tools to understand and analyze the role of coercion in competition in Southern Asia.

Whether you're an undergrad just learning about international relations for the first time, if you're an analyst working on these issues in a professional capacity, if you're in government, the private sector or whatever your vantage point is, if you want to expand your thinking, learn from diverse perspectives and experts from around the world, then Restoring Deterrence I think is the course for you. As Elizabeth mentioned, we designed this one particularly with accessibility and legibility in mind so it's approachable, it's clear in describing these really big ideas and explaining them and how they relate to modern day strategic dynamics.

We also have the interactivity and high-quality analysis that I think are hallmarks of Strategic Learning courses. Plus it's short and sweet. This one takes only about three hours to complete. It's very easy to fit into busy schedules, whether at school or at work or what have you. Now I've talked a little bit, but I think it might be more useful to show you some of the course content. To that end, if you'll bear with me for a moment, I'm going to share the trailer for our course which is also available online.

[video playing]

Mike Pompeo: We have reestablished deterrence, but we know it's not everlasting that risk remains. We are determined not to lose that deterrence.

Bipin Rawat: Technology must become a means of deterrence and not a source of destruction.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Ke minimum deterrent hona chahiye (There should be a minimum deterrent).

Khalid Kidwai: Pakistan have worked for deterrence to be strengthened in South Asia comprehensively.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Leaders around the world from the United States, to India, to Pakistan often talk about deterring their rivals. But what is deterrence, and what role does it play in Southern Asia today? Explore these questions and more in Restoring Deterrence, a free online course from the Stimson Center's Strategic Learning initiative. In this interactive, intuitive course you'll learn about concepts like deterrence, compellence and coercion and study how they apply to the conflicts that shape our world.

Riya Sinha: I felt that there was a good mix of academia, as well as practical examples of how the states have behaved in the past, as well as it gets you thinking of how they're likely to behave in the future.

Noorulain Naseem: This course really gives you a lot of information about what is the role of nuclear weapons in maintaining strategic stability in Southern Asia.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Hear from experts in Southern Asia, the US and beyond and see how deterrence has evolved over time. From the Cuban missile crisis and the Cold War to today's complex interplay linking Pakistan, India, China, and the United States.

Rushali Saha: What particularly stood out to me is the inclusion of China in understanding the regional dynamics, which is definitely interesting and very relevant. The experts do provide very valuable insights and understanding the unique strategic environment in south Asia.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Tension is building across Southern Asia as the US and China compete for dominance, India and Pakistan vie for influence and the region recovers from economic, geopolitical and public health crises. Now more than ever, it is vital that students, policy makers, and the public understand deterrence, its value, and its limits. Mastering these concepts will help us to build stability and reduce the risk of war.

Namra Naseer: I believe it's a great course for anybody who's interested in strategic studies, students, analysts, even the watchers of strategic issues.

Riya Sinha: From students to policy researchers, whether you're new, whether you've already been using, I think there's something in it for everyone and I would really recommend everyone to take this course.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Enroll in Restoring Deterrence for free today.

[video ended]

Zeba Fazli: All right, I couldn't say it any better myself. In any case, as you can see this course is taking a look at what deterrence, coercion and compellence are and how they've played out from the Cold War to today's Southern Asia. Ultimately, I think we're hoping that students will be able to answer for themselves the question of what it means to restore deterrence, if that's possible at all. Now, because this course only takes about three hours to complete, we think it's a really unique and valuable resource, again, for busy students and busy professionals alike.

For instructors, whether you're working at a university or a school or in a professional setting, there are several ways that you can give it a shot in your own classroom or training sessions. Firstly, you can simply promote or recommend it to your students or colleagues as extra reading. You can also integrate just parts of it as supplemental content or reading. Each Strategic Learning course has both a flex and a complete edition. The flex edition allows you to pick and choose what lessons you take. The complete edition is the one that requires you to complete everything in order to earn a certificate. Thirdly, you can simply assign the whole course and have your students earn a certificate.

Then, finally, perhaps, most excitingly, I would think, is partnering with Strategic Learning so that we can work more closely with you and your institution. We've held demos, we've held substantive discussions. We've brought in experts to discuss current events and build on the themes that we are exploring in Restoring Deterrence and other courses. If you're at all interested, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or to my team. I'll add that the Strat Learning website also has a whole drive of instructor resources, including explainers, glossaries, transcripts, example lesson plans, reading lists, and much more and we're always developing more external resources and downloadable resources.

If that is of interest, I highly recommend you check it out. Once more, log into stratlearning.org to enroll in whatever addition of Restoring Deterrence fits your needs and interests.

Thank you so much. We're really excited for you all to sign up and begin your Strategic Learning journey. Now that that's over with, I'd like to begin our moderated discussion with our fantastic panel of experts. We'll start with a few questions of my own and we'll alternate throughout between moderator's questions and audience-submitted questions as appropriate.

Speakers, this is your reminder to please keep your responses to about two minutes max, so we can get to as many questions as possible and, audience members, please be sure to submit your questions in the Q&A box and share your name and affiliation as you do so. We'll do a first round of about 25 minutes of moderator questions. Again, please make sure to submit your questions, audience members.

Now, first, to kick us off, I'd like to ask all of our speakers to consider what we just saw in the trailer about Restoring Deterrence, about it being a course about accessibility and breaking down big ideas for all audiences. In your opinion, why is public discussion about coercion and strategic issues important in Southern Asia and beyond? In other words, what can a course like this offer to interested publics? Let's go first to Colin, then Ketian, Sushant, then Shuja. Colin, take it away.

Colin Jackson: Thank you for having me again and I appreciate the opportunity to participate in a forum like this. I'd say at the outset, my views are my personal views. They don't represent the views of the United States government, Navy, or Naval War College. I think the significance of studying something like this at this point in time is increasingly self-evident. We're in a situation of mutual coercion dynamics in the Ukraine war, we're in the midst of a standoff over Taiwan, issues where tensions are rising dramatically.

We're also in a period where a lot of the introduction of new technologies is arguably either stabilizing or destabilizing or a combination of the two. As we shift the focus explicitly to the South Asia area, I would argue we've had an uncomfortably large number of nuclear or near nuclear crises in South Asia over time. The dynamics there, the number of near misses is worrisome and focuses the mind. I think those are certainly my rationales for why study this now, why be focused on this topic.

Ketian Zhang: Again, thanks for having us. I think for me, there might be two rationales for why the public might want to know about deterrence or learn a little bit more. The first one is I think high politics actually affects individuals' lives. If we take a look at Taiwan, as an example, China has been using economic sanctions, which actually might affect small businesses or even individual citizens there. In addition, the looming prospects of military exercises or missile tests, for example, can also have a psychological impact, even if not a physical one on individual citizens lives.

