

*SVI Bi-monthly Seminar: Report – 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020*

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India's Military Modernization and Counter Force Temptations: Impact on Regional Security

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A bi-monthly seminar titled “India’s Military Modernization and Counter Force Temptations: Impact on Regional Security” was organized by the Strategic Vision Institute (SVI), on February 13, 2020, at the Islamabad Club, comprising a galaxy of scholars, academicians, students and defence and policy analysts. Split between two sessions, the seminar was aimed at generating a candid insight into some of the policy options available to the Pakistani government in the wake of India’s ongoing military modernization plans, as well as an appraisal of some of the most salient suggestions being debated within politico-strategic circles. The seminar comprised of three sessions which include an inaugural session and two working sessions chaired by Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema (President/Executive Director, SVI) and Air Commodore Khalid Banuri (former DG, ACDA) respectively. The eminent panel of speakers and discussants included Dr. Khuram Iqbal (Asst. Prof. International Relations, FCS, NDU), Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Professor, SPIR, QAU), Mr. Sufian Ullah (Research Fellow, CISS, Islamabad), AVM (R) Faaiz Amir HI(M) (Former Vice-Chancellor, Air University Islamabad), and Dr. Adil Sultan (Director Nuclear & Strategic Current Affairs, CASS, Islamabad). The Keynote address was given by Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Saadat NI(M) (President, CASS, Islamabad).

### **Inaugural Session -I**



In his welcome remarks, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President/Executive Director SVI, expressed how honored the SVI was to have such a distinguished panel present at the occasion. He explained that considering the grave importance and gravity of the emerging regional situation, a dispassionate and cool-minded view was required to assess the implications and outcomes of the topic at hand. Briefly outlining the importance of India’s military modernization plans he stated that based on its tumultuous history as well as the more recent developments taking place at the regional and international levels, Pakistan was closely tied to the consequences of India’s military potential. Especially considering the evolution of its force posturing, these plans posed some serious implications which this seminar aimed to discuss and thus address at the policy level.

Charting some of the most salient points in the evolution of India’s force posturing against Pakistan, Dr. Cheema identified the Sundarji Doctrine of the 1980s as India’s attempted strategy of goading Pakistan into a frontal and/or even limited war as an excuse to destroy its nuclear facilities. The Brasstacks exercise, for instance, has been linked directly with this line of thought as espoused by the likes of Pervez Iqbal Cheema and Stephen Cohen who have written extensively on this subject. Fast forward to India’s Draft Nuclear Doctrine of 1999 which followed its second round of nuclear tests, the perhaps idealistic overtures of its No First Use policy (NFU) as well as its emphasis on strategic restraint was quite visibly done away with during Operation Parakram. This represented a retreat of sorts from the DND. This steady erosion of India’s NFU which became increasingly apparent from 2003 onwards was perhaps

completely eradicated by India's former National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon. In his 2016 book 'Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy', he has clearly stated that in case of hostilities India will not wait for Pakistan to attack first and may launch a pre-emptive strike if such were the case. The ruling BJP government since coming to power has further confirmed the erosion of India's stated NFU policy, as is apparent in the statements made from both its civilian and military leaders.

Dr. Cheema pointed out that while the forthcoming panelists would be explaining this evolution of India's force posturing in greater detail, it was within this overriding context that India's military modernization plans must be assessed keeping in mind the grave dangers they pose for regional peace and stability.

## Session-II

The Second Session of the seminar titled "Modernization / Development of India's Strategic / Military Capabilities" was chaired by Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema while the speakers included: Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, and Mr. Sufiyan Ullah.



Dr. Khurram Iqbal, the first speaker of the session spoke on "India's Evolving Strategic Culture and Objectives under BJP". He presented a detailed breakdown of the more normative aspects influencing the reckless decision-making being witnessed within India's defense and security apparatus.

