

Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for Deterrence and Strategic Posturing

Dr Zulfqar Khan*

Abstract

India-Pakistan's economic and power resources, geographical size, relative position in international affairs, strategic alignments with the different powerhouses and their asymmetrical military capabilities are divergently nurturing their respective foreign and security policies. In such an asymmetrical geostrategic and power differential equation, it is argued that there are five cardinal options which Pakistan needs to effectively and resolutely focus upon vis-à-vis India: 1) sustaining a sufficient politico-military resilience in crafting its strategic options; 2) effectively exploiting the structural and environmental dynamics to its advantage; 3) consistently restructuring and upgrading its conventional and nuclear deterrent capabilities; 4) sustaining its independent strategic and foreign policy alternatives and balancing them in the realm of inter-state relations; and 5) to systematically and appropriately recalibrate its strategy linked with the India-Pakistan strategic cauldron. In essence, Pakistan's flexible politico-military policy, and controlled strategising along with up-gradation of its nuclear-cum-conventional forces, and emitting right signaling, would assist in sustaining an efficacious and balanced deterrence. In the prevalent setting, any conflict – limited or all-out, is not a logical option for the nuclear powers of South Asia.

Key words: India-Pakistan, Politico-Military Flexibility, Nuclear, Deterrence, Strategy, Forces, Foreign Security.

* The author is Head, Department of Strategic Studies at the National Defence University in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Introduction

Comparatively, India and Pakistan's economic and power resources, geographical size, relative position in international affairs, strategic alignments with different powerhouses of the 21st Century, and their asymmetrical geopolitical and military capabilities are divergently nurturing their respective foreign and security policies. This is a reality with which Pakistan has to grapple, and to accordingly restructure its priorities and options, including crafting a national security policy, deterrent posturing, and to pursue an appropriate strategic approach toward the emergent regional and geostrategic trajectories. All these elements are quite significant; however, it is observed that having strategic independence is of paramount significance. Therefore, Pakistan needs to evolve an alternative security and doctrinal approach in order to transform the geostrategic architecture of South Asia. It is *reasoned* that, it ought to premise its policies on the paradigm of politico-military flexibility, strategic independence with well-calibrated nuclear deterrent posturing. Secondly, its geographical and strategic position is at the pivotal crossroads of South Asia and the Persian Gulf and, above all, its 2015 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) mega project of USD 46 billion, would continue to keep it in the geostrategic calculus in spite of its economic, military, and internal governance/terrorism-related and diplomatic difficulties and other disadvantages vis-à-vis India. However, United States (US) and India too share common strategic and economic objectives in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea regions in order to counterbalance the rising Chinese political, military and economic capabilities. Ostensibly, US and India perceive that China has territorial ambitions over some islands in the South China Sea that would vastly expand its access to natural resources and have critical leverage over the strategically significant sea lanes linked to the Strait of Malacca. Most significantly, the likely geoeconomic transformations under CPEC, are already shifting the tectonic plates of geopolitics in which Pakistan, it is observed, is in a pivotal position to mould the future geostrategic trajectory of the region. Therefore, in this article five cardinal areas are proposed upon which Pakistan needs to focus in the coming years:

1. Sustain politico-military flexibility.
2. Reconcile with structural dynamics of world politics and the regional geostrategic environment.
3. Attain robust nuclear deterrent capabilities.

4. Maintain strategic independence, choices and posturing in the realm of inter-state relations.
5. Deal with the evolving challenges, especially relating to India-Pakistan's strategic equation.

This policy, it is argued would go a long way in strengthening Pakistan's position in the swiftly transforming geopolitical environment, which is moving contrary to Pakistan's interests, especially in view of India-US strategic partnership. The succeeding five sections focus on the above stated five cardinal principles that are critical to Pakistan's security and its future strategy vis-à-vis India. At the end, an analytical conclusion comprehensively recapitulates all these dimensions with the assistance of various theoretical lenses.

Sustaining Politico-Military Flexibility

Tailoring a country's politico-military strategy¹ has to be in conformity with existing realities. The national military strategy has to be crafted in consonance with other elements of national power, including economic base, natural resources, and both foreign and domestic policies that would tend to accumulatively influence the wide range of challenges confronting its national security. However, without a realistically crafted strategy, writes Richard Betts, it becomes 'a loose cannon' and then war becomes a mindless undertaking. He further elaborates that, 'strategy fails when some link in the planned chain of cause and effect from low-level tactics to high-level political outcomes is broken.' This becomes especially perilous 'when military objectives come to be pursued for their own sake without reference to their political effect.'²

In fact, a military strategy primarily relies upon the force of arms to achieve its objectives; while the overall grand strategy lies within the domain of political leadership. In essence, the grand strategy's '*vital*...interest is...survival of the State, with an 'acceptable' degree of independence, territorial integrity, traditional lifestyles, fundamental institutions, values, and

¹ For politico-military conceptualisation debate, see, Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 48.

² Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000): 5-50 (5, 7).

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

honour intact.’³ Explaining the interrelated matrix, Beaufre writes that strategy can be played on two tiers. First, the ‘major key is direct strategy in which force is the essential factor.’ Related to this is another less significant ‘key of indirect strategy, in which force recedes into the background and its place is taken by psychology and planning.’ In his perspective, integration of these two key elements results in realisation of different ‘patterns’ or situations. Apt utilisation of such a strategy, observes Beaufre, can enable the weaker country to realise its objectives.⁴ Quest for conventional force advantages should not lead the state astray from the significant role that ‘a flexible political-military strategy’ can play in such circumstances.⁵

In any case, the availability of conventional and nuclear capabilities can potently signal both contingencies. Because of the inherent lethality of nuclear weapons, it enables states to achieve their political objectives short of even firing a single shot.⁶ The *flexible strategising* and political leadership acumen to use both conventional and nuclear capabilities selectively and with restraint can yield more positive results.⁷ Such endeavours may be planned astutely in order not to decimate military targets, or to defeat the enemy, but, in fact, to *prevent* the stronger adversary from pursuing deliberate escalations or to prosecute its limited war plans, if any, or to achieve its objectives of compellence against the weaker country.⁸ In such circumstances, the weaker state would be constrained to further enhance its deterrent capability vis-à-vis the stronger adversary both in terms of economic, relative diplomatic and military power potential. All such contingencies, writes Schelling rely upon the skillful employment of ‘signaling’ by the political leadership.⁹ Skillful employment of politico-military strategising would leave the enemy under no ‘illusion’ about the consequences¹⁰ in the event of escalation or plan of deliberate imposition of a conflict. Such ‘restrained, signaling, intimidating

³ John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973), 1.