The second rationale is that I think there is a lot of fear-mongering or war-mongering comments out there, but we want to know what works as deterrence and what does not work from a more scientific and rational perspective. That's why I think it's really important for the public to know about deterrence and what works and what doesn't.

Sushant Singh: Thank you, Zeba and congratulations to Stimson Center on the launch of this course. The reasons I think this course needs to be studied and followed primarily because we are talking about a region where there are three of the biggest military powers in the world, if you look at the top 10 military powers or top six military powers, and all three are nuclear powers as well, and they've been nuclear powers for good enough, more than 20 years now, nearly 25 years now.

But that cannot be the most important reason. I think the most important reason for studying it now is the increasing asymmetry in conventional capabilities between the three countries. China has really taken off vis-à-vis India. Whereas the gap between India and Pakistan has also increased dramatically. This increasing gap enhances risks, as we have nationalist regimes in place, both in Beijing and in New Delhi and a few weeks ago in Pakistan as well. The second reason I would say that this needs to be studied is that it's not only about the continental borders, but also about the Indian Ocean region, which seems to be the place of contestation right now between all kinds of power and all kinds of countries, which is also what abets Southern Asia in that sense. Of course, agreeing with what Ketian and Colin said about the accident and something he saw in India earlier this year, where a BrahMos missile actually landed inside Pakistan accidentally.

Shuja Nawaz: Thank you for including me in this program. I'm delighted to be part of this discussion along with the other panelists. In my view, the question revolves around three Cs; connectivity, co-dependence, and communications. I think anything that we can do to enhance knowledge about this among the participating countries. I agree entirely with the outline presented by Sushant that you have such an imbalance of power in the three countries within the region, and let's not forget that there is a fresh tinder box that has always been there, which is Afghanistan.

We're about the one-year anniversary of the rather higgledy-piggledy US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Russia is now getting involved in the region and in Central Asia. That's going to complicate things. Let's not forget Iran. Central Asia and South Asia or greater South Asia to my mind remains the center of gravity, of global economics, as well as security issues. I, for one, don't subscribe to the tilt to the Pacific because this is the area where you have, as Sushant pointed out correctly, nuclear powers, and the escalation ladder is very steep.

Whatever we can do to build the other factors that will take us away from proceeding up the escalation ladder towards nuclear weapons use is going to save the region and the world. On the counterfactual side, facing the economic difficulties, the climate change and environmental issues that these countries are facing on such a massive scale. If we can get them to build their economies and communicate with each other and trade with each other, then maybe we've achieved deterrence we've achieved stability. Thank you.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you so much, everyone. I think those are all a wide range of answers. I think the common themes are asymmetry across the strategic chain in Southern Asia and concern about stability, accidents, and crises that these regions have seen. We'll be digging into that, I'm sure, further along in the discussion. For now, my second question is about why we call the course Restoring Deterrence. As you would've seen in the trailer, we're interested in how policy makers and leaders around the world are invoking these big ideas, whether it's deterrence in

general or particularly about restoring or reestablishing deterrence with their rivals, on the one hand.

On the second hand, how those ideas are then being understood by national and international audiences. My question is, what does the term "restoring deterrence" mean in your all's minds? Do you think leaders or audiences in Southern Asia would agree with that perspective? For this one, let's start with Sushant, then Shuja, and then go to Ketian and Colin. Sushant, over to you.

Sushant Singh: Restoring Deterrence to my mind is about increasing stability [unintelligible] and threatening another nuclear power, however big or small. Essentially, that's what deterrence is about. It's broadly philosophically creating an environment of peace, which helps [unintelligible] populations that live in [unintelligible] into Balakot in 2019, which led to questions of Chinese coming to Ladakh. Can it fail at a greater degree? Yes, that is always the possibility, that remains a possibility. That's why we are probably here and we are discussing this topic. Would the leaders in the region agree with the description or the ideas that I have about deterrence or restoring deterrence? I doubt it.

Indian political leadership is very clear that it would want to take away parts of Kashmir which are with Pakistan, or maybe even have greater ambitions about what it wants to do. China has similar ambitions about Arunachal Pradesh, about Ladakh, Aksai Chin, et cetera, et cetera. It is unlikely that the leadership in these countries would agree with the ideas that come into my mind when I think about restoring deterrence.

Shuja Nawaz: I think also that leaders within these countries don't want to relive history. I think that is critical. If you look at the history of the three countries, China, India, and Pakistan, there have been numerous conflicts. Some have been bigger than others. In one case, in the conflict in 1971 it led to the breakup of what was originally the state of Pakistan into two wings, East Pakistan and West Pakistan. There's been trauma associated with it. There was trauma associated in the Chinese war. That is something that cannot-- I think to use [unintelligible] phrase, those scratches on the minds of India cannot be erased or filled.

The question now is, what can the leaders in the countries do to take us towards the counterfactual, where you can eliminate the threat of conflict and create the possibility of communication and trade, which is to some extent, already very successful between India and China, but awfully unsuccessful between India and Pakistan. Looking at it more regional perspective with other global powers like Russia and China, and maybe the Arabian Peninsula playing an enabling role, may well be the way out. I hope that we can persuade the leaders in these countries to come up with those solutions so that we are not talking about going up the ladder but eliminating the ladder entirely.

Ketian Zhang: I very much agree with both Sushant and Shuja. I wanted to add that restoring deterrence is a really nice concept to capture the dynamic

process of deterrence in the sense that sometimes deterrence works and sometimes it does not. There's always success or failure. It's a cyclical pattern of crises and crises management. I think restoring deterrence in a way captures the fact that deterrence is dynamic. It's not a static concept. As for whether the leaders might agree with the concept of restoring deterrence, in a way I think they might.

At the same time, I think especially using South Asia as an example, the leaders, for example, between India and China, their perceptions of what is the status quo, what is the baseline for deterrence might be actually very different. They might, in their own mind, want to restore deterrence to what they think their status quo is. Think about the Line of Actual Control as an example. In the process of trying to restore deterrence to their perceived status quo, there might be conflicts or crises that arrive out of the different preceptors about what is the status quo and what is deterrence.

Colin Jackson: I would accept the vast majority of the points that were made here. I would emphasize a couple of other ones here. I think the phrase restoring credibility is fascinating because leaders of various different countries all invoke it, even when it appears to be mutually contradictory. How can various powers' intention with each other restore credibility? I think the most interesting piece of it is what this rests on implicitly.

