

Event Transcript

Nuclearization Debates: What Can South Korea Learn from South Asia?

The Stimson Center

May 3, 2023

Featuring:

Feroz Khan, BG (Retired), Research Professor, Naval Postgraduate School

Nicholas L. Miller, Associate Professor, Dartmouth College

Ruhee Neog, Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi

Elizabeth Threlkeld (co-moderator), Senior Fellow and Director of the South Asia program, Stimson Center

Jenny Town (co-moderator), Senior Fellow and Director of the 38 North program, Stimson Center

Event Description

Join our South Asia and 38 North programs for a panel analyzing what lessons South Asia has to offer the Korean Peninsula as it debates nuclearization. As public support for nuclear weapons in South Korea grows significantly, experts will discuss the nuclearization of South Asia as a comparative case that could offer South Korea lessons for its own possible nuclear future.

Co-hosted by Stimson's South Asia Program and 38 North, this panel of experts will analyze the road to and legacy of nuclearization in India and Pakistan 25-years-on from their 1998 nuclear tests. The discussion will explore nuclear drivers, discourses, and (in)stability in South Asia, offering insights into how nuclear weapons have shaped regional security dynamics and the potential impact they could have in the Korean context.

More information and event video available at <https://www.stimson.org/event/nuclearization-debates-what-can-south-korea-learn-from-south-asia>

Event Transcript

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Good morning, good evening, wherever you're joining us from. My name is Elizabeth Threlkeld and I'm the Director of the South Asia Program at the Stimson Center in Washington, DC. It is a pleasure to have you all with us this morning and a special pleasure for us.

The South Asia Program is really pleased to be co-hosting this event with our partners at the 38North program at Stimson. My colleague, Jenny Town, the director of 38North, is joining us as our co-moderator this morning. And I think it's a very timely discussion that we've been looking forward to.

Our premise this morning, and actually for a series of collaborative events that we are just kicking off with 38North, is to reflect on lessons learned from 25 years of nuclearization in South Asia, and

what we might come to draw from that--what lessons we can take away that will help us better understand the debates that are playing out in South Korea now, over the potential for nuclearization.

Obviously, we recognize the contexts are different, it's not a perfect comparison. But as that conversation seems to be heating up in Seoul, what expectations and realities have we seen in South Asia over the past 25 years that we can meaningfully reflect on to help us better understand how potential nuclearization in South Korea, could impact security and deterrence dynamics in the Korean peninsula?

It's a lot to unpack, but we have a great panel with us today. I'll turn things over to Jenny for a bit more context on the discussion that we'll be having.

Jenny Town:

Thank you, Elizabeth. As you said, I'm Jenny Town. I'm a senior fellow and director of our 38North Program here at Stimson, and it is a pleasure to have 38North work with our South Asia program and I hope we can do more of this going forward.

Earlier this year, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol became the first South Korean president to publicly discuss the idea that South Korea could eventually build its own nuclear weapons program, if the situation with North Korea continues to worsen.

To be clear, Seoul has made no decision to go down the nuclear path as of yet. But the way that this debate has progressed from a very fringe view a decade ago, to one of a more mainstream and frequent discussion, with even greater public support after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, means that we need to be looking at this and taking this seriously.

In the past, the international community, I think, has tended to dismiss this option as unthinkable. Despite the fact that Seoul once had a clandestine nuclear weapons program back in the 1970s. And that program ended as essentially the U.S. gave South Korea the choice, "You can either have nuclear weapons or you can have the alliance. You can't have both."

It seemed to work then, but the geopolitical and geostrategic environment has changed drastically since then. And so really, what are our choices now? But by dismissing this as a real world challenge, the discourse on South Korea's nuclear options has progressed domestically with a lot of focus on why Seoul would want or may even be justified in wanting nuclear weapons. But with little discussion of whether this would truly address the underlying security situation South Korea faces today. Or what the reputational and economic costs of that choice will be.

So, South Korea has deemed itself, for instance, a global pivotal state and has been working to not only deepen and expand its alliance with the U.S. into a strategic rather than just a military alliance, as well as take on greater leadership on global issues such as health, energy, security, climate change, cultural diplomacy, and even democracy. But certainly, that standing would change by choosing a nuclear path.

And moreover, some of the arguments made in favor of South Korea's nuclearization include assumptions about how it would affect North Korea's behavior. That it would increase deterrence not only against the North's nuclear use, but also against low level provocations and coercion. And that it would create this nuclear parody that would force North Korea to engage in arms control talks. Or that it would somehow improve security against potential future Chinese aggression as well.

And so today, we hope to test some of these assumptions looking at how nuclearization has affected bilateral and regional stability in South Asia and the implications that might have then for Northeast Asia. And Elizabeth, I'll turn it back over to you.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Perfect. We will be having a moderated discussion today. We'll focus on conversation rather than having long-winded remarks, so hoping to keep things lively. And we'll try to balance out these two topics, and likely the audiences in the virtual room, because we recognize not everyone is an expert in South Asian nuclear dynamics, not everyone is an expert in strategic dynamics in the Korean peninsula, so we'll do a little bit of both: some back building on the South Asian context, but also a range of comparative questions.

As I mentioned, we are very, very fortunate to have an esteemed panel with us today to help us unpack these questions. Very brief introductions, though their full bios will be available on the event website. Brigadier General, retired, Feroz Khan, is a professor of research at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. He's a retired brigadier general from the Pakistan Army. Has both combat and command experience on Pakistan's Eastern and Western borders. Was a former director for arms control and disarmament affairs at Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division and is the author of two books, which are must-reads, the most recent of which is called *Subcontinent Adrift*.

