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Lavoy, Peter R.; Clary, Christopher

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Strategic Stability in South Asia

June 29-July 1, 2004

Conference Summary

Peter R. Lavoy and Christopher Clary
NPS Center for Contemporary Conflict



About sixty serving and retired military officials, diplomats, intelligence analysts, and non-governmental experts gathered at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California from 29 June to 2 July 2004 to examine ways to stabilize the military and nuclear competition between India and Pakistan. The conference was organized by the NPS Center for Contemporary Conflict (CCC). NPS Superintendent RDML Patrick W. Dunne opened the first session of the conference, and David Hamon of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency provided introductory remarks explaining the intent of the sponsoring agency. CCC director Dr. Peter Lavoy introduced the conference's objective: to assess the key military elements that affect strategic stability in a nuclearized South Asia. Participants from India, Pakistan, the United States, and the United Kingdom examined present and projected military risks, surveyed potential escalatory pathways, and discussed nuclear risks during peacetime, crisis, and war.

Cold War Parallels and Contrasts

The conference began with Dr. Patrick Morgan, Professor at the University of California-Irvine offering insightful reflections on the troubling

Cold War experience between the United States and the Soviet Union. Throughout the five decades of Cold War competition, Washington and Moscow struggled to attain strategic stability. For a deterrent to be stabilizing, it must be credible. In the Cold War, attaining this credibility—necessary for attaining long-term stability—often generated short- and medium-term instabilities. Both parties performed elaborate rituals (nuclear testing, missile flight tests, command post exercises) to demonstrate the credibility of their nuclear threats. Concerns over the delicacy of deterrence meant that technological evolutions (ballistic missiles, MIRVing, improved accuracy, and missile defenses) could trigger destabilizing iterations of reactions and counterreactions.



Conference participants (from left to right), former Indian army chief V.P. Malik, Group Captain Khawar Hussain of the Pakistani Air Force, and U.S. scholar Stephen Cohen.

Attempting to ascertain the source of each superpower's nuclear policy was difficult, complicating the analysis of the choices the adversary would make. Nuclear policy, doctrine, and operations during the Cold War were the product of a lively and convoluted process involving thousands of players over the fifty year of conflict, many of which held quite different views on what stability meant.



State Department official Robert Gromoll, Indian scholar Rajesh Basrur, Pakistani scholar Rifaat Hussain, CCC fellow Brig. (ret.) Feroz Hassan Khan, Indian retired Admiral Raja Menon, and U.S. scholar Michael Krepon.

As former U.S. government official Michael Wheeler observed, even the last decade of the Cold War produced grave concerns on both sides about the adversary attempting some sort of nuclear first use. Arms control restrained arms races, but strategic planners still sought qualitative and quantitative improvements that might allow them to “escape” from deterrence. In the end, the superpowers avoided conflict, but they never quite achieved a condition of static stability. Moscow could only keep pace by expending massive resources—an effort that would bankrupt its economy and ultimately cause its collapse. Wheeler stressed that the principal lesson of the Cold War was the

necessity of a two-track stability process. One track involved the patient pursuit of the settlement of fundamental political differences. Simultaneously, negotiations were held to stabilize nuclear arms races and lower the risk of inadvertent or accidental triggers to nuclear war.

Perhaps luckily, South Asian policymakers have had a much more relaxed view toward nuclear deterrence. India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974—but the weapon was too large to be delivered by any aircraft in India's arsenal. Pakistan matched India's nuclear test with a not-so-hidden weapons program of its own. However, neither side felt compelled to test a nuclear explosive device until May 1998. A credible deterrent, at least initially, did not need to be visible. A bomb in the basement would do. Even after the 1998 nuclear tests, nuclear weapons have had a surprisingly low salience in regional crises and competitions. As Dr. Rajesh Basrur of the Centre for Global Studies in Mumbai, India, argued, “In contrast with the Cold War, there has been no direct nuclear component in the confrontations between India and Pakistan. Though there is much talk of an arms race, there is no evidence of haste in the development of a range of capabilities.”



NPS student from Pakistan and the United States.



U.S. Department of Energy official Scott Davis and Gen. (ret.) V.P. Malik.

Nuclear Deterrence, Doctrine & Force Posture

The untested nuclear weapons in the Indian and Pakistani arsenals were low-maintenance devices. Force postures, doctrines, delivery systems, and command and control practices developed slowly, outside of the public glare, because there was no strategic urgency to do otherwise. While both India and Pakistan had dueling missile tests in the mid-1990s, their pace was more indicative of a research and development effort than a crash program to achieve nuclear deterrence.

