

INTRODUCTION

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This special issue of the *National Security Journal* assembles a group of prominent political, military, technical and academic experts from Australia, China, India, Pakistan, Russia and the United States to analyse regional nuclear challenges in South Asia. Given the complexity of these issues and polarisation of political and theoretical perspectives on the causes of the regional nuclear dilemma, the essays vary in their assessments. However, there is also strong agreement among the authors that nuclear challenges are highly destabilising—not just in the regional context in South Asia—but also globally. Their analyses reveal that previous frameworks need to be updated to address the emergence of new factors and actors. The following offers a brief overview of key points from the essays contained in this volume.

South Asia retains an important position in the game of major powers both shaping and being shaped by the international order. In comparison to the Cold War experience between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the India-Pakistan and India-China nuclear dyads have the potential to shift from proxy conflict to that of more direct conflict. While both the USSR and the United States maintained a naval presence in the Indian Ocean, this marked a secondary theatre of operations. By contrast, now that the Indian Ocean region is part of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, the likelihood of China-United States confrontation in the region is growing with spill over effects on countries like India and Pakistan.

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Within these dynamics, there are a range of factors that are impacting nuclear issues in South Asia. Among these, India and Pakistan remain outside the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Further, regional religious conflicts, ethnic tensions, military confrontations and territorial disputes are ongoing. In the midst of this complex security environment, India and Pakistan are engaged in a conventional and nuclear arms competition with new technologies and systems that have a direct bearing on their respective doctrines and nuclear postures.

In creating a new framework for evaluating nuclear risks in South Asia, longstanding disputes and emerging rivalries must be factored, as well as the role of external powers. This is in large part due to the complexity of the causes of instability and the risks of conventional and nuclear escalation. Thus, in spite of the tendency to focus on India and Pakistan, inclusion of a broader set of countries is required to better achieve and implement more wholistic risk reduction measures. This engagement must occur not simply in dyadic, but also in multilateral contexts, due to the cascading effects of postural and technological interactions among them.

Within this shifting strategic construct, external powers are likely to play an enhanced role in future risk reduction measures. China-US bilateral relations, as well as China-India-Pakistan and China-India-Russia trilateral relations all serve as critical parts of South Asian multilateral relations. Without these more dynamic and inclusive forms of engagement, confidence-building measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan are likely to continue to falter in their implementation. The essays contained in this volume suggest that the best way to address escalatory tendencies and mistrust is through the creation of a platform of open dialogue and discussion. To this end, this volume co-edited with Dr Petr Topychkanov does not seek to achieve consensus, but rather to provide a representative overview of a plurality of viewpoints. It is divided into four sections—framework, postures, technologies and future.

Framework

In the first section, Dr David Brewster and Dr Jingdong Yuan offer their evaluations of how to best create a new framework for analysing stability and instability in South Asia under the nuclear shadow. Dr Brewster explores India-Pakistan and China-India cross-border clashes to examine how nuclear weapons shape both conventional and sub-conventional conflicts. Dr Yuan furthers this analysis by providing his own assessment of how shifts in postures such as no first use (NFU) and escalate to de-escalate, as well as technological advances may either mitigate or exacerbate nuclear risks. In doing so, he advocates moving beyond dyadic to multilateral constructs to form a new framework for nuclear risk reduction.

Postures

In the second section, Lieutenant General (retd) Amit Sharma, Dr Adil Sultan and Professor Wang Dehua analyse challenges to nuclear posture and deterrence from India's, Pakistan's and China's vantage points. Lieutenant General (retd) Sharma examines India's and Pakistan's nuclear paths and how these are shaped by nuclear trends in China, Russia, Israel, North Korea and the United States. Dr Sultan focuses his analysis on India's and Pakistan's new technologies and their impact on such postures as NFU, limited war in a nuclearised environment and full spectrum deterrence. Professor Wang concludes the section with his evaluation of the South Asian security architecture and its impact on nuclear stability.

Technologies

In the third section, Dr Roshan Khanijo, Dr Alexey Kupriyanov and Dr Chen Kaimin examine how technologies intersect with postures and weapon systems to affect escalation and strategic stability. Dr Khanijo provides an overview of the key technological trends in tactical nuclear weapons, unmanned weapons and asymmetric warfare for their negative impact on CBMs. Dr Kupriyanov focuses on an increasingly saturated maritime environment to explore how an underwater Cold War may be emerging with efforts to deploy nuclear-powered submarines armed with nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, as well as nuclear-capable cruise missiles on diesel-electric submarines in the Indian Ocean. Dr Chen completes the discussion by providing an assessment of various trends and technologies, and their impact on nuclear escalation in South Asia.

Future

In the fourth section, Dr Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry and Dr Dmitry Stefanovich provide their recommendations on how to best address nuclear challenges, misperceptions and geopolitics through the lens of evolving nuclear technologies and postures. Dr Chaudhry analyses the short-, medium- and long-term challenges to strategic stability in South Asia, proposing a three-tiered framework at the bilateral level between India and Pakistan, the trilateral level among China, India and Pakistan and the multilateral level to facilitate future conventional and nuclear CBMs. Dr Stefanovich suggests risk reduction and arms control measures that address threat perceptions and misperceptions among the leadership of South Asian nuclear weapon states, as well as the role of external powers and their longer-term impact on nuclear posture and technology development in the region.

This special issue will hopefully attract the attention of the New Zealand audience at a number of levels. Efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific require a consistent multilateral effort with an increasingly prominent role for the countries of

Oceania. This region's growing ties with South Asia are all the more evident following the September 2021 trilateral security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS)—which expands the footprint of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, ushers the sale of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and portends a more complicated dynamic with China. In light of such trends, the expert community of nuclear-weapons-free nations benefits from the deeper understanding of the underlying sources of nuclear proliferation, and the nuclear standoff in South Asia in particular, which could lead to future thoughtful and constructive New Zealand contributions to the prevention of nuclear crises and disasters.