Credibility rests on at least two elements, it seems to me. One is capability. Sushant talked to this question of asymmetries, both in the conventional and nuclear domains, but it also speaks to resolve the willingness of a party to follow through either on the threats it makes or on the assurances it provides to an adversary. What do I mean by that? Frequently in a deterrent situation, the power that is sending the message says, "I don't want you to do the following. If you do the following, I will do X, Y, or Z to you," but at the same time to be effective you say, "If you refrain from that activity, then I won't do all sorts of bad things to you in return."

The problem is if your threats and your assurances to the target of this deterrent message is impaired, if you do not follow through on your threats, if you do not follow through on your assurances, there's a danger that in subsequent competitions, people will not take you seriously, that you will be pushed around by various players. I think this is why this is an appealing concept, saying restoring deterrence presumes that it's been impaired. It's fascinating that all parties in the great power competition appear to think that their credibility is impaired.

I think the game is about how one communicates resolve that your threats and assurances are real, that you mean it, and you accumulate it by following through on the statements you make, and you diminish it when you fail to follow through on it. One of the ones, for instance, in past US stuff that is pointed to quite a bit is the notion that Obama

made commitments, let's say, in Syria to go after chemical weapons use, and then he steps back from what that apparent threat when the adversary does what he asked them not to do. A lot of people in US policy circles say that diminished US credibility in subsequent crises. We could argue about whether that's the case, but those are the dynamics that I think are in the background.

Zeba Fazli: Excellent. Thank you all so much. Those are great answers and I think gets to a lot of the questions and themes that come up in Restoring Deterrence the course, as well as in the larger question of what is restoring deterrence. Now I think I'll transition to a couple of substantive and current events questions. Ketian and Colin, as Elizabeth said up top, it's a fun time to be having this discussion given the prominence of Taiwan and the Nancy Pelosi visit in the headlines just today and yesterday. US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi arrived in Taiwan yesterday, met with politicians, and was also met with strong warnings from China about future actions and exercises that I believe are supposed to take place this week.

My question for the two of you is, how might China respond to demonstrate that attempts at coercive signaling, although they were unsuccessful in deterring Pelosi's visit in the first place, are being backed by action? I think this gets also to what both Colin and Ketian were saying about communicating resolve and following through with threats. Let's start with Ketian and then go to Colin.

Ketian Zhang: Yes, sure thing. I think this case is obviously still evolving and we're currently observing China's reactions it's fairly possible that it's going to continue for the next couple of months or so. In a way, China considers House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit as a deterrence failure from China's perspective. Therefore, I think it's using coercion to try to deter future occurrences of such visits. In a way, it is trying to restore deterrence from China's perspective. I think as of now, and as you've mentioned, we're seeing China announcing large-scale military exercise all around Taiwan, which is not dissimilar to the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995 and 1996, which this course actually also talks about.

The scale might be a little bit larger because I think there are indications that Chinese missiles might actually fly over Taiwan's airspace. Currently, I think we're still observing what's going to happen. In addition to military coercion, and this is something different from the 1995 and 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, China is also using economic sanctions, and very targeted economic sanctions, against Taiwan, including banning certain Taiwanese fruits and products into China, which is what we are seeing in more recent years, which is using non-military coercive ventures to restore deterrence. For the rest, I'll defer to Colin for more information.

Colin Jackson: I agree with what Ketian is putting forward on that localized crisis. What I would point to is a related point that there's a general coercive struggle that's going on in the background. This is a local and particular

instance in that competition. I would say that what appears to be happening here is the United States is trying to deter what it perceives as Chinese attempts to coerce Taiwan into unification. That's the backdrop. From the Chinese point of view, they're trying to deter the United States from altering the status quo. That's the way that they would communicate this. They may also be trying, both in military and non-military ways, to persuade Taiwan to unify with the mainland.

That's the backdrop against which this particular crisis emerges. What's interesting is, again, both sides are trapped in this interesting signaling and resolve problem. The Chinese state wants to make sure that it is not seen as unwilling to follow through on threats, but it wants to restore credibility without, almost in parentheses, creating an explosion. Most great powers are engaged in this game of wanting what they want or seeking to prevent what they don't want but without a catastrophic outcome. It seems to me not accidental that the PRC is doing a bundle of actions which show seriousness without necessarily leading to an inadvertent explosion.

On the US side, I think the sense is once the Pelosi visit had been leaked, it put the United States government including Representative Pelosi in a tough position. If they were seen to back down in the visit, they too would lose credibility and resolve in this attempt to bolster what they see as certainly a partner in East Asia in the Taiwan government. It's very interesting how both sides, these things tend to be either bi- or tri-lateral, and all parties are attempting to communicate resolve while stopping short of a catastrophic or uncontrolled explosion of violence on some level.

Zeba Fazli: All right, thank you both so much. I know it's an evolving situation, but I think it's one that has a lot of overlap thematically and substantively with what we cover in the course. My next couple of questions are going to focus on the India and China border conflict. I'll start with Ketian. You recently published a paper analyzing why China has increased its use of military coercion in its border dispute with India over time. I was wondering if you could walk us through the reasons for this and how we've seen this increased use of military coercion play out in recent events, given reports that China is building a village in Bhutanese territory in Doklam, conducting air drills along the LAC, and the evolving situation across that border.

Ketian Zhang: Sure thing. I'm going to try to very briefly describe what the paper argues. The basic argument is a contrast between China's use of military coercion along the southern Indian border with China's use of non-military coercion, including gray-zone coercion in maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The contrast is that China uses military coercion more starting from around 2006 vis-à-vis India, whereas starting from around the same time, the frequency of coercion increases vis-à-vis maritime disputes in South China Sea, but China intends to use non-militarized, including gray-zone, coercion.

I think that the key rationale for explaining this difference is that the perceived geopolitical backlash cost vis-à-vis India or Southeast Asian states are very different. From China's perspective, the United States is much more likely to get involved into a militarized conflict in the South China Sea because the United States is trading allies with, for example, the Philippines, and the stakes are a lot higher.

China just simply does not believe the stakes are high enough for the United States to get involved militarily in a border clash between China and India. That's why I think in recent years we're seeing an increase of the use of military coercion alongside the Sino-Indian land border area. I'd be more than happy to share a link to this article so that for those interested, you can have a broader picture or a bigger picture of what the articles is arguing.

Zeba Fazli: All right, thank you so much. I think it's such an interesting development to be tracing and, again, increasingly relevant. Sushant, I think the other side of that question is that since the Ladakh standoff that began in the spring of 2020, the Indian army has reportedly moved six divisions from the border with Pakistan to Ladakh to prevent further PLA incursions. As we've seen over two years now, Indian leaders have been continually reluctant to discuss or publicly acknowledge ongoing Chinese coercion in the disputed border regions.

I'm curious, from your perspective, how is the Indian military conceptualizing deterrence against China? What does their decision to not engage in public discussions about Chinese incursions mean for their ability to deter future *faits accompli* or restore the status quo ante as they see it?