⁴ André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy*, trans. R. H. Barry (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 134-135.

⁵ Thomas C. Schelling, “Nuclears, NATO and the ‘New Strategy’,” in *Problems of National Strategy: A Book of Readings*, ed. Henry A. Kissinger (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 178.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For elaborate description of compellence see, Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 109-115.

⁹ Schelling, “Nuclears, NATO and the ‘New Strategy’,” 178.

¹⁰ Ibid., 178-179.

use of ‘nuclears for brinkmanship’ has sometimes been called the ‘shot across the bow’ by Schelling.¹¹ Essentially, all these are instruments for crafting balancing strategies that can contribute towards the sustenance of peace and survival of the state.¹²

Under a nuclear environment, any wrong move by the adversary – whether conventionally or strategically superior or inferior in forces or in relative terms vis-à-vis the opponent – would entail *serious* consequences. Therefore, essentially, at the end, it is the expectations of *consequences* that mould the attitude of other party to desist from military engagement. In the India-Pakistan context, such strategic calculus is a predominant factor that should logically prevent both countries from resorting to erroneously conceived plans of a limited military engagement – no matter how diminutive in time and space it might be. The political leadership’s high degree of ‘control and restraint’¹³ is of *absolute* importance, especially in an environment where mutual mistrust and strategic culture is inimical to each other; the power equation is lop-sided; and there are simmering bilateral disputes that persistently aggravate the security situation together with apparent lack of political will to resolve them, locking them in a perpetual impasse. This makes the role of *restrained* and *flexible* strategising of prime significance in the conflict-prone environment of South Asia where the incidences of terrorism and frequent crises are intrinsic. Protracted multidimensional antagonism ranging from cultural, religious and other historical divergences have furthermore increased the instability and the prospects of crises that can lead both countries to conflict.

Therefore, it is crucial for both countries’ leaderships to sufficiently understand the threat *spectrum*, and to chalk out plans to bridge their differences with the intent of settling their disputes. Otherwise, festering bilateral disputes could consistently magnify bilateral differences that might accidentally spiral out of control into a crisis, or even to a war. In this context, Schelling has rightly observed that limited war possesses a peculiar symptom to generate a ‘general war.’¹⁴ In an anarchic world, every state tends to seek security to protect its critical national interests. However, mistrust between states usually leads to a security dilemma and creates wrong

¹¹ Ibid., 179.

¹² Jack S. Levy, “What do Great Powers Balance Against and When?” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, eds. T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz and Michel Fortmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹³ Schelling, “Nuclears, NATO and the ‘New Strategy’,” 179.

¹⁴ Ibid., 182.

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

perceptions about the other state – from being seen as revisionist or power hungry. The security construct ‘regardless of intention to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and the measures of others as potentially threatening.’¹⁵ Whereas the constructivists observe that the material world is a socially constructed phenomenon, which deeply influences a state’s behaviour and perceptions about others. In Alexander Wendt’s estimation, ‘anarchy is what states make of it.’¹⁶ On the other hand, conflicting ideologies too play a role in shaping a state’s ideas, perceptions, and its foreign and security policies. Because ideology is ‘the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a socio-political programme,’¹⁷ considering a state’s identity and the meaning attached to different changes taking place is important.

Divergent threat perceptions and socially constructed notions tend to motivate states and people to behave and react differently towards situations or objects.¹⁸ In such a milieu, ideology sometimes *obscures* or *illuminates* the actual reality negatively or positively thereby influencing policymakers’ perceptions and beliefs about political objectives.¹⁹ In the South Asian context, the political leadership of Pakistan and India have been deeply impacted by divergent strategic cultures, historical experiences, acrimonious bilateral relations and geography since independence that motivated their policymakers to take certain decisions:

Everything a security community does, if not a manifestation of strategic culture, is at least an example of behaviour effected by culturally shaped, or encultured people, organisations, procedures, and weapons.²⁰

Similarly,

Strategic preferences are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree, by

¹⁵ John H. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157-180 (157).

¹⁶ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organisation* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.

¹⁷ Jack Snyder, Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, “Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule at Home,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (2009): 155-187 (163).

¹⁸ Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” 10.

¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, The Mapping Series (New York: Verso, 1994), 10.

²⁰ Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132.

Zulfqar Khan

the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites.²¹

In view of these complex ideologies, divergently obscuring and illuminating perceptions along with the diametrically conflicting baggage of cultural and historical legacies, makes it absolutely essential for the Pakistani and Indian leadership to sustain a political and military flexibility while dealing with bilateral issues.

Reconciling with Structural Dynamics of World Politics and Regional Geostrategic Environment

The 21st Century has transformed the parameters of Westphalian nation-states' principles based upon a framework of governance structured on the norms of statehood and sovereignty. The onset of globalisation has incorporated nation-states 'into a single world society, global society' intrinsically interdependent upon each other.²² While cultural diversity in parallel has transcended geographical territories due to the technological progress creating globalised cultural homogenisation.²³ Such homogenisation has further transcended parameters of the Westphalian system to other interlinked 'interdependencies formed by economic openness, the political imperative of welfare maximisation, and democratic political principles.'²⁴ Post-Westphalian states have to voluntarily accept 'mutual governance between states' and deal with the related 'loss of autonomy in order to maximise the welfare benefits of cross-border flows and to meet common challenges or threats to national welfare' with a 'circumscribed legal autonomy'.²⁵ In South Asia, for instance, the primary sources of conflict between India and Pakistan are multiple historical and cultural factors, which have been intensified due to non-resolution of bilateral disputes.