Second, we have Ruhee Neog who is the Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi. Ruhee has been a research fellow with Harvard's Belfer Center, is a member of the Comparative Monitoring Center, or is a fellow with the Comparative Monitoring Center with Sandia National Labs, and

pertinent to this discussion, was a visiting fellow with the Stimson Center in 2017. So it's a pleasure to have you back with us virtually, Ruhee.

Last but not least is Dr. Nick Miller, who is an associate professor of government at Dartmouth. Nick focuses on nuclear proliferation and international security. He's the author of *Stopping the Bomb*, as well as a number of book chapters and journal articles. One of which we're going to be referring to today for some lessons learned on South Asia. Before going to Dartmouth, he was an assistant professor of political science at Brown and received his PhD in political science from MIT.

So thank you all three for joining us. Really looking forward to learning from you this morning.

All right. Without further ado, let's kick things off. And I think having heard some of the context on discussions and debates underway in South Korea at the moment, maybe we can take a step back to reflect on the situation in South Asia in the late 20th century.

Actually, this month in May of 2023, we are 25 years on from the overt nuclearization of both India and Pakistan, so it's a meaningful milestone in South Asia. We recognize, of course, the dynamics are different, as I mentioned. South Korea has the U.S. nuclear umbrella, India had previously conducted a so-called peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974. Pakistan was widely suspected to have a developed weapons capacity. But looking back on that moment in the late '90s, what were some of the initial expectations in South Asia 25 years ago for how overt nuclearization would change security dynamics in the region?

I'll start with Feroz here and then go to some of our other panelists. Feroz?

We're having some audio challenges, Feroz.

Feroz Khan: Sorry, I muted. Can you hear me now?

Elizabeth Threlkeld: There we go. Yes, we can hear you now.

Feroz Khan: Yes. Thank you so much. Now, 25 years ago, around this time, 1998, the world was so different. But what was the turn of the century India and Pakistan were looking for? It was important, especially I am expected to speak from the Pakistani perspective. It was under sanctions from the United States and it had to conduct the nuclear test following what India chose the timing of the test. So the expectation immediately was, as you remember, the 1999, there was a memorandum of understanding in Lahore, agreement

done immediately. So the hope immediately was that there will be a different era of detente and stability leading towards a quick resolution of the conflict between India and Pakistan, and both leadership in India and Pakistan were actually heading in that direction. That was the foremost thing.

Purely from the Pakistani perspective, the idea of nuclear weapons was from the very beginning, go about almost 25 years back, say 50 years from the mid '70s, was to prevent the repeat of the 1971 war that could happen.

The third thing I would list is that especially from a weaker country from Pakistan, they were hoping that a restraint agreement with India would prevent an arms race, that would put Pakistan at a disadvantage. And so that was part of a hopeful period of seeking stability as a result of nuclear weapons, but looking back 25 years now, it was just the opposite of what had happened.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Ruhee, I'm curious for your thoughts. Does that mirror the experiences that epic was felt in Delhi in some of the early hopes?

Ruhee Neog:

Oh, thanks Elizabeth, and thanks to Stimson for the invitation. And I would agree with Brigadier General Khan's assessment entirely. Which is that the main objective would've been greater stability by conflict prevention. And I think there is enough primary literature on the subject of Indian nuclear decision making, and of course, the security argument was that it was a consideration of India's negative security environment that would've, among other factors, precipitated the decision to overtly nuclearize.

So fundamentally, and I'm going to keep this short to begin things, Elizabeth, because as you identified at the beginning, we want to have a conversation. Just to your question, I think the answer again, as Brigadier General Khan has also identified, it is quite straightforward. And that would've been conflict prevention slash deterring adversarial aggression slash greater stability.

What I will flag at this point, and perhaps this is something we can bring up later in the discussion, is the term strategic stability, because of course, we use it very frequently. It is also invoked frequently by both practitioners and scholars, but we don't do this without taking recourse to definitions, even though we know that it can mean different things in different contexts. And I think particularly in this discussion, since we are looking at comparative cases between South slash Southern Asia and the Korean peninsula, it would be useful to discuss and perhaps even debate what we mean when we say strategic stability before we move on to a discussion about perhaps what are the objectives or what are the means and ways in which strategic stability could be achieved

or has been achieved, at least in our regional context. Yes, so those are my thoughts to begin with.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

That's a great point, Ruhee, and I think an important one that we can look at perhaps at different time periods to see if the goalposts have shifted a bit on what we mean when we say strategic stability because it's one of those slippery terms that gets used fairly frequently but to your point, we rarely sit back and try to define it.

Nick, maybe I can come to you for your thoughts. Obviously, you've deeply researched this period in time. But perhaps picking up as well on Ruhee's question about strategic stability, any thoughts on how that was perceived in this 1998, late '90s era in South Asia?

Nick Miller:

Yeah, well, I think Feroz and Ruhee captured the expectations in South Asia quite well and better than I could have. One thing I want to add, which I think relates to this question of strategic stability, is the overt nuclearization facilitated from Pakistan's perspective a change in their nuclear strategy and doctrine that you mentioned in your question, that it was already widely known, before 1998, that Pakistan had a nuclear weapons capability. It just hadn't been overtly declared and tested. But initially, in the late '80s and early nineties, they were using their nuclear weapons in an indirect fashion. The idea was if there was a crisis with India that emerged, Pakistan could essentially implicitly threaten to brandish its nuclear arsenal or maybe declare it openly. And that might provide some incentive for the international community and the United States in particular, to step in and try to manage these crises.