Sushant Singh**:** The first thing the Indian strategy or the Indian military planners do not use the word "deterrence" with respect to China. The word that I have heard mostly used by former service chiefs or people who have dealt with the issue is dissuasion. I understand there is a bit of overlap between dissuasion and deterrence. The idea is that somehow we will use all aspects of national power, using diplomatic and using global partnerships and alliances to somehow keep China away from doing what it needs to do. Coming specifically to nuclear weapons, there's actually no discussion of nuclear weapons in the India-China relationship.

The last time an Indian official spoke of nuclear weapons with respect to China was when India tested its nuclear weapons officially in 1998. Then Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes spoke about it. That primarily also comes from the fact that PRC also has a no first use policy and India also has a no first use policy. That is as far as the idea of deterrence is concerned with respect to China.

Coming to the more important question, how does PRC look at the way the leadership has dealt with the crisis? I think the very clear weakness, the silence, this complete desire by the political leadership to push it

under the carpet that nothing has happened, they see that it's a sign of political weakness in an environment where they cannot afford to tell their domestic audience that this is what is actually going on in the border.

Almost an inversion of what people used to say about China. It is about that Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot afford to lose face vis-à-vis China in front of his own people. That's why, you see, since July 2021 and we're talking about 13 months, there's been no further disengagement, de-escalation, de-induction from the Ladakh area. There have been 16 rounds of military talks, but there's virtually no progress in moving any forces away for the last 13 months.

The areas which are militarily very important to India, Depsang, Demchok, on these areas the Chinese have consistently refused to discuss. These are the areas where they've come and blocked, particularly the area of Depsang, up close to the Karakoram Pass, about which a lot has been written because this is the only area where China and Pakistan can physically meet, [unintelligible] Siachen Glacier, et cetera. All the other reasons are there. Fundamentally, the point to recognize, as Ketian also said, that they have changed the status quo. The PRC has changed the status quo in Ladakh. The infrastructure that they have created, the [unintelligible] that they have done, the option that they have created.

To give you a simple example, everybody talks about the 1962 Sino-India War. In the 1962 Sino-India War, up to the 1980s, the Indians used to believe that Chinese would require one full season to actually mobilize and they would launch a war in the next season. Till a decade back, they used to hear about a month's time. Now they are talking about a week's time and some military officers say that it could be even less than a week in which China could come. The status quo which India wants to restore as of April 2020, that is gone. This creates a very big risk for the future. If I may connect it to the current situation, if President Xi Jinping is humiliated over Taiwan, what happens in Ladakh? That's a question which none of us really know what really happens at that point.

Zeba Fazli: That's a great and very sobering extended question. I'm sure we'll find out the answer over the next couple of weeks. Okay, great. It looks like we have regained Shuja. Let me give him a moment. Welcome back, Shuja. I hope everything's okay.

Shuja Nawaz: Yes. I have electrical work being done in the apartment and somebody switched off the power to my base unit. Sorry about that.

Zeba Fazli: Well, welcome back. You're just in time in fact. I was going to turn to you and to Sushant to talk through India-Pakistan relations. We're in a deceptively calm period these days in India-Pakistan conflict in that it has been somewhat quiet, but there's a lot of concern about the potential for escalation in a future India-Pakistan crisis. On top of that,

there are lots of other things on the horizon in the region. Shuja, you mentioned Afghanistan and the Taliban. There's risks of instability in Pakistan. We just saw Imran Khan's government replaced with Shehbaz Sharif's. India I think is increasingly emboldened domestically, and so all together there are a lot of incentives for both countries to signal greater resolve next time.

To both of you, I'd like to pose a question. Given these seemingly unfavorable political conditions, what steps can India and Pakistan still take to prevent future crisis and instability? I think the extended question would be, how does your assessment compare to traditional thinking about deterrence in India and Pakistan respectively? Shuja I'll start with you and then go to Sushant.

Shuja Nawaz: Okay, I'm glad you mentioned Afghanistan because that is in the news now with the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri. There are still unanswered questions as to what role, if any, Pakistan played in that, either by allowing US drones to take off from Pakistani territory because they don't have the range to loiter over Kabul if they fly from Doha. That's the reality. Let me just remind our audience that Afghanistan will remain the center of instability in the region. It also offers an opportunity for both India and Pakistan to work together to try and restore some sanity and balance to the Afghan political entity.

Here I'm speaking as an American. I think we made a serious mistake in the very haphazard withdrawal that took place a year ago from Kabul. It reminded me of Brent Scowcroft telling me when we were talking about the earlier withdrawal from Afghanistan that whenever the US leaves unfinished business in Afghanistan it has to go back in to fix it. I think we're going to be facing that kind of a situation in the region. The two players that can play a role in calming things down and working with the Taliban and ensuring that they allow participation and pluralism to exist within their country are India and Pakistan because Afghanistan depends on them for trade.

It depends on them for training and depends on them as an outlet to the rest of the world other than Iran. When General Kurilla, the CENTCOM commander, went in in June to Central Asia and he met the leaders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan they told him that there were three things that mattered to them. They were Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Afghanistan because they're worried of Afghanistan becoming yet another center for terrorist groups not within the control of the Taliban government.

That is going to be bad news for all the countries in the region, including Iran, including Pakistan, and including India, because whatever happens on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border will have repercussions in India. Particularly if they use proxies like the Balochistan Liberation Army or other such entities as Pakistan alleges. The situation inside India and Pakistan is really critical. The economic challenges are enormous.

They have to go back on the growth path. The weather and climate that I've mentioned before have now turned for the worse. We've got flooding, we've got cyclones, all kinds of activities that are beyond the control of the government. There has to be another way of living together in that part of the world. Simply going up the escalation ladder in terms of conventional or nuclear weaponry is not the answer.

Sushant Singh: Shuja has spoken about Afghanistan in detail and Indian policy on Afghanistan as being very different this time around because they've started engaging with the Taliban. They've got a quasi-diplomatic set up there. They're providing infrastructure. They're sending wheat. They're sending medicines, and actually it's a surprise that such a deep and detailed engagement is happening with the Taliban. Moving away from Afghanistan I think I'll read out the standard template of things which we've been getting for last 20-30 years as to what India and Pakistan can do.

Open lines of communication, get all the protocols going, sign new agreements, have those deals on low-hanging fruit like the Sir Creek which can be agreed upon. Essentially, the point is the political leadership of the two countries need to start engaging again. That engagement has completely stopped over the last few years. That engagement has to happen.

I think particularly I speak for India, if not for Pakistan, the nationalistic rhetoric in the countries have to come down because especially in our part of the world with the very raucous democracies, that kind of thing can lead to a lot of pressure on the political leadership to take actions which may not be conducive for peace.