²¹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64 (34).

²² See Martin Albrow, introduction to *Globalisation, Knowledge and Society: Readings from International Sociology*, 1st ed., eds. Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (London: SAGE Publications, 1990).

²³ See Steve Smith and John Baylis, introduction to *The Globalisation of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, 2nd ed., eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

²⁴ James Sperling, "National Security Cultures, Technologies of Public Goods Supply and Security Governance," in *National Security Cultures: Patterns of Global Governance*, eds. Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

In the Westphalian system, states were vested with authority and independence without recourse to external pressures to manage their internal and external disorders or challenges.²⁶ Thus, some states were 'more equal than others,'²⁷ which impeded endeavours toward conflict resolution as is the case in South Asia. In fact, due to India's advantageous power differential, bilateral issues could not be resolved in spite of the United Nations involvement in the Kashmir dispute since 1948.²⁸ In addition, both countries' disparate security cultures, historical legacies, and the dominant power potentials of India vis-à-vis Pakistan, and due to the latter's reluctance to deviate from its traditional stance, were essentially responsible for the non-resolution of Kashmir dispute, which has persistently bedeviled their relations. Since their security cultures were fundamentally divergent they functioned as a glaring barrier in indoctrinating interstate cooperation between the two. 'Common security cultures only produce cooperation when they tend towards the post-Westphalian variant,' writes Sperling, since the Westphalian security culture depends more on power maximisation and 'military power to achieve their goals.' Sperling observes that the post-Westphalian structure views 'multilateralism as the strategy of choice reflexively, to securitise a not dissimilar range of threats and to adopt policy options that minimise social and economic dislocations internally or in the target state or region.'²⁹ The subcontinent's divergent security cultures and the power differential were the major inhibiting factors behind non-sustenance and institutionalisation of cooperation. Constructive institution-building security governance structures like 'protection' and 'prevention' remained ineffective; and conflict resolution instruments of 'assurance' and 'compellence' were also unsuccessful in the inter-state relationship.³⁰

According to Sperling, the national security structure has to be in conformity with the prevalent international structure under post-Westphalian governance since 'states can no longer be treated as homogeneous actors', there is voluntary acceptance of mutual governance between states to meet

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

²⁸ For UN involvement see "Kashmir: Nuclear Flashpoint," *kashmirlibrary.org*, accessed November 16, 2015, http://www.kashmirlibrary.org/kashmir_timeline/kashmir_chapters/1948-1954.shtml.

²⁹ Sperling, "National Security Cultures, Technologies of Public Goods Supply and Security Governance," 12-13.

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

shared challenges and threats.³¹ However, such a security culture is absent in India and Pakistan which is riddled with serious mistrust. Hence, their bilateral disputes continue to simmer. These structural anomalies in spite of overt nuclearisation of South Asia in 1998 could not convince the policymaking elites of both countries to abridge the *gap* between security cultures. To further elaborate, the next section will critically analyse the nuclear posturing of India and Pakistan.

Attaining Robust Nuclear Deterrent Capabilities

In view of widening asymmetrical power potentials between the two, the strategic community and policymakers in India and Pakistan are inclined to view the structural security anomalies from the lens of strengthening their respective national interests. They would consider their survival with the employment and strategising of force of arms as a paramount instrument to achieve their respective national objectives.³² As culture has deeply influenced and shaped their socio-cultural ethos, security cultures, identity, ego, and perceptions about each other, therefore, they are likely to employ nuclear weapons as instruments of deterrence³³ and to safeguard their interests. Subsequent to 9/11, the concept of terror and the related threat of ‘military retaliation to forestall a military attack’³⁴ became deeply entrenched in their military cultures. But, it is essential to understand that deterrence is more effective if it is triangulated with an assurance to retaliate with well-structured procedures to compel the adversary to compliance without crossing its limit of tolerance.³⁵ In nuclear milieu, deterrence is postured in a way to flag the future risk of ‘mutual disaster’ or sensitising about the probability of accentuating ‘rocking the boat’ security predicament.³⁶ Presently, both India and Pakistan possess sufficient capabilities to rock the boat. However, if they do not restrain their offensive strategising against each other or fail to foster a culture of assurance,

³¹ Ibid., 1-2.

³² Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy and History*, Collected Essays, vol. 2 (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1985), xiii.

³³ Bruce A. Jacobs, “Deterrence and Deterrability,” *Criminology* 48, no. 2 (2010): 417-441.

³⁴ Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 1980), 29.

³⁵ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*, The Henry L. Stimson Lecture Series, Rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 70.

³⁶ Ibid., 91.

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

cooperation, and conflict resolution then instability would remain intrinsic to South Asia's environment.

The contemporary South Asian security and nuclear equilibrium has broader regional and extra-regional connotations too. In addition to Pakistan-India's military and strategic equation, China-India, and China-US strategic trajectories are also equally significant factors at the geostrategic plane that are influencing the regional security architecture. Regional security linkages, given the extra-regional geostrategic transformation, are impacting the dynamics of India-Pakistan nuclear deterrent posturing. For instance, after the formalisation of a broad-based strategic partnership between India and US in 2005, India has undertaken massive military and nuclear expansion and modernisation programme. William Cohen, former US Secretary of Defence (1997–2001) observed that, 'India sees itself in a different light — not looking so much inward and looking at Pakistan, but globally.' This indicates India's game-plan to emerge as 'a big player' both at the regional and global levels.³⁷ To anchor India as a big power, in October 2016, the US and India signed a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), to further enhance their bilateral strategic and military cooperation. The other foundational agreements that are likely to be formalised include Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) for geospatial intelligence³⁸ – agreements which the US signs with countries with which it has close military ties.