After the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, U.S. interlocutors, and nascent non-governmental

strategic communities in Islamabad and Delhi, began to prod their governments to add flesh to the nuclear skeleton. India issued a draft doctrine—articulating a strategy of massive retaliation after the absorption of a nuclear first strike. One aspect of this policy—that India would not be the first to use weapons of mass destruction—comforted U.S. policymakers, although it failed to adequately reassure strategic planners in Islamabad. As Air Commodore Khalid Banuri of the Pakistan Strategic Plans Division stated, “Considering ‘No First Use’ (NFU) as a flawed argument, the possibility of an Indian pre-emptive strike cannot be ruled out. To cater for such [an] eventuality, Pakistan has to factor in all options to ensure that its response remains viable. Thus the rising conventional imbalance and the lack of confidence in NFU are viewed as potentially destabilizing and risky.”



Air Commodore Khalid Banuri of the Pakistan Strategic Plans Division and Dr. Ashley Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace.

Pakistan had struggled since its independence in 1947 to confront an India that was larger and militarily stronger. Dr. Rifaat Hussain, of the Pakistan National Defence College, noted that Pakistan's initial attempts to externally balance against India (through alliances) failed. During the 1965 war, the United States cut off military supplies to both countries, despite Pakistan's membership in the SEATO and CENTO alliances. In 1971, as Pakistan lost its eastern wing to an Indian-supported Bangladeshi insurgency, the United States stood by. As a result, Pakistan launched its own nuclear weapons program, to "internally balance" the neighboring threat.



Dr. Rifaat Hussain and University of Bradford scholar Maria Sultan.

By 1985, Pakistan had developed a recessed nuclear weapons capability. Pakistani officials felt that their displays of military readiness (and their undeployed nuclear deterrent) had prevented war during the 1987 Brasstacks Crisis and 1990 Zarb-e-Momin exercises and during several other crises over the past two decades.

Their decision to go ahead with a nuclear capability allowed them to quickly respond in 1998 when India tested. They believe that nuclear weapons and conventional forces were crucial in deterring India from prosecuting a "limited war," as a response to either the 1999 Kargil operation or the 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi.

Today, nuclear weapons are central to Pakistani strategic thought, especially with regard to deterring India from initiating large-scale military operations against Pakistan. As Rifaat Hussain argued, "In the absence of both an offensive conventional capability, which will allow it to disrupt an Indian offensive preemptively, and the geostrategic space in which to maneuver and fight in a defense-in-depth strategy, Pakistan's physical protection can only be assured by nuclear weapons. Islamabad expects that in the event of an Indian attack, its offensive would be met in the first instance by a non-nuclear defense of the forward areas close to the border. Should Islamabad fail to hold the front by non-nuclear combat, it would warn New Delhi that small-yield nuclear weapons would be used to strike at the invading Indian forces. And then, as a last resort, it would strike with such weapons if the warning went unheeded." The question of how Pakistan would employ nuclear weapons, if it ever did do so, generated considerable debate.



Dr. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



Feroz Hassan Khan and Shankar Bajpai, former Indian ambassador to the United States, Pakistan, and China.

Pakistani officials believed it was necessary to demonstrate their willingness and capability to use nuclear forces in extremis. They publicly talked about how strategic forces would be managed and how command and control would operate at the macro-level. As Brigadier (ret.) Feroz Hassan Khan, a visiting professor at NPS, noted, the Pakistan government intentionally has not elaborated on its nuclear use doctrine. Islamabad officials have avoided any formal discussion of nuclear thresholds or weapons employment concepts so as to complicate any Indian decision to use force.

Indian planners have viewed the situation quite differently. As Dr. Rajesh Basrur, director of the Centre for Global Studies in Mumbai, India, observed, Indian planners do not believe that nuclear weapons are *central* to Indian security. Nuclear weapons, for India, are *political*, rather than operational, instruments. The fact that both parties had fought a limited war over the Kargil heights in 1999 upset, but did not fundamentally alter, these Indian beliefs. In fact, Indian frustration over Pakistan's continued support of Kashmiri separatists combined with anger at Pakistan's Kargil escapade led it to consider limited war options. Indian planners apparently concluded: if one side can hide behind nuclear weapons in order to foment violence, we can respond in a limited fashion.