We did see that happen at several times in the 1980s and 1990s. After India tested in 1998, this allowed Pakistan to demonstrate its nuclear capability more concretely and then demonstrate that it might have the capability to produce and deploy so-called tactical nuclear weapons. This corresponded with a shift in Pakistani nuclear strategy towards a first use posture vis-à-vis India. And this would allow Pakistan to take its security into its own hands a bit more directly, and not relying on the United States as a patron to step in and address matters, instead of having the capability to deter India more independently.

So I think that's another important change that's taking place in this time period. Obviously, from the Pakistani perspective, that's intended to, as Feroz indicated, create more stability in the relationship with India and provide a more reliable, stronger deterrent.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Yeah, absolutely. Picking up, Feroz and Ruhee. I guess, Feroz, where you left off in your response, you were noting that expectations had not matched up with the reality that you were outlining in terms of expectations for how overt nuclearization could change strategic stability dynamics in South Asia. Can you unpack that a little bit for us? What have we seen over the last 25 years?

Feroz Khan:

Yes, I think that we alluded to that. We get into the definition of what strategic stability really constitutes, particularly in South Asia. There are so many variables involved.

I believe this is the next question that we're putting because essentially what happened, especially in Pakistan, was that immediately after the nuclear test, they got into a civil military collapse. Resulting to a military coup in Pakistan and things changed, and exactly what the idea of restraint of the western nuclear forces did not happen. A sort of an arms race for that began. Rather than conflict resolution, what happened was, that both sides now had nuclear weapons. The conflict position hardened rather than softening the position. That was the reverse of what was expected in Lahore. Everything that started happening in the next five years, started questioning all those difficulties that... the literature of Cold War began to apply in a very different environment in South Asia because it was so virulent. Stability and stability paradox. The India and Pakistani were on a new nuclear learning curve, did not exactly know how to change their behavior. And then what we saw, and as Nick was alluding to, there were innovative military doctrines that started after commencing military doctrines. India began to change its doctrine from deep maneuver to shallow maneuver, and that resulted as with the tactical nuclear weapon. There was mismatch between Indian thinking of doctrine and Pakistani think of doctrine.

And eventually by the second decade, then India and Pakistani drifted. For a longer answer, this is the book we alluded to. Everything is answering as to what happened in 25 years rather than... So I will only briefly give this answer that strategic stability as defined in the Cold War, became much more different because they were levels of problems, conventional and nuclear. And this entanglement of the triangular thing was very difficult for the region to change their objectives to what was hoped in 1999.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Yeah. Ruhee coming to you, we've gotten a few ideas on the table in terms of your great question on strategic stability. I'm curious to turn it back to you, but also to ask you as Brigadier Feroz did, to reflect on expectations versus reality from the perspective of New Delhi over the last 25 years. How have you seen the discussion

evolve in terms of how nuclear weapons in the subcontinent were expected to play out and in fact what we've seen in reality?

Ruhee Neog:

Thanks, Elizabeth.

So as I said earlier, and as was agreed by my co-panelists, the primary justification whether it was for India or for Pakistan, was greater security, greater stability, whatever terminology or language you choose to use. Eventually the bottom line was that you wanted to deter your adversary from aggressing against you. And I think in certain ways, nuclear weapons or the possession and presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia have been able to generate these conditions but of course with important caveats. And here just to, I will keep then referring back to strategic stability since that is the direction that I accidentally have led us on.

Two, and I missed large chunks of Brigadier General Khan's remarks because I wasn't able to hear clearly. But in terms of expectations of strategic stability, I also do wonder whether these decision makers at the time had an expectation of absolute strategic stability, which can never be the case. Which is why I identify this caveat. Because even as by and large we've seen a large scale conflict, the likelihood of a large scale conflict, diminishing again--here with the caveat that even as I say this, we of course know that the Indian military very actively considers and now has explicitly started acknowledging the possibility of a two front threat from China and Pakistan--so even if that likelihood of large scale conflict is reduced, of course we also have at the same time nuclear weapons or the acquisition of nuclear weapons sort of opening up or enabling the space for asymmetric warfare, sub conventional conflict, whatever you choose to call it. And I think this will continue for as long as Pakistan seeks to exploit the nuclear shadow and sees value in the use of prosper border terrorism as state policy.

And what we also have in addition to this is, and we've seen this demonstrated with greater clarity more recently, are Indian attempts to test Pakistani thresholds and experiment with the possibility of limited military action. And all of these conditions together can create greater instability at various different levels and will of course have an impact on escalation. So then to the fundamental question, going back to strategic stability in its narrow sense, because India has its low first use policy. But I think both India and Pakistan, I see no reason why either country would want to use, and here the operative word is want, why they would want to use nuclear weapons first.

And in a broader sense of the term strategic stability, which is conflict prevention or an absence of conflict, again, you have hits and misses. So I think in any geographical scenario, if you are assessing this question of expectations and seeing whether the objective of greater stability or strategic stability has been met, I think the answer will never be absolute. And I think it will probably be something big like you will see shades of both greater stability and greater instability. I hope that answers your question a little bit.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

No, it does. Thank you Ruhee. And I think you've, both you and Feroz have put some food for thought on the table. Especially in terms of what's known in scholarship as the stability instability paradox. The extent to which the nuclear umbrella actually facilitates conflict at lower levels, be it conventional or sub conventional. And this idea of both sides increasingly pushing the envelope perhaps, of what is possible for limited war under the nuclear umbrella.