India is buying/manufacturing sophisticated conventional weapon systems like aircraft carriers, the Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules transport planes and airborne refuelling tankers that would go long way in enhancing its strategic outreach to operate in territories far away from home.³⁹ The Indian Navy is also working on the nuclear-powered second aircraft carrier INS *Vishal*, which is being built with the cooperation of the US under the Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology

³⁷ Quoted in Anand Giridharadas, "Land of Gandhi Asserts itself as Global Military Power," *New York Times*, September 21, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/22/world/asia/22india.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&.

³⁸ Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India, US Reach Agreement on Logistics, Boost Defence Ties," *Defense News*, April 12, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/2016/04/12/india-us-reach-agreement-logistics-boost-defense-ties/82936758/>.

³⁹ Giridharadas, "Land of Gandhi Asserts itself as Global Military Power."

Cooperation (JWGACTC) as a part of their broader bilateral Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI).⁴⁰ In addition, in 2016, India also commissioned the indigenously manufactured nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) INS *Arihant*, which is equipped with the nuclear-capable missile called K-4. Moreover, India has earmarked an 11 per cent additional defence budget for FY 2015-16 along with other military modernisation plans to buy hi-tech conventional weapons worth USD 100 billion in the coming years. This is obviously expected to further tip the already volatile military balance to its advantage.⁴¹ According to Prakash Menon, for its 12th and 13th Five-Year Plans of 2007-12 and 2012-17, military modernisation is expected to cost USD 200 billion.⁴² Thereby further depleting the existing 'delicate conventional military balance vis-à-vis Pakistan,' which ostensibly motivated the latter to undertake conventional and strategic measures relative to India.⁴³ Pakistan evolved a 'full-spectrum deterrence' strategy with the induction of low-yield nuclear weapons to accordingly abridge the existing strategic and conventional loopholes in its doctrinal calculus.⁴⁴ Pakistan's 'full-spectrum deterrence capability' in the perspective of its policymakers is in line with its 'credible minimum deterrence' posturing ostensibly designed to prevent 'aggression.'⁴⁵

Generally, it is perceived in Pakistan that the existing conventional forces' asymmetry is the primary trigger behind Pakistan's restructuring of its military strategy and nuclear posturing vis-à-vis India. Pakistani policymakers consider its full-spectrum deterrence strategy as a well-crafted plan to ensure military balance and to maintain regional stability.⁴⁶ In spite of

⁴⁰ It is not expected to become operational before 2030.

⁴¹ Walter C. Ladwig III, "Could India's Military Really Crush Pakistan?" *National Interest*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/feature/could-indias-military-really-crush-pakistan-13247>.

⁴² Prakash Menon, "Last Word: Military as a Stabiliser," in *India's Military Modernisation: Challenges and Prospect*, 1st ed., eds. Rajesh Basrur, Ajaya Kumar Das and Manjeet S. Pardesi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 282.

⁴³ Walter C. Ladwig III, "Indian Military Modernisation and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 729-772 (1).

⁴⁴ ISPR Pakistan, press release no. 94/2011-ISPR, Inter Services Public Relations, April 19, 2011, http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=1721#pr_link1721.

⁴⁵ "Strategic Review: Nuclear Authority vows to Deter all Forms of Aggression," *Express Tribune*, September 10, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/954084/strategic-review-nuclear-authority-vows-to-deter-all-forms-of-aggression/>; ISPR Pakistan, press release no. PR-280/2015-ISPR, Inter Services Public Relations, September 9, 2015, https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=3026.

⁴⁶ Zulfqar Khan, "Pakistan's Evolving Strategic Outlook: Strategy and Nuclear Deterrence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 1 (2016): 103-121,

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

this doctrinal restructuring by Pakistan, *prima facie* its nuclear stance still seems to be based on the principles of credible minimum deterrence. However, it appears fully integrated with its grand strategy to prevent Indian hegemonic aspirations, and to dissuade its punitive-aggressive posturing against Pakistan. The country's nuclear stance also accords it necessary resilience and robustness to deal with the emerging lop-sided security structure of South Asia. Furthermore, in view of the present geoeconomic, law and order and terrorism-related difficulties, it appears to be a logical *stop-gap strategy* that would provide sufficient rationale and dynamism to be accordingly restructured with the changing power equation and the geostrategic contours of the region. On the other hand, the Indian military expansion programme, both for regional and geostrategic purposes - to attain 'big player' status, along with its proactive strategy (also tagged Cold Start Doctrine - CSD) has objectives to threaten or to impose a limited war on Pakistan. A declared Nuclear Weapon State (NWS) like India's apparent crafting of an offensive military strategy against another declared NWS (Pakistan) – primarily due to its conventional forces advantage, can be highly destabilising and dangerous for international peace and security.⁴⁷ Additionally, India's massive military modernisation programme, including its bid to acquire 'blue-water navy', nuclear submarines, expansion in its air capability, and land forces equipped with hi-tech weapon systems and doctrinal reorganisation with intent to use them in a proactive strategy against Pakistan, is likely to keep regional peace and stability on a sharp edge. This may furthermore compel Islamabad to plug its existing doctrinal loopholes, if any, with *strategic sufficiency* and nuclear deterrent capability in order to restrain India from operationalising its offensive plans against Pakistan. Therefore, by keeping the regional security canvas in view, Pakistan has had to look for alternative arrangements to balance out the increasing asymmetrical power equation of South Asia. In this context, the succeeding section of the study would focus on the strategic choices that are available to both India and Pakistan in the swiftly transforming geostrategic environment.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296430115_Pakistan's_Evolving_Strategic_Outlook_Strategy_and_Nuclear_Deterrence.