CCC research professor Lt. Col. (ret.) Surinder Rana and Dr. Wyn Bowen of King's College London.

Comfort and Dilemmas

Despite approaching nuclear necessity from very different perspectives, both sides appear to be comfortable with their present nuclear status. India feels that its large geographic size and abundant natural boundaries make its nuclear force relatively invulnerable. Moreover, its more relaxed retaliation-only strategy affords it time to react to any irrational nuclear attack. Indian planners are at least publicly adamant that any Indian response to nuclear use would be certain and massive. Pakistan feels that a mobile and dispersed nuclear arsenal is nearly invulnerable, even from increasingly advanced Indian conventional capabilities.



Maria Sultan, with CCC research associate Christopher Clary in the background.

Despite this relative comfort with the status quo, both countries face considerable strategic dilemmas. India hopes to conventionally threaten Pakistan in order to alter Pakistani political and military behavior. As General (ret.) V. P. Malik, former Indian chief of army staff, noted, when a nation is targeted by what it perceives to be state-sponsored proxy war,

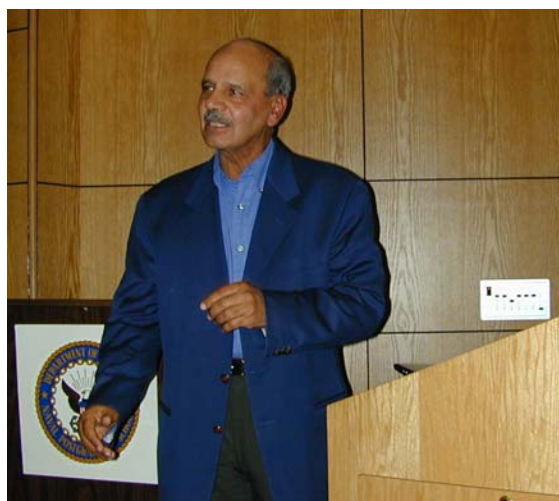
“when pushed to the wall, [it] is tempted to use its conventional forces to bring the proxy war into the open, rather than fight with all the limitations of a ‘no war no peace situation.’” It can fight in the open—initiate conventional hostilities—because, as General Malik argues, “space exists between proxy war/low-intensity conflict and a nuclear umbrella wherein a limited conventional war is a distinct possibility.”

In order to initiate hostilities against Pakistani targets, however, New Delhi must find ways to prevent an escalatory military spiral. It probably would do so by initiating attacks that are limited in time but spread out over space, or limited in space but spread out over time. However, it was observed that escalation is always the option of the opponent. Would an Indian attack lead to an unexpected and escalatory Pakistani counter-attack? How could a limited conflict remain limited?



CCC director Peter Lavoy.

While Pakistan can escalate, is that a rational decision for Pakistan? Widening a conventional conflict could prove devastating to Pakistan given India's growing conventional force imbalance. As Pakistani Air Commodore Tariq Ashraf argued, "The increasing conventional gap is bound to result in a lowering of Pakistan's nuclear threshold and making it more prone to resorting to the nuclear option in any future military conflict between the two countries."



Lt. Gen. (ret.) Asad Durrani, fmr. head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and fmr. ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

However, this is a challenging threat to make credibly. If Pakistan aims to raise the nuclear bogey, it must be willing to "go nuclear" in response to an Indian conventional attack. It must initiate this nuclear attack knowing that it will lead to national suicide—Pakistan will cease to exist as a viable state if India responds massively. India, on the other hand, must threaten to massively retaliate against Pakistani cities, even if Pakistan only uses a single nuclear weapon against Indian military forces operating

in Pakistani territory. Such an attack would be disproportionate and unjust—but moving toward flexible response could require a massive expansion of Indian nuclear weapons and delivery systems, and a radical revision of India's existing civil-military relationships and command and control arrangements.

Command and Control Dilemmas

Controlling nuclear weapons presents its own set of dilemmas. Strategic planners hope, as Duke professor Peter Feaver noted almost a decade ago, that nuclear weapons would *always* be used when ordered but *never* used when not. To oversimplify the conference deliberations, for Pakistan the overwhelming concern over the "never" problem has pushed it toward a posture of "always;" while for India the overarching worry about "always" has produced a command and control system designed largely around achieving "never."



U.S. State Department official John Schlosser, David Hamon of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and Dr. Glen Segell of the UK Institute of Security Policy.