Which actually leads very nicely to the question that I wanted to bring you in on, Nick. You and Mark Bell just wrote a fascinating article or a fascinating chapter in a new book, which I would highly recommend, *The Fragile Balance of Terror*, discussing this concept of nuclear learning. So what have India and Pakistan taken away from their first 25 years as overt nuclear powers? And how well, if at all, states that become nuclear powers actually do learn? Very briefly, if you could, let us know what your findings were and how you think they apply to India and Pakistan's behavior in the 25 years since we've seen those tests. Maybe finally, what factors were the most important in shaping both sides' behavior over those two and a half decades?

Nick Miller:

Sure, great question.

There's this prominent idea in the scholarly literature that nuclear powers learn over time and they learn in a very particular way. It's kind of a comforting argument. The idea is states learn to behave more safely and responsibly with their nuclear arsenals. Particularly they learn nuclear weapons are only useful for deterrents, not for enabling aggression. They learn that they should try to avoid arms races and they take steps to make sure they don't suffer nuclear accidents or miscalculations, and they manage their nuclear arsenals in a way to minimize those risks. And so what we did in the chapter is basically just ask, do we actually see that sort of learning taking place in South Asia in the last several decades? And we find that mostly it has not. And if anything, the trends seem to have actually pointed in the opposite direction.

So if you look at India and Pakistan prior to the 1998 tests, they both had relatively relaxed nuclear postures. In an absolute sense and certainly compared to what they have today, both were focused on deterrence and they structured their arsenals in a way that minimized the odds of sort of hasty use in a crisis. The weapons were stored and disassembled in separate components.

Since then, they both adopted increasingly aggressive conventional and nuclear postures that probably come with higher risks of accident and miscalculation. I mentioned briefly earlier Pakistan adopting a first use posture after 1998. And according to a lot of people who have studied this, they've used this to effectively deter India from retaliating for insurgent attacks that have Pakistani backing. And Pakistan appears to have learned that its nuclear arsenal actually does more than deterrence. It allows it to be more aggressive in its policy towards India.

And that's sort of the opposite of what these nuclear learning arguments would expect. Because nuclear weapons are only supposed to be useful for deterrence, not enabling aggressive forms of behavior.

If you look at the Indian side in large part, in response to what Pakistan has been doing, India I think has learned or come to believe that the more relaxed nuclear posture that its long had is kind of a liability. And it's moved towards developing an arsenal that can be ready and used more quickly. It's also begun investing in capabilities that at least in theory, and this is very controversial, could be used or could be useful at least if they wanted to conduct a preemptive attack against Pakistani nuclear forces in a crisis scenario. So this includes things like missile defense, more accurate missiles, better satellite and sensing capabilities.

If you look in the conventional realm, especially under Modi, India's also been more aggressive in just how it's using its military force. Of course, the most notable example of this would be in 2019, when India launched airstrikes at Pakistani territory proper in retaliation for an attack that occurred in Indian administered Kashmir. So you have learning that's taking place on both sides, but in both cases it's pointing in the opposite direction of what these optimistic arguments expect. Both sides seem to be learning that they should be more aggressive in both kind of the conventional and nuclear realms. And that gives them a coercive advantage over their adversary.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

That's a great summary. Thank you so much, Nick.

Ruhee and Brigadier Khan, I want to pull you both in for your reactions to what Nick just laid out. To those lessons that he's described, but also any others that's reflecting on the last 25 years

you think are important to pull out. Nick, you were alluding to this, and Ruhee you did as well earlier, the idea of the two front threat. That it's not just India and Pakistan in the mix, that China is also increasingly a factor to bear in mind in Southern Asia, but what other lessons learned come to mind reflecting on expectations versus reality of nuclearization in South Asia? Ruhee, I'll start with you.

Ruhee Neog:

Thanks Elizabeth, and thank you Nick for your comments. And I agree with all of them and I agree particularly because you challenge conventional wisdom around the assumptions that nuclear learning makes.

And I think this is very relevant, particularly because of course policy as you know, rarely engages with academia. And even when it does, we use it of course to explain and understand your behavior interactions, et cetera. But there is an understanding that none of this is set in stone or absolute. And also I think there is an acknowledgement that this kind of mainstream knowledge production often emerges from very particular geographical and cultural contexts.

And in that regard, Nick, I fully agree with you that nuclear learning, the literature of nuclear learning tends to assume a positive outcome. But as we've seen in South Asia, that is not necessarily always the case. In fact, I would say that is rarely the case and stability is not an automatic outcome of this process. And then as you pointed out and described very well, this kind of learning can be used to exploit the security dilemma. In ways in which essentially one actor is trying to expand its positive choices, while trying to induce a choice paralysis or choice limitation in another actor.

One more question worth asking also with regard to learning, since the literature at least assumes that it is always positive. Is that even if the learning is positive, is it also being implemented, in the same way? Because there is a difference between learning and executing. I think in the India-Pakistan case, so speaking here of South Asia, I think the two countries assume a certain kind of maturity and also tend to project a certain kind of maturity as these two nuclear armed neighbors that have had interactions as overtly nuclearized countries over a 25-year period. But I think what this does also is that this kind of mentality breeds a sense of complacency. And I don't think that kind of complacency has any place really in a nuclearized environment.

But also on the flip side, I think that the question worth asking, and here I'm sort of zooming out, is what is it that deters us? And here I'm not speaking as a South Asian or an Indian, I'm speaking

generally as scholars, even practitioners. What is it that deters learning through the experiences of others? And I flag this because in recent interactions in conferences and things, I have found to my surprise that people, quite a few people, who operate in this subfield and work also on nuclear issues, they don't or they didn't know when I interacted with them about the existence for example, of the India Pakistan agreement on non-aggression against each other's nuclear installations which has been around since 1991, I think. And this has come up more frequently now because of what we've seen unfolding in Ukraine with nuclear facilities getting caught up in a crisis, et cetera.