⁴⁷ Zulfqar Khan and Rizwana Abbasi, "Regional-Centric Deterrence: Reassessing its Efficacy for South Asia," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 25, no. 4 (2013): 489-501.

Maintaining Strategic Independence, Choices and Posturing

The South Asian geostrategic environment is transforming, thereby, gradually increasing its *centrality* in regional and world affairs. In order to understand the significance of the region, it is important to appreciate the geopolitical and geoeconomic changes that are taking place. For trade and commerce, by 2030, the world's energy needs would increase manifolds of which China and India would consume nearly half. In addition, the world's five NWS (Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea) are in Asia. Whereas 58 per cent of US trade is with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation states, and the Asian Development Bank claims that by 2050, Asia and the Pacific will account for 51 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).⁴⁸ In such a competitive and changing environment, China and India are apparently projected to shift their focus towards acquisition of sea-based capabilities both for energy security and to expand their seaborne strategic outreach. In the context of India and China, the power advantage is in the latter's favour. This is likely to deepen the rivalry between US and China in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴⁹ On the contrary, power equation between India-Pakistan is further tilting asymmetrically, thereby, shrinking Pakistan's strategic and economic space. This should motivate Pakistan to prioritise its internal security and economic development; tackle the problem of non-state actors (NSAs) in its tribal areas; and to reassert control over its tribal territories with intent to restore its position that has been lately undermined due to NSAs and the Indian sponsored terrorists, sectarian and separatist activities in Balochistan.⁵⁰ Moreover, the NSAs' activities have further aggravated the security situation of Northwest Asia, which has confronted Pakistan with a two frontal-security

⁴⁸ Michael J. Green, "US Defence Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theatre," Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, April 14, 2015), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/ts150413_Green.pdf.

⁴⁹ For intensification of rivalry and military competition in the Asia-Pacific see, Adam P. Liff and G. John Ikenberry, "Racing toward Tragedy?: China's Rise, Military Competition in the Asia Pacific, and the Security Dilemma," *International Security* 39, no. 2 (2014): 52-91.

⁵⁰ Mohammad Zafar, "'RAW officer' arrested in Balochistan," *Express Tribune*, March 25, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1072455/terror-purge-forces-nab-indian-spy-in-balochistan/>. Both countries' bilateral relations took a nosedive after the arrest of Indian Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) officer, Commander Yadav from Balochistan in March 2016, who was serving undercover in Chabahar Port project in Iran, and was reportedly involved in training/supporting separatist and terrorist elements in Pakistan.

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

dilemma at a time when the power balance is already asymmetrical and in favour of India.

In such a murky situation, formalisation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015 is of great geoeconomic and geostrategic significance that would provide immense opportunities to both countries. For Beijing it would serve as ‘an entry point to the Arabian Gulf, thus widening its geopolitical influence and possibly its military in the region.’⁵¹ For Islamabad, it can prove to be a major economic stabilisation avenue not only to improve its economy but also to evolve into a ‘centre for energy transmission from the Gulf’ with huge strategic dividends to capitalise on.⁵² Moreover, Pakistan can utilise the Corridor as an anchor to eliminate the threats of NSAs, and to overcome its two-frontal security dilemma; prevent the Indian military pressure tactics ; and to improve its bargaining profile vis-à-vis India that could assist in ending the ongoing diplomatic impasse between the two. Additionally, it can go a long way in stabilising Islamabad’s internal situation and improving its external position by successfully balancing its critical position at the choke-point of Arabian Gulf and consequently enabling it to play a rightful role in the regional power architecture. Pakistan’s improved position in relation to India would assist in assertively evolving confidence-building initiatives for conflict resolution; dissuade crafting of perilous posturing against each other; and, create a favourable environment to generate viability of nuclear deterrence and maintain strategic stability. The development of CPEC and Gwadar seaport would open a whole vista of focused economic development and provide regional and global connectivity, including with the Middle Eastern and Central Asian states. On the other hand, the US-India strategic partnership has already brought India much closer to the former with a view to contain the rise of China. Besides, Pakistan too is expected to deepen its collaborative security framework with China for mutual benefit rather than as a strategic design against any other state.⁵³ This would strengthen Pakistan’s strategic

⁵¹ Mahwish Chowdhary, “China’s Billion-Dollar Gateway to the Subcontinent: Pakistan may be a Door it cannot Close,” *Forbes*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2015/08/25/china-looks-to-pakistan-to-expand-its-influence-in-asia/#6e6167a93de9>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Adviser to the Prime Minister of Pakistan’s statement, Mariam Shafiqat, “Emerging Order in Asia Pacific: Indian Opposition to CPEC Ill-Advised: Aziz,” *Express Tribune*, November 19, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/994162/emerging-order-in-asia-pacific-indian-opposition-to-cpec-ill-advised-aziz/>.

relevance in the fast transforming geostrategic environment where new alliances are being forged. Specifically in the context of India and Pakistan, the former has now been elevated to a strategic partner status by the US in spite of its earlier alliance with the erstwhile Soviet Union (now Russia). On the contrary, Pakistan's position during the Cold War was that of a committed ally of the US, which now in the War on Terror period, has been relegated to a marginalised state when it comes to India-Pakistan equation.