Air Commodore Banuri discussed Pakistan's unique challenges, as it faces down a very large-

scale Indian conventional threat. Islamabad is not comforted by India's nuclear "no-first-use" declaration. "Pakistan has created an elaborate infrastructure to improve technical and physical security of its nuclear assets and facilities during peace and war," Banuri said. He continued, "Pakistan has created [a] fairly good [command and control system] as an interim measure to exercise effective command over its nuclear forces that will not fail during crisis/war." While the Pakistani "mid-term quest for a robust, all encompassing and technological viable C⁴I² SR system is moving at a satisfactory pace," Banuri noted the importance of human reliability. "Technical solutions are no substitute for and do not guarantee good judgment, clear analysis, or self-discipline under stress," he asserted.



American scholar Rodney Jones, NPS Professor Anshu Chatterjee, and Defense Threat Reduction Agency official Jeffrey Milstein.

Pakistan had recently augmented its safety and security structure for its nuclear arsenal, Banuri announced. The Pakistan armed forces created a security unit within the Strategic Plans Division,

headed by a two-star general, to continuously monitor and defend against both *insider* and *outsider* threats. While Pakistan feels confident in the physical security around its nuclear sites, it still remains open to outside assistance, so long as the principle of non-intrusiveness is maintained.

Indian command and control challenges center around efforts to ensure that a residual nuclear capability will still be usable after absorbing an adversary's first strike. As Brigadier (ret.) Gurmeet Kanwal of the Observers Research Foundation in Delhi argued, "The credibility of a nuclear deterrent that is limited to retaliatory strikes only hinges around the ability of the nuclear force to survive a first strike in sufficient numbers to inflict unacceptable punishment in retaliation." By not pursuing "first use" nuclear strategies, India dramatically simplified its command and control requirements. By settling on a "ride-out-and-retaliate" posture, India will have to develop detailed plans for the succession of national command authority and steps to ensure that surviving nuclear warheads can be mated and launched even after a nuclear attack has severely disrupted the national command and control system. The conference participants noted that these imperatives were not given much consideration when the Indian government decided to become an overt nuclear-weapon state in 1998.



Brigadier (ret.) Gurmeet Kanwal, of the Institute of Security Studies at the Observers Research Foundation.



Dr. Rose Gottemoeller of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Security Studies and U.S. Department of Energy official Steve Aoki.

Next Steps

The conference concluded with a discussion on the potential for confidence building, arms control, and nuclear risk reduction measures in South Asia. A panel chaired by Dr. Rose Gottemoeller of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace considered the next steps that concerned governments should take to improve stability on the subcontinent. Brig. Naeem Salik of the Pakistani Strategic Plans

Division initiated the discussion. He argued that it was necessary to create an insulated and sustainable process of dialogue. While Salik was predisposed favorably towards mutual and balanced force reductions, he realized that India's broader concerns (read "China") made such negotiations quite difficult. Salik proposed moving ahead with the upgradation of the DGMO hotline and the establishment of a review and oversight commission to ensure that existing confidence-building measures are being implemented properly.

C. Raja Mohan, Jawaharlal Nehru University professor and respected journalist in Delhi, presented an Indian perspective. Mohan was hopeful, arguing, "It is reasonable to expect modest but steady progress in nuclear confidence-building in the coming period." He summarized Indian thought on the issue: "India is aware that it is at the very beginning of a process of constructing nuclear and conventional military stability with Pakistan. It is prepared to consider and implement a range of CBMs on the nuclear front that is focused on exchange of information, communication, and interaction. Such measures, India hopes, will enhance the security of both sides. India, however, is unlikely to accept at this stage any proposals that aim to constrain its nuclear force structure and their deployment as some of Pakistan's proposals for a 'strategic restraint regime' suggest."



Peter Lavoy with CCC research assistants Izumi Wakugawa, Lashley Pulsipher, and Elizabeth Stone

Future Work on Stability in South Asia

The Center for Contemporary Conflict was left with much work to do after the conference

successfully concluded. Professor Lavoy plans on taking the show on the road—holding workshops in New Delhi and Islamabad, and perhaps other venues in India and Pakistan, to gauge regional reaction and thought on how best to understand security dynamics on the subcontinent. Additional work is beginning on gaining deeper understanding into command and control in emerging nuclear states and of paths that can be pursued for bringing India, Pakistan, and Israel into the international non-proliferation regime. For now, the CCC staff will be busy editing the excellent essays from the conference into a book, which should be published late in 2005.



Monterey Conference Participants