In this case, vis-à-vis India and Pakistan what has really kept India honest over the last couple of years is the Chinese pressure. The fact that India chose to speak to Pakistan in late 2020 was because there was a genuine worry that the Pakistan army could mobilize certain troops on the Line of Control in Kashmir onto the India border and the Indian military would find it really tough to deal with both the borders at the same time. I think that is the pressure which led India to open some lines of communication with Pakistan which led to the reiteration of the ceasefire on the Line of Control in Kashmir. Even otherwise some backchannel communication has continued since.

The second part of your question, the Indian military, actually the armed forces, and I'm not talking about the political leadership here, looks at the window just before the nuclear weapons come into play for undertaking their operations. That has been their theory over the last 20 years. In their war games, et cetera, they hardly talk about the use of nuclear weapons. I think that's one big significant difference between India and Pakistan in that case. There's a downside to it and as we saw during the Balakot episode in 2019 when Indian air force planes crossed into Pakistan not just into Pakistan-controlled Kashmir,

Pakistan-administered Kashmir but actually into Pakistan proper in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and targeted the seminary at Balakot.

That clearly tells me that the Indian military leadership and the political leadership somehow believe that they can control the escalation and are willing to climb it. At one level it seems very reckless and risky. At a political level it is full of bravado-based domestic political results during elections, so there is an incentive for doing it. My fear is that this may actually push Pakistan to a wall where we are actually leading to a situation where deterrence could completely break down.

That's a risk which people who are concerned with Southern Asia should recognize. If you just look at two incidents, Balakot and the fact that a BrahMos missile could accidentally be launched and was actually going towards a Pakistani air base, landing a few miles short because of whatever reasons, I think that should leave us worried about the situation in this part of the world.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you so much. A lot to chew on there. Again, very sobering assessment. We have a couple of audience questions both in the Q&A and from our Twitter and YouTube audiences. First I'm going to ask Ketian, can you please expand on your previous comments regarding differing perceptions of the status quo between India and China? Specifically they ask, how is China using an evolving status quo definition to underline its territorial or strategic interest in the past and how might that further complicate its ongoing tensions with India?

Ketian Zhang: Great. Thank you so much for the question. I think this does not just apply to the Sino-Indian land border dispute. I think what is considered to be a status quo in territorial disputes is a very vague term for all parties. We can see that in maritime disputes in the South China Sea as well, but for the Sino-India land border case, I think one of the issues is that the Line of Actual Control, or the LAC, different sides perceive it differently, as in where the Line of Actual Control actually lies. It's not an agreed-upon sort of a line. Otherwise, there would've been a Sino-India land border.

Starting from around 2006, because China has had an increased capacity, especially military capacity on the Tibetan plateau, it's been increasing the patrols along the LAC in the Sino-India land border, which I think in turn is perceived by India as a change in the status quo because of the increase of patrols, because in a way, the more patrol you do, it might be perceived as the other side as an increase in your claimed strength to the territorial dispute or the respective territorial dispute.

In turn, I think at least from China's perspective, there are actions taken by India to increase India's claim strength in terms of the territorial dispute. China actually considers-- I believe it's the 2017 Doklam incident, starting from, for example, India's actions. This is viewed as a negative feedback loop of perceived changes to status quo along the

LAC from both sides and that's, I think partially why we're seeing an uptick of trying to use military coercion to restore what it believes to be the correct status quo along the LAC, so to speak.

In a way, it could be destabilizing, but at the same time, I think, as Colin said earlier about the current-- some people call it the fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis and I think is a nice way to characterize it, that both sides are still in constant communication with one another including the military in both China and India. I don't think it's as destabilizing, even though the difference in terms of what is the status quo is definitely a thorny issue in both land border and maritime territorial disputes.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you, Ketian. Sushant, you've been nodding a lot. Do you have anything to add to that question or to answer?

Sushant Singh: I agree with her. There's nothing much I can add to that.

Zeba Fazli: Awesome. Then our second question, there's not a speaker specified so I'll open it to the floor. What is the impact of emerging technologies on deterrence? Specifically, I think we're asking about the world going towards AI and cyber and keeping in mind also the crisis of the BrahMos missile being launched by India and landing in Pakistan. If anyone wants to take that, then the floor is yours.

Shuja Nawaz: Maybe I can start Zeba. It's Murphy's law at work. If things are going to go wrong, they will. Any amount of technology is really as good as the people behind it. What we are seeing is the constant possibility that mistakes will be made and then people will try and cover it up at the operational level and when they do that, the decision makers are ill-informed about exactly what's going on. As a result, wrong decisions can be made in a split-second manner, which can lead to a rapid escalation. That is really something, particularly for India and Pakistan, where there is no advance warning time. The border is very long and the forces are right on the border.

Given the technologies, given the capacity to do a lot of damage using whatever kinds of nuclear weapons, so-called tactical weapons, or rail weapons, they're all nuclear. Once you open that box, you've let all the genies out. It'll be very, very tough to roll back. I think I agree with Sushant that the BrahMos incident should have led to a lot of heads rolling on the Indian side. We haven't heard enough publicly about what happened in the follow-up to BrahMos. My suspicion is, as often happens in South Asia, that the matter will be put under the carpet and we will pretend as if it didn't happen until it happens again and then there may be a larger crisis the next time.

Zeba Fazli: Yes, I think one thing that we've traced a lot-- Oh, yes. Colin, go ahead, sorry.

Colin Jackson: No, just to jump on this point that Shuja is raising. I think one of the things that's in the background is militaries, regardless of nationality, love acquiring new technologies and the presumption in the background is to acquire a new technology is to move forward or towards this notion of restoring deterrence in the capability sense. I think those of us who stare at the deterrence problem from a crisis stability point of view often scratch our heads and say, "Is this acquisition in fact stabilizing or destabilizing?" They're very active discussions about this. We could get into this in detail on what is going on in South Asia currently.

I would just say that the deeper the United States got into the Cold War use and discussion of conventional and nuclear deterrence, the more concerned the United States professionals became about command-and-control issues. This plays out in two ways in the contemporary setting. One is how much authority is delegated or pre-delegated to military decision makers, how much control do civilians have over the use of these devastating weapons, and what role does taking the human out of the decision process through the use of artificial intelligence, how does this potentially stabilize or fundamentally destabilize what's going on?

This is a large topic. I'm not going to do it justice, but the command-and-control piece of it as Americans look at South Asia is very troubling and we've had ongoing discussions with Pakistan and India on why we think they should learn from our, I won't call it mistakes, but teething pains in terms of learning how to control these things safely and to minimize the chances of accidental use.