In the context of India and China, there are various issues that can escalate bilateral tensions in spite of their plan to boost trade.⁵⁴ This includes disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC); India's support of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees; growing Sino-Pakistan economic and strategic cooperation in the shape of CPEC/Gwadar seaport. In parallel, China and India would compete too for their strategic maritime interests and to retain control over the Indo-Pacific transit routes such as Beijing's apparent plan to construct Bangladeshi port of Chittagong, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka; and India's expanding economic, strategic and naval cooperation with the US, Vietnam and Japan.⁵⁵ In Northwest Asia, relationships between India, China, Iran, Russia and US in the Central and Eurasia is likely to move on divergent trajectories. In this context, Roman Muzalevsky suggests that the US and India should develop a strategic partnership that should enable them to retain their influence in Central Asia.⁵⁶ China is already pursuing its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) plan⁵⁷ to increase its economic and political influence and to expand connectivity with the Asian heartland. Muzalevsky observes that China is a powerful barrier against India's emergence as a great power, which the US and India would endeavour to neutralise, and to entrench themselves in Afghanistan – one to stabilise this country, and two, to retain their presence for strategic objectives.⁵⁸ In 2012, India announced its 'Connect Central Asia' policy with which it has linked the Strait of Hormuz and

⁵⁴ Sabir Shah, "India, China Aim to Boost Trade Volume to USD 100 billion by 2015," *News International*, September 18, 2014.

⁵⁵ Daniel S. Markey, "Armed Confrontation between China and India" (Contingency Planning Memorandum no. 27, Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action, New York, 2015), 1-4.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Francis P. Sempa, "India and the 21st Century's Great Game," *Diplomat*, November 11, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/india-and-the-21st-century-s-great-game/>.

⁵⁷ Francis Cheung and Alexious Lee, "A Brilliant Plan: One Belt, One Road" (Hong Kong: Credit Lyonnais Securities Asia (CLSA), n.d.), accessed December 13, 2015, <https://www.clsa.com/special/onebeltoneroad/>.

⁵⁸ Sempa, "India and the 21st Century's Great Game."

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

Persian Gulf under the ongoing construction project of Indo-Iranian Chabahar seaport as an alternative to Gwadar. This would accord India, Afghanistan and Iran access to the Central Asian markets. Chabahar project can only take off once Pakistan's strategic interests are sufficiently protected in Afghanistan, and the Indian-sponsored terrorism activities end in the tribal areas, Balochistan, and Karachi, about which Islamabad had already provided three dossiers to the US and the United Nations.⁵⁹ Clearly, the US and India are competing to counterbalance China - simultaneously in Central Asia and Pacific, as a part of their broader strategy. In Asia-Pacific, China has indicated its interests to join the recently established Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). In future, the probability of India joining the TPP to give it a broader regional geo-economic outlook⁶⁰ seems to be a plausible outcome.⁶¹ Furthermore, the US-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in its November 2015 meeting reportedly reached an agreement to convert TPP into a 'strategic and comprehensive partnership.'⁶² If this materialises, it could act as a bulwark against China. In South China Sea, for instance, there is already a tense brinkmanship in progress due to conflicting claims of different regional countries supported by the US, including the Philippines and Vietnam against China. Through this channel, annual trade worth USD 5 trillion passes, which amply highlights its geostrategic and geoeconomic significance. It is also crucial to appreciate the global security dimensions prevalent in the Middle East and the rising tide of NSAs and the so-called Islamic State's activities, Russia's resurgence, reoccupation of Crimea in February 2014, and its intrusion into Ukraine, which would further impact the future contours of groupings or alliance formations. This, according to Dmitri Trenin, would accord Russia necessary dividends in several ways:

The gambit allowed Moscow to incorporate Crimea, and it kept Kiev fearful of a full-scale invasion, which made the new

⁵⁹ "Evidence of India's Terror Sponsorship Shared with US," *Express Tribune*, October 22, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/977223/three-dossiers-evidence-of-indias-terror-sponsorship-shared-with-us/>.

⁶⁰ Joseph S. Nye Jr., interview by Eleanor Albert, "The Promise of a US-India Partnership," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/india/promise-us-india-partnership/p37240>.

⁶¹ US President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order in 2017 abandoning the TPP.

⁶² Prashanth Parameswaran, "US, ASEAN to Ink New Strategic Partnership," *Diplomat*, November 20, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/us-asean-to-ink-new-strategic-partnership/>.

Zulfqar Khan

Ukrainian leadership abandon the idea of using its available forces to suppress the separatist rebellion in Donbas.⁶³

These geostrategic alterations aside, with reference to South Asia, Joseph Nye has warned that any future ‘Mumbai-style attack’ can lead both India and Pakistan to war.⁶⁴

In the existing geostrategic landscape,⁶⁵ choices for both India and Pakistan are diverse. The US perceives its alliances from the lens of forging closer partnerships with allies with commitment to “mutual support and obligation.’ In the case of India, ‘a strong sense of policy independence’ inhibits such obligatory expectations. Albeit, Delhi would always anchor to such an alliance system/arrangement in order to maximise ‘independence and limiting obligations.’ For instance, during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, India carefully refrained from criticism:

Because India does not sign on to formal alliances and does not seek one with the US, it would be a mistake to view strengthening US-India ties as an alliance-in-process. Instead, to capture the opportunity for increased cooperation, while acknowledging the inherent limits to partnership India places on its foreign relations, it would be better to emphasise a joint-venture model for US-India ties.⁶⁶

On the other hand, in 2015, the Indian Foreign Secretary underscored the significance of its transition from ‘balancing’ to a ‘leading power’ status to which Washington appears to be amenable.⁶⁷ According to US scholars, instead of getting into intricacies of ‘mutual support and obligation’ – both India and the US should focus on the axis of ‘joint-venture framework’.⁶⁸

Conversely, what would be Pakistan’s strategic choices? In the given situation, to sustain stable and robust nuclear deterrence would be a challenge considering the clear imbalance in power with India. India, due to its

⁶³ Dmitri Trenin, “The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 26.

⁶⁴ Parameswaran, “US, ASEAN to Ink New Strategic Partnership.”

⁶⁵ For in-depth study of geostrategy, see, Paul Kennedy, “Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition,” in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 1–2.

