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Introduction: South Asia and Theories of Nuclear Deterrence: Subcontinental Perspectives

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Conflict resolution and promotion of regional cooperation in South Asia assumed a new urgency in the aftermath of the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May of 1998. Its urgency was further underlined by the outbreak of fighting in Kargil in May–July 1999, full mobilization on the border during most of 2002, and continued low-intensity warfare and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. The stability of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan in a dynamic context is a matter of life and death and forces itself onto the scholarly agenda of security studies in South Asia. While short-term measures to prevent the outbreak of war by accident or miscalculation, and military and non-military confidence-building measures (CBMs) to control conflict are necessary steps, there is a need to go beyond CBMs and begin thinking through, *conceptually*, the longer-term difficulties of stabilizing the deterrence relationship. The collection of papers in this issue attempt to explore the relationship between theories of nuclear deterrence and the unique nuclear situation in South Asia. This is in important ways a new departure. While there have been at least half a dozen detailed accounts of the Indian nuclear program published since 1998, all of them are essentially analytical histories and engage at best tangentially with theories of deterrence.[1] And deterrence theory confronts a situation in South Asia that is very different from the context in which such theorizing developed, the US–Soviet confrontation during the Cold War. India and Pakistan, unlike the US and the USSR, were once the same country, have a common border, and very short missile flight times limiting reaction time to almost nothing. Add to this a history of wars and a territorial dispute in Jammu and

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Kashmir marked by a rebellion and low-intensity war against the Indian state supported by Pakistan. This entire situation, in turn, is nested in a US-dominated global order, with a post-9/11 US military presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and nuclear power China neighboring both India and Pakistan, but which has historically supported the development of Pakistani nuclear and missile capabilities. China has also fought a war with India in 1962 and the two have a continuing border and territorial dispute. Nuclear deterrence theory has not engaged with a situation like this, one which calls out for an exploration of what theory can contribute to the understanding of nuclear deterrence in South Asia as well as what the South Asian situation can contribute to theory. This collection is also a new departure in the sense that it is the first time that a group of scholars from the South Asian subcontinent have collectively tried to apply deterrence theory to South Asia. The initiative was taken by the University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India, in New Delhi.

Of course, deterrence is only about stabilization of conflict and prevention of war, necessary for survival but not in itself sufficient to resolve conflict. Conflict needs to be understood and conflict resolution alternatives and prospects need to be explored by situating deterrence theory in international relations theory more broadly, and still more broadly in social science theorizing about political and party systems, ethnic conflict and the historical process of state formation in modern and contemporary times, while at the same time situating South Asia in the larger extra-regional and global order. This multi-year project, generously supported by the Ford Foundation, attempted to engage scholars working within security studies from the South Asian region with each other, drawing upon their varied perspectives to query their own understanding of theory and its relationship to the region. An initial conference was held in July of 2002, followed by one with finished papers in August of 2003, both in New Delhi. The current issue contains a selection of the revised and updated papers presented at the August 2003 conference. I would like to thank the Ford Foundation for financial support, Ambassador S. K. Singh for his invaluable facilitation of the project, the Editor of India Review, Sumit Ganguly, for generously offering to publish a special issue of the conference papers, and the Managing Editor, Alyssa Ayres, for her tireless and enthusiastic support throughout the process. In the following paragraphs, I outline the contents of the papers in this issue.

E. Sridharan situates the theorizing on nuclear deterrence in the subcontinent in the larger framework of international relations theory and larger context of inter-state conflict prior to nuclear weapons. He argues for the explanatory power offered by a subaltern realist reading situated in regional security complex theory in which state- and nation-building processes are central to conflict. Nuclearization and the resultant fragile deterrence are only effects. However, he argues that nuclear deterrence can potentially be a driver of conflict resolution, not just conflict management.

Rajesh M. Basrur attempts to provide a foundation based on international relations theory for the doctrine of credible minimum deterrence, which despite being the official Indian as well as Pakistani nuclear doctrine has never had its assumptions and principles clearly enunciated. He finds that international relations theory validates credible minimum deterrence and this in turn has implications for theory, allowing more space for political will than the more structural determinist theoretical approaches. He concludes that the policy implications do not support a need for massive overkill capabilities.

Rasul Bakhsh Rais, the Pakistani contributor in this collection, focuses on three issues: the credibility of Pakistan's implied first-use doctrine in the context of a conventional war which it is losing; whether nuclear deterrence stability creates incentives for low-intensity warfare and limited conventional warfare; and whether the US presence will undermine or enhance Pakistan's nuclear deterrence capability or undermine it. Rais concludes that nuclear stability depends on Pakistan adopting a credible minimum deterrence posture, effective command and control infrastructure and engaging in a broad-based dialogue with India.

Bharat Karnad takes a hawkish Indian nationalist view dismissing the relevance of classical nuclear deterrence theory because India and Pakistan are grossly unequal in their capabilities. He argues that Pakistani nuclear deterrence of India works on Indian sufferance which is for historical reasons rooted in domestic politics. Karnad argues that Pakistan's first-use threat is not credible and should not deter an Indian conventional assault. He argues that the India–Pakistan confrontation is really a sideshow in the long run compared to the India–China rivalry in Asia.

Rajesh Rajagopalan examines four types of unintended use scenarios in South Asia in the context of the debate between proliferation optimists

and proliferation pessimists. He takes the side of the proliferation optimists in the debate on the risks of nuclear use in South Asia by analyzing four types of unintended use – inadvertent escalation, unauthorized use, loss of possession (to terrorists) and nuclear accidents.

As a first attempt at viewing the nuclear confrontation in South Asia through the lens of deterrence theory and international relations theory, the collection comes out with mixed findings. However, there are some commonalities that emerge from the diverse perspectives. Sridharan and Karnad emphasize the importance of historical and domestic political factors in shaping the worldview and nuclear behavior of India and Pakistan, arguing from different standpoints that neorealist international relations theory and classical deterrence theory are explanatorily inadequate. Basrur and Rais emphasize the importance of credible minimum deterrence as a viable and desirable doctrine respectively. Rajagopalan's paper validates the neorealist perspective and sides with the proliferation optimists in assessing the probability of unauthorized use as low. His paper's conclusion that India–Pakistan nuclear deterrence can be stable also ties in with Sridharan's conclusion that de facto nuclear deterrence can not only manage conflict but also potentially be a driver of conflict resolution. Despite the diversity of theoretical perspectives, the broad conclusion of most of the contributors is that nuclear deterrence theory and neorealist theory need modifications to explain nuclear behavior in South Asia.

NOTES

1. See for example, Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2002); Ashley Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica, CA, 2001); Ashok Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Raja Menon, *A Nuclear Strategy for India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000); Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Post-colonial State* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999); Sumit Ganguly, "India's Pathway to Pokhran II," *International Security* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 148–77.