And that has led to questions about what are the things we could be doing to insulate such sensitive facilities, installations, so on and so forth from the external environment. But of course the precedent for this already exists elsewhere, except that geography is not in the west. And I think this makes a clear case for how overall negative characterizations of regional dynamics, and in this case I'm speaking of South Asia, and these lenses could be the most dangerous place on earth. Or it could be a nuclear flashpoint. How these can deter, they can disincentivize any opportunity to learn from another context.

And I think if we are having a discussion on nuclear learning, it is also important to identify one, of course, the ways in which nuclear learning could be both negative and positive. But also what are the ways or what the factors that hold us back from learning from the experience of others. And I think that is relevant also because we are discussing comparative cases today.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Absolutely. Thanks, Ruhee. And thanks also for mentioning the arms control side of the equation with CBMs that have been developed over the years. We've talked a lot about deterrence, but it's also how both sides have sought to manage these weapons and the risks that come with them over time.

Brigadier Khan, let me briefly turn to you: any other thoughts before we shift to a more comparative mode in terms of the nuclear learning that has taken place?

Whoops, you might be muted again.

Feroz Khan:

So yes, I mean I have a lot to say but I'll be brief because you asked us.

So Nick began with this and I agree with what Nick has said and you know what Ruhee has said, I just want to add a little bit more. A decade back I had a project which is also in a published volume called *The Next Decade of Nuclear Learning*. That was in 2013, the comprehensive sort of views from India and Pakistan as to

what did they learn in the first decade of neutralization. And Nick, you alluded that it is assumed that nuclear powers are going to learn something over a period of time. And that's exactly what happened, that as India Pakistan progressed, they began to learning. Because each environment in the region is different than the experience that had existed in the Cold War, because this was a regional dynamic.

And again, I think we alluded that Korean Peninsula and South Asia will remain different and we are alluding to that, those environment. There's one point that I wanted to explain, rather two more points. One is that the concept of nuclear learning was written by Jeffrey Knopf, who's a colleague of mine at NPS now. He wrote, and that is published in one of the nonproliferation article. And we came to one conclusion that states either learn something, which was what he described as complex learning and simple learning. And this was the problem here was that there was expectation that statecraft and behavior of states would change when you acquire nuclear weapons. The problem begins there because states do not change their objective and they try to find different views of reaching the same objective. Rather than changing the objective because nuclear weapons would not be able to give those objectives that you thought would have been achieved during non-conventional means, either through subconventional means or through conventional means. Now you can achieve that.

Instead, what states do is simple learning: they try to circle around and try to reach the same objective. This is where India and Pakistan really went. And by the way, Ruhee is right in saying that the complexity of the three or two front situation both India and Pakistan began to face. But I would rather qualify that that rather became more in the second decade. In the first decade if we closely watch, it was more dyadic between India and Pakistan dynamics, that all doctrine were actually evolving. And it was only in the second part where China became a greater factor in two front situation. Even though from a proliferation standpoint, China Pakistan's population is something that... It's just a different debate altogether. But if you talk purely talking about during, that was the issue. So that is one issue that we began on the nuclear learning curve that's observances is that meaning of nuclear revolution does a much later in the state.

And I've been a strong proponent of that rather than perfecting the instability stability paradox which I believe after 25 years, both India and Pakistan have not done. Previously in literally they were just groping in the dark. From a military standpoint, I wanted to add something more, and this is more the Pakistani doctrinal perspective. Because they began configuring deterrent forces is not

as easy for new nuclear powers as much as it is thought. Now how do you integrate conventional and nuclear weapons, how the jointness come? That was a very, very difficult path of Pakistan in particular. They could not... I mean there was no other way to learn from. They had to go by learning through their own doctrinal situations. What are the thresholds? Well, with the nuclear weapons we use, it's easy to say first you, but it's not as easy to actually configure it on ground.

And that's why it looks simple that from very academic perspective, but really when you operationalize it is not that easy. And one more factor that I would say that 9/11 factor also impacted a lot in India and Pakistan history. So if the 9/11 factor had not happened, things might have been different because there was a different situation with Pakistan and some sort of a asymmetric warfare happening in Afghanistan. The only slight, maybe I don't want to start the debate, but Nick, I would want to just qualify something you may have mentioned that Pakistan became more aggressive to up the ante because of nuclear weapons. I would not attribute that because in my view it was the other way around. Because it was again an unlearning process. They were not upping the ante. In fact before the nuclear test, they had really upped the ante on Kashmir from 1989 to 1998. In fact, it was the other way around. And I have been arguing that Pakistan has been using that strategy from 1948 onwards. So nuclear weapons only provided them more complexity as to where it does, similarly a doctrine happened.

So I will qualify that statement that they became more aggressive because that looks like because it was happening in a post 9/11 environment, and by the way the terrorism word did not appear in the lexicon before 2001. If you go back to 1998 narrative, nobody used the word terrorism or Kashmir. They were using different language, proxy war, this war, that war. So I would say, qualify, that the problem was they continued to do that despite nuclear weapons and did not change the policy.

And that is one of the most difficult part that when nuclear weapons states are supposed to change strategies, supposed to change their statecraft, supposed to change their diplomacy, the world begins to look at them differently if they acquire nuclear weapons. And I think it took a long time for India and Pakistan to really come to that point.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Well thanks to you all for setting the table so well. I'll turn things over to Jenny for some comparative questions now that hopefully we can draw in the South Korean context a bit more.