⁶⁶ Alyssa Ayres, Charles R. Kaye and Joseph S. Nye Jr., “A New Indo-US Partnership Model,” *Indian Express*, November 11, 2015.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

geo-economic and military advantages, is under the illusion that it can 'bully a weaker power' – Pakistan.⁶⁹ In this background, Pakistan's dependence upon regional-centric nuclear deterrence imperatives is increasing. However, while battlefield nuclear weapons are being integrated in both countries' 'military doctrines, there is a space to calibrate strategies well below the threshold levels of each other.'⁷⁰ Apparently, Pakistan's battlefield nuclear weapons would tend to fill this 'space' through its full-spectrum nuclear deterrence strategy.

Both countries' conventional war-fighting capabilities and other non-military elements of security are asymmetrical; therefore, the testing of weaker state's threshold level would be highly destabilising and dangerous to peace and security."⁷¹

It is essential for both countries to commence:

....confidence and security building measures along with resolution of bilateral issues that would go long way in removing the possibilities of crafting of limited war fighting plans.⁷²

The weaker player - Pakistan under its full-spectrum nuclear deterrent strategy is endeavouring to increase 'its defensive-offensive capability, and to accordingly evolve a comprehensive strategy against the conventionally much stronger adversary – India.' Pakistani strategic community is of the view that this would assist Pakistan in countering 'a wide range of new threats, and deny maneuverability space to its adversary to conceive plan for a limited war.'⁷³

⁶⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," in *Theories of War and Peace: An International Security Reader*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 13.

⁷⁰ Khan and Abbasi, "Regional-Centric Deterrence: Reassessing its Efficacy for South Asia," 498-499.

⁷¹ Khan, "Pakistan's Evolving Strategic Outlook: Strategy and Nuclear Deterrence," 103-121.

⁷² Khan and Abbasi, "Regional-Centric Deterrence: Reassessing its Efficacy for South Asia," 499.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 495.

Dealing with Evolving Challenges and the India-Pak Strategic Equation

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, the strategic community has endeavoured to evolve some dynamic nuclear concepts with the intent to tackle issues of strategic and non-strategic battlefield nuclear weapons in military doctrines.⁷⁴ The integration of nuclear weapons into military strategy is not a static notion, rather it is an evolving and resilient construct and by mustering necessary capability could accord a NWS more confidence to comprehensively cater to its security requirements. Krepon and Dalton with reference to Pakistan suggested that Islamabad should follow an alternative 'path' to 'mainstream' its 'nuclear-weapon-related-initiatives.'⁷⁵ It is argued that it would further complicate Pakistan's rationale for integrating its battlefield nuclear forces into its military planning. Delinking Pakistan's nuclear weapons plan from India's expanding conventional and nuclear arsenal⁷⁶ would only be a feasible strategy once both countries successfully evolve some sort of a confidence and security building structure or at least a rapport to commence a dialogue process with a view to evolve an arms control mechanism to resolve other bilateral disputes amicably. Presently, this is not on the horizon. However, in December 2015, both countries' foreign ministers had decided in principle to resume Foreign Secretary level talks scheduled for January 2016 in Islamabad with a view to chalk out a roadmap to carry forward their diplomacy under the newly announced Bilateral Comprehensive Dialogue process. These were postponed, but on April 26, 2016, the Foreign Secretaries briefly met in New Delhi during the Regional Conference on Afghanistan, to explore modalities to break the existing political impasse. However, no progress was made relating to resumption of the Composite Dialogue. In fact, the Pakistani Foreign Secretary communicated serious concerns over the arrest of an Indian Intelligence officer in Pakistan.⁷⁷ Previously, their bilateral relations had

⁷⁴ For the evolution of nuclear strategy, see, John Baylis and John Garnett, eds., *Makers of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991).

⁷⁵ Toby Dalton and Michael Krepon, *A Normal Nuclear Pakistan*, report (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015), 3, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/NormalNuclearPakistan.pdf>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁷ Abdul Manan, Mohammad Zafar and Qadeer Tanoli, "Pakistan May not Give India Consular Access to RAW Officer," *Express Tribune*, March 28, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1074088/straining-ties-pakistan-may-not-give-india-consular-access-to-yadav/>.

*Geostrategic Transformation: Pakistan's Options for
Deterrence and Strategic Posturing*

deteriorated in wake of the attack on the Indian airbase in Pathankot, for which New Delhi had accused Jaish-e-Mohammad (Pakistan-based organisation).

In the strategic realm, in spite of Pakistan's obvious tilt towards China due to the latter's steadfast economic and strategic support, it should simultaneously sustain a well synchronised foreign and security policy (in league with its 'full-spectrum' nuclear deterrence strategy) with other countries as well, including the US and European Union (EU). As argued in the preceding sections, Pakistan has earned a critical position in the region that it can exploit to its geopolitical and geoeconomic advantage. In essence, even without establishing formal 'collective security systems, defensive alliances' with any country, its robust balancing behaviour is adequate to maintain its key role in the region.⁷⁸ Pakistan's robust nuclear weapons capability has endowed it with necessary strategic independence that should continue to act as a surety towards its sovereignty and security.⁷⁹ Naturally, the structure of world politics is essentially premised on the principles of self-help⁸⁰ in which no country can be 'counted' upon, especially when it comes to a conflict between two declared NWS.⁸¹

Hence, Pakistan's independent nuclear deterrent and foreign policy classically fits into the calculus of providing for its own security requirements in line with crafting compatible strategies to strengthen all elements of national power, as well as pursuing its military strategy in harmony with the prevalent norms of international politics. To deter India, it should consistently strive to make conventional, strategic and doctrinal reconfigurations to upgrade its deterrent and other 'counter-measures.'⁸² Fundamentally, deterrence is 'achieved not through the ability to defend but through the ability to punish.'⁸³ Essentially, the question is how would Pakistan react to Indian calibration of a limited war plan under the rubric of its proactive

⁷⁸ Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defence, and the Causes of War," in *Theories of War and Peace: An International Security Reader*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 71.