Sushant Singh: I agree with both Shuja and Colin there. Colin makes some great points, but I think in case of countries in South Asia, the increasing gap in conventional capabilities actually makes newer technologies in the field of nuclear [unintelligible] et cetera, more attractive for all these countries. They're financially more affordable, the risk is much less, you need less quantity, et cetera. I think that's where the risk lies.

As we have seen historically, technology has only made weapons more deadlier, more difficult to handle. No technology has made weapons safer. Only the human beings, whether it's a chemical weapon protocol or whether it was the biological weapon protocol, it is clear leaders were to come together and decide that this cannot be used because left to itself, technologies have not helped any kind of weapons and we shouldn't expect that they would help nuclear weapons become less deadly or more easy to use.

Shuja Nawaz: Let me just add a quick footnote to this discussion. In Pakistan, the SPD, which is the Strategic Plans Division that's responsible for the nuclear planning and assets, traditionally has been led by and guided by people from the artillery, or the top corner as we call it in South Asia. All artillery people are really embedded in a thinking which is very linear, which is if you can increase the payload and if you can increase

the range, that's all that matters. You keep going up that route. For them the idea of de-escalation or the idea of stepping back and saying, "What if we don't use these weapons or make their use impossible," doesn't really happen.

This goes back to the point about delegation of authority that Colin mentioned. We actually organized a session with former late Secretary of State George Shultz where he and Secretary Perry both invited Indian and Pakistani nuclear experts to Stanford to talk about this issue and to learn from the US experience with the Soviets in the early days about fighting under a nuclear overhang, a conventional war under a nuclear overhang. Quite frankly, since I sat in on one of those meetings, I don't think either side walked away learning the lessons that Secretary Shultz meant to impart.

Zeba Fazli: Yes. This question of what we learned from the Cold War, what we learned from the US-Soviet experience and how it's applied in Southern Asia it's one that we've been tracing since the first deterrence course that was released in 2020 and it's certainly at play here in Restoring Deterrence. Thank you to audience for your questions. We'll go back to moderator questions, and then have one last round of a lighting round audience questions later, in our remaining half hour. From my list, I think, Shuja, speaking of US experience in South Asia, I'm curious from yours and Colin's perspective about the U.S role historically as a mediator of India-Pakistan crises.

I think that's been complicated by its increasing strategic competition with China, as well as other challenges in the U.S-Pakistan relationship. I think that there is concern that U.S influence of Pakistan may be increasingly limited in crises, given that strategic competition and great power competition, on top of perceptions of the U.S being a declining power, at least as far as South Asia is concerned.

For both of you, I'm curious as to your thoughts on whether the U.S can continue to be an effective mediator of the India-Pakistan crises and what actions the U.S government can take, either independently or in collaboration with Pakistan or India, to improve strategic stability in Southern Asia. Shuja, I'll go to you, and then to Colin.

Shuja Nawaz: My brief answer is the U.S should show some modesty in its ability, and that is based on the fact that it has over time lost its leverage, both with India and with Pakistan. With India, because India is now a kind of a poised superpower, it's a huge economic power. It's expanding its influence. Militarily, India is also going up the ladder, though it cannot compete with China. For the U.S to think that India can compete with China and force India into that competition in the Pacific is probably not a great idea.

With Pakistan, there's almost no economic assistance going from the United States to Pakistan. That leverage which played a big role in convincing the Pakistani public and its leadership that the U.S was a

friend of Pakistan has been diminished. We need to take a more realistic look at our ability and not see the U.S playing a mediator role, but playing more of a role as an entity that can create an enabling environment that will allow the countries in question, India and Pakistan, to reach the right conclusions, and to use economic assistance not bilaterally, but through the multilateral international financial institutions, particularly for Pakistan, to be able to put it back on its feet.

Because that is the biggest crisis that the country faces at the moment, is getting out of the hole that COVID put it into and that the Ukraine conflict has now added to, and the ups and downs of the energy prices of the world, because it is so dependent on imported energy and imported food, in this case from Ukraine. Over the next, I would say, five years or more, Pakistan is going to be in that hole. For the U.S to influence decision-making in the country, it will really have to talk in terms of principles and consistency of U.S involvement in the region.

The role of Afghanistan cannot be underestimated. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which I'm sure we'll discuss separately, needs to be looked at very carefully because that is going to determine Pakistan's actions in the region.

Colin Jackson: I would agree wholeheartedly with Shuja's call for modesty and an acknowledgment of reduced U.S leverage relative to the historical norm. I do think the United States was both more influential and the other great powers involved in the region were less powerful at earlier points in time. A lot of reasons why I think it was an easier problem for the United States to address in the past than it is in the present or the future. I would say though that what is undiminished, and I can say this as a former policymaker in this area, is the desire, the strident desire to avoid an explosion between two South Asian neighbors.

The problem is, how do you pursue what is essentially a fixed goal, which is the avoidance of major war, nuclear war in South Asia if we're in a period of diminished leverage? I would pick up on a couple of Shuja's points. I think the search certainly for a lot of the professionals in the space from the American point of view was, how can we find areas of cooperation with both India and Pakistan at a period where those two parties are in tension and where great power competition between the United States and China is further muddling this issue?

I think certain factions on the U.S side say, "Okay, everything has to be subordinated to the U.S-China competition." I think that that's a fairly bipartisan elite consensus. That makes the management of this problem particularly difficult. There are people who would argue because Pakistan is increasingly aligned with China and the United States is increasingly aligned with India, we cannot address these issues without comprising our commitment to some struggle between two blocs.

I find myself in a very different position. I think this is what makes policy hard but important. I agree that we should be looking for areas where we can cooperate with Pakistan in particular. CT cooperation may be an area, counterterrorism cooperation, in the wake of the Afghanistan withdrawal. There may be areas, as Shuja points out, in the economic realm, where we can come to positive-sum outcomes, but I think the search for this and the commitment to trying to do this is very important from the American point of view, but it's not necessarily a majority opinion.

I think that's one of the things that's rather sobering. Looking at the American policy community, they're so fixated understandably on the U.S-China competition that sometimes this pushes this very sensitive and very important problem into the background and makes it harder to manage. I'd pick up on a second point, though, too. One of the things we look at, whether it's in the South Asia context or let's say even in the Ukraine conflict is what the relationship between the conventional balance and nuclear risk is.

Frequently, I find myself at meetings, making points like, the way to buy down the risk of nuclear escalation is to look for conventional stability. This is a very old theme, it runs throughout the U.S Cold War experience. We backed away after the 1950s from a mostly nuclear posture in the New Look policy to a flexible response one where we built up conventional capabilities in order to avoid the nuclear precipice.