Jenny Town:

Thanks Elizabeth. And yeah, thank you to all the speakers. It's been a really fascinating and really insightful discussion, that I think is really important to the Korean context as well.

I know we've talked a lot about how nuclearization has really affected this whole low level military adventurism. That it hasn't necessarily solved it, that there can be greater stability and greater instability at the same time. I do wonder if we could talk a little bit more about what were some of the non-nuclear tools in this process, to bring this argument around.

And so one thing you hear in South Korea for instance is that South Korea having nuclear weapons would put north and South Korea on equal footing and force North Korea to the negotiating table to really hammer out confidence building, risk reduction, arms control measures. And I wonder if that's the case, if we can talk a little bit about has that been the case in South Asia? What has the South Asian experience been in negotiating and keeping to confidence building measures? And what might that tell us about similar negotiations in the Korean context? And I wonder if we can go to, well Nick first, since he's on screen?

Nick Miller:

Sure. So I think the South Asian experience, it shows that nuclearization can certainly help motivate efforts at arms control and risk reduction.

But I would say the process is not automatic. Or going back to the discussion we just had about learning, it's not sort of a linear process and the progress that countries make on arms control or risk reduction, is very much influenced by geopolitics and domestic politics and the political climate that happens to be going on at the time.

I think Ruhee alluded to this earlier, we shouldn't miss out on talking about the fact that there have been some positive steps that have taken place between India and Pakistan in this area. So she already mentioned, Ruhee mentioned, this agreement not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. That's an important confidence building measure. They agreed to provide information about these facilities as well. There's also an agreement to provide notification pre-launch of ballistic missile tests to reduce the risk of some sort of miscalculation taking place.

And it also is worth noting since 1998 they have, India and Pakistan, have maintained I guess what you could think of as a joint moratorium on nuclear testing. And so those are all positive things we should point to. But obviously there's agreements and risk reduction measures that have not materialized. Initially post 1998 as part of the Lahore Declaration, there was this idea that

there'd be consultations on nuclear doctrine that haven't really come to fruition.

And it's also worth noting, there really hasn't been anything like the sort of arms control agreements you saw during the Cold War, that were negotiated by the superpowers. Which weren't just about confidence building but actually imposed limits on the size of countries' deployed arsenals or the contours of those arsenals and what sort of delivery vehicles they could maintain. There's nothing like that between India and Pakistan.

I think a fundamental issue, this was true during the Cold War too, is that you only are likely to see these sort of major arms control deals, either when you already have relatively stable bilateral relations. And I think you can look at the SALT and ABM treaties in the 1970s as an example of this. These emerged during a period of detente between the US and Soviet Union. Or these arms control agreements sometimes emerge when countries are really scared after they've just gone through an extremely dangerous crisis. And here you can think of something like the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, which came right after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Which really shook both American and Soviets right about how they could potentially stumble into a nuclear war.

And so there's a problem here where you either need these positive preconditions of relative stability that we haven't really ever had in an India-Pakistan case and we don't have in the South Korea-North Korea case. Or there'd be some sort of really dangerous crisis. But we also don't want to see that. Because anytime you have a really dangerous crisis, there's some probability that it doesn't turn out the way you hope. So I think that's one of the challenges, is the pathways to getting to these more transformational arms control agreements are not really easy to walk down.

Jenny Town:

Thanks, Nick. I think all of those points are really important. Especially on the agreements that we would like to happen that we thought would happen that have not yet come about. Ruhee, I wonder if we can turn to you next?

Ruhee Neog:

Thank you, Jenny. I just put my earphones in. Can you hear me?

Jenny Town:

Yes.

Ruhee Neog:

Okay, great.

So I actually again find that I completely agree with Nick. If, and here I want to of course clarify that I'm not advocating for nuclear weapons, but the acquisition of nuclear weapons can create, I mean I think that already has a very powerful built in incentive to discuss

regional stability. But as Nick pointed out, this is not linear or as easy as one makes it sound. I will only supplement Nick's excellent remarks.

So with regards to these mechanisms, these discussions around regional nuclear stability, et cetera. Jenny, you asked I think an important question, which is, how do you keep these mechanisms in place? While it is important to talk about what are the mechanisms, vehicles, et cetera elsewhere that provide these templates for emulation or adaptation, et cetera, I think it is what is fundamentally more important is to be looking at these other cases and ask what makes them hold, what makes emphasis regardless of the state of interstate relations.

So Nick has mentioned a couple, another one between India and Pakistan, that we could be talking about is the DGMO hotline between director-generals of military operations, which is used on a weekly basis between the offices of the DGMO and on a need basis between the DGMOs themselves. And I think this is a good example of a mechanism that has more or less held through fairly long period of time.

So then the question to be asking is how do you make these mechanisms so procedural and so formulaic, that they've become embedded and socialized into your day-to-day security discourse and are completely insulated from external shocks? Of course you have for example the Foreign Secretary level hotlines between India and Pakistan--not hotlines, hotline between India-Pakistan, which was also referred to as the nuclear hotline, which is moribund.

So what is it that makes some succeed and not others? What are the circumstances that protect them from the external political security environment? And here we could also be talking about the inter Korea hotline, which also that whole network has been around for a long time. But of course it's been disrupted several times also and is subject to political whims. So how do you ensure that doesn't happen? I think that is worth investigating.

Jenny Town:

Thanks Ruhee. Feroz, I want to give you a chance to weigh in on this too. And in deference to time, if we could keep our answers a little bit short that would be great.

Feroz Khan:

Yeah, yeah, I'll be very short.