⁷⁹ For further details on sophisticated independence, see Albert Wohlstetter, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country," in *Problems of National Strategy: A Book of Readings*, ed. Henry A. Kissinger (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), 186.

⁸⁰ Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 4.

⁸¹ Wohlstetter, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country," 192.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 194.

⁸³ Sagan and Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, 5.

strategy?⁸⁴ It is argued that, Pakistan's robust nuclear deterrent capability can inflict damage upon the adversary and so go a long way in dissuading the adversary from any misadventure. Pakistan is a declared NWS that would be difficult to 'disarm' or to be coerced without increasing the possibility of threat of destruction to 'oneself.'⁸⁵ In such circumstances, the political independence of Pakistan, especially pertaining to its nuclear policy and posturing, is of cardinal significance.⁸⁶

It is important to point out that the threat of employment of nuclear weapons should not be floundered in a rhetorical fashion.⁸⁷ Only appropriate signaling along with doctrinal contingency to employ nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances would prevent escalation or a limited war.⁸⁸ Therefore, it is important for the policymakers of India and Pakistan to appreciate the significance of well-calibrated strategising rather than issuance of rhetorical statements, threats, and sticking to their respective inflexible diplomatic stances without taking into account the existing anomalies in their bilateral relations, which otherwise possess seeds to trigger crises that could lead to a catastrophic war due to multiple inter-related factors. Efficient signaling can perform a powerful role in communicating redlines and vulnerabilities to each other. It can dispel any illusion that the overwhelming conventional forces of a powerful state can get away with employment of force, even for limited military objectives, without evoking a proportionate response from the conventionally less advantageous nuclear armed-rival - Pakistan. Nuclear weapons 'would *signal* something' observes Schelling, as it '*destroys* targets', therefore, to get the 'right signal across would be an important part of the policy.'⁸⁹ Controlled strategising of nuclear weapons necessitates sustenance of political-military flexibility, strategic independence and, above all, a well-structured command and control infrastructure to sustain a fine balance of deterrence in the highly charged security environment of South Asia, especially in the case of Pakistan.

⁸⁴ Wohlstetter, "Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country," 194.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 199.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 201.

⁸⁷ Schelling, "Nuclears, NATO and the 'New Strategy'," 178.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

The article argued that Pakistan ought to base its foreign and security policy on the principles of politico-military flexibility in view of the prevalent structural dynamics of world politics, and to maintain its robust nuclear deterrent capabilities, and strategic independence with intent to deal with the evolving security challenges intrinsic to South Asia. This would accord Pakistan necessary strategic independence and assist in crafting a well-calibrated nuclear deterrent posture in the fast transforming geostrategic environment.⁹⁰ In view of the geostrategic flux, India-Pakistan's economic and relative power potential differential, and their asymmetrical military capabilities are influencing their security and doctrinal trajectories. South Asia has a pivotal role to play as it is located at the strategic crossroads of the Persian Gulf, Northwest Asia, the Middle East, and the Far East. The region has gained an added significance due to launching of CPEC and OBOR by China in which Pakistan has a critical geoeconomic and geostrategic centrality. All these developments will continue to make Pakistan a linchpin in the fluctuating geostrategic setting.

On the other hand, the Chinese and Iranian leadership in January 2016 agreed to increase their bilateral trade to USD 600 billion in the coming decade. In addition to trade and commerce, these agreements would also have far-reaching diplomatic and military implications as well that would logically increase Beijing's both horizontal and vertical influence in the region/Persian Gulf/Middle East.⁹¹ In all this, Pakistan should continue to cater to its own national interests, which could be additionally harnessed with the evolution of compatible strategies to deter India. Islamabad needs to undertake necessary conventional and strategic plans to upgrade its deterrent strategy by keeping current and rapidly changing geostrategic developments in view. It is essential for Pakistan to craft a flexible deterrence strategy in consonance with the quantum of threat and to appropriately adjust response contingencies and strategies so as to deal with these challenges. In fact, the robustness of deterrence and strategy does not necessarily lie in the possession of larger

⁹⁰ For an insightful perspective on the transforming contours of world politics, see, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (2015/16): 7-53,
http://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/isec_a_00225.pdf.

⁹¹ Sara Hsu, "China's Relations with Iran: A Threat to the West?" *Diplomat*, January 27, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/chinas-relations-with-iran-a-threat-to-the-west/>.

conventional forces; rather it is intrinsically the capability to inflict unacceptable harm upon the adversary and to deny it battlefield advantages.

Retrospectively, it is imperative for India and Pakistan to understand the cost associated with any conflict between them, as war's so-called glory is merely moonshine.⁹² For India-Pakistan 'arbitration or adjudication' could go a long way in resolving their bilateral disputes. Vasquez writes that history testifies to the fact that over three-fourths of disputes were resolved with mediation (with success rate of 76.9 per cent).⁹³ He further observes that even the 'higher provocation threshold can range from verbal threats and warnings, to military deployments and displays, to the use of force in limited wars.' Hence, in South Asian setting, India's reported CSD plan of imposing a limited conventional war on Pakistan can quite easily spiral out of control, thereby, leading to limited war with higher propensity of crossing the threshold.⁹⁴ Therefore, any conflict, limited or all-out, is not a logical option for any nuclear power.⁹⁵ In this background, India's endeavours to impose 'escalation dominance'⁹⁶ is expected to fizzle out or lead to hazardous escalation. It has also been discussed that the military strategy has to be in sync with the 'grand strategy' of a state, which simultaneously has to take into account many other factors. Both Pakistan and India have to dispassionately take stock of their respective strategies and tactics in amalgam with many other prevalent factors before crafting any perilous and lopsided plans. ■

⁹² General William Tecumseh Sherman's statement, quoted in Johan Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 6.

⁹³ John A. Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know about War*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹⁵ Glenn Herald Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 455-56.

⁹⁶ For further details, see Toby Dalton and George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Options and Escalation Dominance*, report (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), 1-40.