As I look at South Asia, what is worrisome is that the conventional imbalance is growing between Pakistan and India, and I agree that that increases the salience and the attractiveness of nuclear options, particularly for Pakistan. This is a big problem, and I think not just the United States policy community, but the foreign policy community globally needs to think very carefully about this. I think extreme instability or asymmetry in conventional strength, all things being equal makes it a more dangerous situation for nuclear escalation.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you both. We are about 20 minutes until we hit our end point, so I'm going to ask speakers to be more conscientious of two minutes per response, and then we'll get into some last audience questions. First, my question is for Sushant and Shuja to think about the so-called two-front threat that India faces from China and Pakistan. Sushant, last year you published a research note with the Stimson Center arguing that India lacks the resources to fight a two-front war with China and Pakistan, should one arise.

How does the prospect of such a conflict complicate India's deterrence posture? Do the Indian army realignments suggest any change in strategy from the approach that you described in that paper of assigning primary and secondary fronts, which would be Pakistan and China respectively?

Sushant Singh: Yes, clearly a two-front war is a nightmare for Indian military planners and the Indian military leaders, and the political leaders. Now that's a given. This question has been asked of Indian military leadership a lot in the recent months since the China border crisis began, and none of them-- If you're reading them carefully, listen to them carefully, none of them have actually said that we can handle two fronts simultaneously.

As Zeba said, earlier the whole idea was that the main front would be Pakistan and China would only try to come and put some pressure on us, so that would be the primary front for which India was prepared, and China would be the secondary front because China had always been dealt with diplomatically by the Indians and there was some kind of stability in that scenario. Ladakh has completely upturned that demise and brought the situation [unintelligible].

What I hear from military leaders and military planners is that the idea is actually to torture Pakistan with extreme punishment if it does anything while China is trying to do whatever it is doing on the border. If a threat from China emerges, then India is going to-- India really doesn't have the resources to stop Pakistan from doing anything except threatening with great punishment. I think the phrase great punishment**,** or very significant punishment, or whatever word military leaders may use, essentially signifies the use of nuclear weapons at some of the critical points. I think that is what I believe further complicated the situation in this case.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you Sushant. Then-

Shuja Nawaz: I would look at the order of battle of India. I think it's significant that there's been some changes in that troops have been moved from the three Strike Corps facing Pakistan towards the Chinese border but much more, perhaps, could be done on that front, because the abiding concern inside the Pakistan military, and let's not fool ourselves, the decisions on the India-Pakistan military front are made by the military, much more than that by civilian governments in Pakistan.

As General Kayani, the former army chief used to say, you have to look at the capability of the hostile forces, in this case, India. If their capabilities are that they can advance quickly into Pakistani territory, occupy key cities and then make Pakistan sue for peace, then that's what Pakistan army would worry about and that's what they will prepare for. The signaling effect of India actually reducing its strike forces and the independent brigade groups on the Pakistan border, would be enormous, in my view.

It doesn't necessarily have to go into an advanced offensive posture against China, but maybe just a defensive posture against China, with enough space between the two forces to avoid the risk of unnecessary and accidental conflict in the Himalayas would be one approach. That is something that the US can play a role in discussing with India and

convincing them that there will be support for India, as there always has been. In '62, also the US provided very rapid support to India.

Remember, in '62, Pakistan had the opportunity of opening another front against India, and it chose not to because it would be foolish of Pakistan to get involved in a two-front war because it would suddenly incur the wrath of the whole of the world, particularly the Western world for taking advantage of that Chinese-Indian conflict. In my view, I think a lot depends on the posture India wants to create in the region.

It can remove the fear that resides very deep in the Pakistani psyche about the potential for India to march into Pakistan and break it into two or three pieces. If that fear can be removed, then maybe they can talk about other ways of opening that border to trade and travel rather than as a path for military ingress.

Sushant Singh: Just to add to what Shuja said, and I'm not disputing anything what he has said. The fact of the matter is that before the border crisis, China began in Ladakh, the Indian political leadership in public speeches in public addresses had taken a very aggressive stance against Pakistan. Mr. Modi, in fact, in an election rally went on to say that the nuclear weapons that India has have not been kept for the festival of Diwali. Mr. Doval is on record with an aggressive statement.

The Prime Minister's most significant speech in India is on the Independence Day from the ramparts of the Red Fort, where he wants to talk about Balochistan and all those things. The stance had been very aggressive, very almost like that we are going to teach Pakistan a lesson kind of a thing. The China crisis completely has shifted. Have the intentions changed? As Shuja was saying that the military planners in Rawalpindi, look at the capabilities, not the intentions. I think even the intentions have not really changed. They did-- whatever has happened has been forced by the Chinese threat which has built up on the borders.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you both. Ketian, did you have anything to add about the prospect of two-front competition or two-front war with China and Pakistan against India or anything else that the others have said today?

Ketian Zhang: Yes. I was actually about to raise a two-finger. I think I agree with both Sushant and Shuja. At the same time, I think at least from what I know, the prospect of Sino-India war over the border dispute seems to be relatively low. Just because I think, as Sushant mentioned, intentions are important. I think the intentions or the stakes for war with China are just relatively lower. The stakes for Taiwan is a lot higher than compared to India.

Although territorial integrity is China's core interest, that individual territorial disputes, for example, those with the rocks in the South China Sea or along the LAC is simply not considered a core interest to the Chinese government. What that means is that although we're going

to probably continue to see skirmishes in the future, or lower-level conflict at a very localized level, but I just don't see China intentionally going into war with India over the territorial disputes. Especially if we see or look at Sino-Indian relations at the moment, the land border disputes tend to be very compartmentalized.

Both sides are fairly cooperative on a lot of other fronts, including economic fronts or climate change among other things, and they communicate fairly regularly when it comes to land border disputes. Although I think it's important for India to think about a potential two-front war, but at the same time, I just think that the likelihood when it comes to China, having a war with India over the LAC is relatively low.

Zeba Fazli: Thank you, Ketian. I think that's a valuable perspective. With that, I'm going to close out this round of questions and transition back to our audience questions before we wrap up for the day. First, I think Ketian to your point about the Ladakh and the land border with India not being a core interest to China but it is a core interest for India I think, the question from the audience is how are changing threat perceptions in Southern Asia impacting deterrence dynamics between Pakistan, India, and China?

I think that differing threat perceptions, changing threat perceptions, Sushant you were also talking about this, and how the 2020 crisis upended this in a lot of ways for India. Maybe open this to the floor, to whoever would want to answer that, and then we can go from there.

Shuja Nawaz: Maybe I can open on the conventional side based on my understanding from conversations with people inside Pakistan over the last few years, Pakistan is in a very comfortable position, despite the conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan. The reason being that it's like old sparring partners, India and Pakistan know each other so well and they know each other's geography so well that you can basically close your eyes and be able to predict exactly where the opposition is going to come from where they ingress will be, where you have to defend.