I think most of the point I made, CBMs is still a lot of [inaudible 00:47:20] stability and data. I mean there has to be a policy change. All the CBMs that is being mentioned here, if you note that this was pre-nuclear test before 1998, most of the CBMs. After the nuclear test, there were hardly very, very few CBMs between

India and Pakistan. In fact, we are looking at the Lahore Agreement is indicating all kind of things that India and Pakistan should have done. They did not hardly did anything in the 25 years that they promised. So that's something that the question is.

However, there is one thing, again, it goes back to the nuclear learning that despite the absence of any formal arms control or formal stability agreement between the two countries, I would still say that India and Pakistan and have shown some inbuilt restraint despite the crisis of not gone out of hand. They have had many crisis, especially in the last decade or so. It did not go out of hand.

So there is some element of restraint that is agreed that is somehow inbuilt in the countries and all. We have a greater problem. I thought we switched to the next question, but the problem between India and Pakistan is that neither is assured of the deterrence will hold and that is why they continue India and Pakistan to keep on poking at each other. And that is why we get into crisis instability here and there. So I mean that's a different debate. But now as new technological weapons are evolving into the arsenals of India and Pakistan both, there is a dogmatic belief that nuclear deterrence will continue to hold as it was held in the 20th century. So we are now in the third decade of 21st century and now looking beyond the simple nuclear deterrence that existed in 20th century. And that debate has not quite dawned in India and Pakistan, although we just talk about in seminars and weapons, et cetera.

So it is a bit surprising because we are talking about what has prompted South Korea to start thinking in terms of that it sort of abandoned thinking in the '70s. I very curious to know what prompted South Korea to think on these lines. India and Pakistan have a different history. They were never a member of NPT, they never had faith, they never had umbrella. And so I can only say one thing because I may not get time because there is some parallel about South Korea and Pakistani way of thinking that may go back in their '70s. Both countries had one common fear, if I understand correctly, that there was fear of abandonment of alliance. The Pakistani feared that when it come to extremists the Americans are not going to come to their rescue. And they saw that in 1965, 1971 and that's what led them to believe fear of abandonment.

And at the same time the fear of getting entanglement or deep commitments they could not fulfill, because the perceptions were very different. And that was one of the factors that led Pakistani to start thinking in nuclear weapons apart from the reasons that are commonly known as to why Pakistan went nuclear. But maybe what change South Korea is equal should to think in the 21st century when nuclear deterrence is being questioned because of technological advancement. So that is one question that I'm interested to hear as well.

Jenny Town:

Thank you for that. I think in the South Korean case it is very similar where some of the motivation for wanting to go nuclear, wanting their own nuclear weapons, is also driven by a fear of abandonment by the United States. Especially now as North Korea has developed ICBM capabilities that can now hold the US also at risk of nuclear attack.

And so I think there have been periods of time in South Korean history where the US has threatened to withdraw troops, has started to draw down troops. And they've also watched this happen in other countries where even though the political arrangement and the actual legal treaty arrangement between those other countries was very different, it still feeds that anxiety of why, of what happens if the US doesn't come to their rescue. Or doesn't come to their defense and doesn't support those efforts against a nuclear North Korea.

I think we don't have a lot of time left. I do want to stay on this issue of the US and the US role of this. And obviously the role of the US is very different in South Asia and the South Korean context. But I think now again the geopolitical situation has changed so much that opinions differ about how accepting the US and the international community at large would be if South Korea were to choose a nuclear path. And so from each of your perspectives, how do you think that the US and the international community have impacted nuclear and strategic behavior in South Asia? And what lessons might we learn from that or extrapolate from that for the Korean context? Ruhee?

Ruhee Neog:

Thank you, Jenny. And in the interest of time, I will keep this very short.

Which is to say I think what we can extrapolate from the South slash Southern Asian dynamic with regard to, well the role of the US but also China's role. One of the prevailing views is that of quadrilateral, I don't want to say equation because that will make it mess. But like a quadrilateral relationship in which American security thinking and American nuclear developments are feeding into Chinese nuclear decision making. Chinese nuclear decision making will have an impact even if it's not aimed on Indian security thinking. And that in turn will shift Pakistani nuclear developments.

And even if these developments don't shape each other, they can be used to justify advancements within each of these countries. And I think this is one of the roles that the United States has played in the Southern Asian context. But of course the other one that I would flag that I won't go into, is that of a mediating, a third party mediator role and I think you could discuss the US' role. You could

also potentially discuss China's role since we're talking about Korea as well.

Jenny Town:

Thank you. Nick?

Nick Miller:

Yeah, so I think in South Asia if we start there, the US I think played an important role in delaying and sort of limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But obviously they ultimately couldn't prevent it.

So if you look at the nuclear testing front, I think the US policy is a big reason why Pakistan didn't test until 1998. And the US was helping to restrain that. I think it's probably part of the story for why India didn't test for those 24 years between 1974 and 1998. And it probably is part of why neither country has tested since 1998.

So I think there's influence that you see there, but obviously the US didn't have either the leverage or willingness to totally prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons in either case. For either country the US wasn't willing to offer ironclad security guarantees. If you go back to the '80s, the US wasn't willing to really turn the screws on Pakistan because they were helping the US push the Soviets out of Afghanistan. India was a different animal because of its non-aligned stance and the US didn't really have nearly as much leverage there.

But I think things looked very different on the Korean peninsula. And there the US I would say stands a much better chance of preventing a nuclear arms race. The obvious difference is the US already guarantees South Korea's security, it's a formal treaty ally, much more iron cloud guarantee than Pakistan ever had. The US stations tens of thousands of American troops there. So from my perspective, I think the US should be able to augment this alliance in a way to help address South Korea's concerns.

And there's some reporting about the Biden administration doing that right now. And I think between augmenting the alliance while making clear to South Korea, the alliance could be in danger if they were to try to get their own nuclear weapons, that probably should be sufficient to convince South Korea not to go down that road. And basically South Korea just stands to lose a lot more from proliferation than India or Pakistan did. Because they didn't have this really powerful relationship with the US at least of the same magnitude to lose.

One last thing I would just say about this in terms of comparing across these regions. One thing South Korea might be thinking about, is the impact of getting nuclear weapons on their civilian nuclear program. So South Korea has pretty significant civilian

nuclear industry both on the... It's active on the import and export side. I mean if they were to go down the road of withdrawing from the NPT and getting nuclear weapons, that would be very seriously damaged. And you can say goodbye to nuclear trade with the US, it'd be harder for them to export nuclear technology.

So I think that's a big disincentive and that's something that we saw to some degree in the India and Pakistan case. And it took India decades to emerge from the cold and get this deal with the United States to resume nuclear trade. And Pakistan's always faced kind of limitations on nuclear trade as a result of its nuclear weapons program. So I think that's another thing that's probably going to weigh in South Korea's decision making.

Jenny Town: Those are all great points and points that have been more part of the discussion in recent months than previously. Feroz, if we could turn to you as well and get your thoughts on this.

Feroz Khan: Yeah, I can combine two things. I mean I was looking at the questions that was both about how China would respond and how US would respond. So are we talking about the US or China or both? Just to clarify for that.

Jenny Town: Yeah, just in interest of time, we've combined the questions together now. So if you want to talk-

Feroz Khan: So let me talk about very quickly, very briefly.
Yeah, very briefly that China borders South Asia in a very peculiar way than probably it does with the Korean peninsula. It has the two most volatile provinces, Tibet and the Xinjiang bordering India and Pakistan respectively, which is much more volatile in a sense. And the kind of border disputes it has with India is a border dispute. And then the rivalry more into power balancing in Asia that shifts. So that interest of China in South Asia is to have a stable South Asia, does not want to get involved directly because it has a nested security dilemma elsewhere, particularly on Taiwan and South China Sea, other front. So similarly it would still does not want to get into anything but a stable equilibrium balance, right, does not want to get involved. So that's the paddle that I would say about China.

The other thing particularly about South Asia, the Chinese are really balancing in a very peculiar way. I have written a lot on this, that there are two form of things like hegemonic stability of India becoming too powerful under really old powering Pakistani in a way. And that could become problematic for the Chinese because if that happens with nuclear weapons in the mix, instability is going to happen. So all they're wanting to do is to have some kind

of a balance of our stability within the South Asian continent. Not picking Pakistani too strong to make it aggressive and not making India too strong and allowing that. That's what they're doing as far as this is concerned.

From a US standpoint, I mean that history is an important one for South Korea to understand that especially US relationship with Pakistan, as Nick was alluding. Whenever the geopolitical exigencies became greater, that trumped their proliferation concerns and that is what happened with Pakistan, that were it not with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, we may have had a very different history of proliferation and I've written a lot in my own book.

So I mean the other thing is that United States sees both New Delhi and Islamabad one phone call away. So there's a crisis or anything, US is able to influence both capitals in ways that it can do. That is probably not the case in the Korean peninsula. It can only call Seoul and not Pyongyang. So these are, lately what has happened is, that if it is so much tilted in favor of India, that there is intense frustration in Pakistan, which is just not helpful. So these are some of the factors that are there. Japan is another factor in Korean Peninsula and in this case it is India-Pakistan is more dyadic in the sense, and India-China is a more different level of power asymmetry India-Pakistan. So when it become a triangulation of the problem between India and Pakistan, it is unpacking that is getting more and more important.

There is a fourth factor that I just want to flag, which is not the case in South Korea and that is the Islamic bomb factor. One of the reasons that Pakistan was being pushed to the wall from the '70s onward was because the US never wanted a Muslim country acquired nuclear weapons. And the Islamic bomb rhetoric was one of the major factor where the US was totally pushing Pakistan so hard compared to, was almost ignoring what India had done in 1974 and subsequently. And that history seeps very deeply in the Pakistani psyche even today. That Muslim countries will not be allowed, so they keep on siding Iraq, Libya, Iran, Syria. And they say, "Well, we are the one who got away with and that was because of geopolitical exigencies." That is one lesson South Korea may still think to draw from Pakistan.

Jenny Town:

All very good points. Thank you so much to all of you for your insights today.

There's obviously a lot to be learned about this complex relationship and how nuclear weapons have helped shaped the way that South Asia, the stability and strategic environment in South Asia today, and really test some of the assumptions that are driving

South Korean calls for nuclear weapons as well. This is definitely not an issue that's going to go away anytime soon unfortunately, and is one that at least now we are taking more seriously and starting to have these harder discussions about what are the actual costs, what are some of the expectations of how nuclearization in Northeast Asia, further nuclearization in Northeast Asia might affect the strategic environment. And we really need to be clear-eyed about the range of how that might play out and not just live in these optimistic views of how nuclear weapons might change that calculus.

Thank you again to all of our speakers and to Elizabeth and the South Asia program for partnering with us on this. This is just the first part of a larger discussion we hope to have and we do have several pieces coming that will be co-published on 38North as well as South Asian Voices, which is run by our South Asia program as well, that will examine a lot of these key issues in greater detail and really start to feed the conversation and ground the conversation in these comparative lessons. And so thanks to everyone and we hope that you will tune in to more and look for the pieces in the near future.