Pakistan has over time, moved its forces in such a way as to prevent that very rapid attack from the Indian side, in order to occupy territory and make Pakistan sue for peace. By moving the army, from the north to further near the Indian border in Pakistan, they've created a barrier to Indian ingress into Pakistan. They will probably be willing to give up territory in the south, but that territory may not be as strategically important in the context of India-Pakistan.

These calculations mean that there is already some kind of stability on the conventional side. It's really the nuclear side, where these are the issues that Colin raised were the issues of devolution of responsibility for the use of so-called tactical weapons becomes a reality and the possibility that by moving small weapons around, or instead of having them de-mated by mating them so they can be used rapidly, creates the

possibility of accidents or the weapons landing in the wrong hands, creating further instability. Those are things that I think still need to be resolved.

Sushant Singh: What Shuja said about Pakistan is absolutely true as far as India is concerned, I think a lot of it is about the kind of politics that's happening in India today and the very high-pitched nationalist rhetoric. I think that somehow brings a danger with it to the kind of ties that India has with Pakistan. We've already seen two highly publicized operations inside Pakistani-controlled territory, was one called the surgical strikes another the Balakot airstrike. That leaves me worried about where it could go into the future, the raised nationalist rhetoric in India for political cause.

Zeba Fazli: All right thank you both. If no one else has anything to add I think maybe one last or second-to-last question. I think one of the key lessons from my perspective of Restoring Deterrence and a lot of what we do at the Stimson Center is thinking about the eye of the beholder problem and differing perceptions of the status quo. This is what the last question was about, and we've been talking about that all this morning or this evening depending on where you are, from the Taiwan issue to the India-China border issues.

I think a question for all of you would be considering this problem, the eye of the beholder problem making it difficult to determine who's deterring and who's compelling in a rivalry. How could observers of strategic dynamics in this region critically interpret actions and rhetoric that they hear on these issues? I'll open that to everybody, maybe start with Colin and then go to Ketian, Sushant and Shuja.

Colin Jackson: I think the most important aspect for outside observers is to exercise not necessarily sympathy with any of the players but empathy. In other words, the ability to stand in the shoes virtually speaking of each of the parties in the conflict and understand contextually whether these messages are likely to be primarily, private let's say messages to the adversary or are they playing as Sushant has alluded to, to domestic audiences in an attempt to indulge nationalist impulses. I think a lot of the challenge of being a third-party observer here is to disentangle this.

I can't give you a stable answer to how one does that other than the sense of not to treat this in a surface way on any of these messages. I think from the US point of view typically we're looking not only at rhetoric but at movement of capabilities what people are doing in practical terms. Some summation of those two things is what we're basing our appreciation potentially.

Ketian Zhang: For me, I think maybe one way to get around with the issue of deciding who is deterring and who is compelling, is to be open to the idea, and this is something that I've been working on in my book manuscript as well, that sometimes states are simply compelling to deter. We're seeing it a lot I think in the Sino-Indian as well as the Taiwan Strait

cases in the sense that China, for example, is using coercion or compellence to deter future occurrences of what it thinks to be a breach to say the status quo. Same thing for I think India and to a certain extent the United States as well.

In a way, compellence and deterrence are not necessarily separate from one another which is what the standard literature implies. I think there is a blurred line between what is compellence and what is deterrence. In addition, I very much agree with Colin in that we need to really objectively assess what are the goals or intentions of all parties involved instead of just assigning normative judgment of what is wrong or what is right. It is important to have normative judgment, but I think for our purpose is really important to understand the intentions of ourselves as well as the adversary.

Sushant Singh: To add to what Colin and Ketian said, the only thing you can do is actually build-- for outside observers then I presume you're referring to the United States or other global powers, is to actually build long-term relationships generate some trust and that would provide you the better understanding of the intentions of the words that I use and what is meant and the context in which those words are being said. This is something which you need to do over a long period of time you can't just go in at the last moment and hope to understand what the people are trying to say what they're signaling or what they're doing or what they intend doing. I think that's something which is particularly relevant in case of Pakistan today when it comes to the United States.

Shuja Nawaz: On my part, looking at it as a Pakistani-American and particularly from the US point of view, I would advise the US to try and maintain a steady quantum of expertise on the region. We have a habit of rapidly moving people around and taking away experience and even now I was very amused to learn we've just sent a new ambassador to Pakistan who has no experience in the country but obviously is a trained diplomat. Now we're sending a new Deputy Chief of Mission to Pakistan also.

I think that's very important to retain continuity and to retain a critical mass of expertise *vis-à-vis* our country. The other point which picks up on what Sushant and I've been talking about throughout this session is the ability of populist governments to appeal to domestic audiences which has been the case in India. The mode that India takes goes down that route, my fear is that it will provoke a similar reaction inside Pakistan and to some extent, the populist rhetoric of Imran Khan reflects the populist rhetoric of Modi in India in my view.

You're going to have this constant tussle between populist forces that will create internal dynamics that are not conducive to creating peace and stability. That makes it very tough for friends like the United States or Western powers to then intervene in a more positive way. It really destroys the internal dynamics within the countries. Now the reality as I see it in Pakistan is that across the spectrum, political parties have been looking to open the border to the east for trade and for traffic.

Even the military had created support for trade with India including in the days when Mr. Zardari was president, the military actually approved the idea of opening trade with India and granting MFN status to India. It was Mr. Zardari's decision based on domestic political considerations because of upcoming elections that the agriculturalists in Punjab forced him to go back on that pledge to India. That started the slide in the relationship with India. I think we have to take into account these domestic dynamics when we look at it from the outside.

Zeba Fazli: All right thank you so much everyone. That essentially brings us to time. I have pages and pages of additional questions that I would love to ask you, but this has been just a fantastic session. Thank you so much Ketian, Sushant, Colin, and Shuja, and to all of you for joining. I think this has been such an edifying and an intriguing conversation and honestly it is just the tip of the iceberg, as I think we've certainly dug into today, for the questions and debates and study of coercion and crises and competition in Southern Asia.

If this conversation has intrigued you, if there are elements you want to dig into, if there's deterrence theory that you want to brush up on, or if there's anything else that you want to follow up on, then I cannot encourage you enough to go to stratlearning.org and enroll in Restoring Deterrence or any of our Strategic Learning courses for yourself. They're useful, they're fun to take as a student I promise and they're really unique resources whether you're just starting out working on these issues or if you're an old hand. I hope you'll enjoy it and I hope you'll learn and engage with these scholars and so many more.

Thank you again to everyone for joining us today thank you to our panelists, and to Elizabeth for being our convener today. Thank you again so much, have a fabulous rest of your day.