He explained that Indian strategic culture has gone through a profound transformation, which has obvious policy implications for Pakistan. There is a growing *Saffronisation* of Indian strategic culture, which is producing modes of thought, increasingly receptive to aggressive posturing and force utilization vis-à-vis Pakistan. Hence, considering this shift is extremely important if one is to understand Indian military modernization and what it means for Pakistan.

There are various ways of understanding and forecasting a state's behavior, its strategic thinking and policy objectives. As such, 'strategic culture' is one such lens that contributes most towards shaping them. In all, it comprises the ideological outlook and life experiences of those who matter the most in the strategic policy-making community. According to some scholars, strategic culture directly comes out of the pockets of a country's political and military elite. In a country like India, with its deep democratic roots, the political elite matters a lot more than its military elite especially when it comes to shaping its strategic culture. Based on this it is imperative that we understand the composition of the current Indian political elite and how this elite interprets geography, history, domestic politics, and international structure.

Today, RSS - the organization banned in India thrice for its involvement in terrorism, reigns supreme not only in the streets but also in the Parliament and other policymaking forums of India. According to a leading Indian investigative media platform, in Modi's first term 41 of 66 BJP ministers hailed from an RSS background. Since his re-election in 2019, this figure has increased by another 9 percent. The most important panel in the Modi cabinet, the 'Cabinet Committee on Security' (CCS), is dominated by the *Sangh*. The CCS is composed of five official members, out of which three including the Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Home Minister have been active members of the RSS. The 'Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs' (CCEA); the second most important ministerial panel, is also dominated by those with RSS backgrounds. Out of ten, eight members of this elite committee have strong links to the *Sangh*.

Think-Tanks, that are often assumed to fill certain vacuums in the strategic domain, are in principle expected to generate and discuss new ideas. However, in Narendra Modi's India, eight think-tanks are believed to be shaping Indian security and foreign policies, all of which are directly funded by the RSS. Officials linked to these think-tanks enjoy uninterrupted access to the country's strategic community. This institutional penetration has allowed the RSS to shape and influence Indian policies on everything ranging from education to national security in an unprecedented manner. For instance, the most influential of the league of eight think-tanks is the "India Foundation" which was jointly founded by the RSS leader Ram Madhav and none other than Shaurya Doval, the son of Ajit Doval, incumbent National Security Advisor of India – who is also a staunch member of the RSS.

Similarly, educational syllabi are another source of influencing and shaping a country's collective sense of history and nationhood, which ultimately contribute to shaping its strategic culture. This key portfolio as well has been handed over to the RSS linked Ramesh Pokhryal. Under his leadership, the overarching notions of subjugation, racial superiority, and humiliation are constantly reiterated in the new syllabi developed by an RSS-led apex body. Examples include re-defining the very ideas of evolution, and historical subjugation, whilst glorifying and romanticizing the Hindu civilization's mythic beginnings. As a result, the curriculum tends to shy away from acknowledging inclusive and secular policies, often contradicting even established scientific practices and modes of thought.

As far as the threat to Pakistan is concerned, it is now virtually impossible to look at Indian strategic thinking without considering the deeper historical baggage which the likes of Modi, Amit Shah, and Ajit Doval carry with themselves. Their cumulative historical memory blames Muslims for centuries of subjugation and treats Pakistan as a residue of those Muslim invaders. Therefore, the anti-Pakistan mantra is central to Hindutva's ideology. Similarly, in terms of geography, the Saffron elite considers the South Asian region as its exclusive sphere of influence. Hence, representing a major shift from the idea of *Akhand Bharat* towards that of a *Hindu Rashtra*, with the latter thus holding wider international implications beyond the more immediate South Asian region.



Looking ahead it is worth noting that the Hindutva movement is now institutionalized to such an extent within India that its effects as an institutionalized phenomenon are difficult to reverse. With the second political triumph of the BJP, the Saffron movement has entered a consolidation phase, in which the ideology has now penetrated even deeper into Indian strategic culture. An alternate view even further posits that strategic culture is a product of changing domestic political contexts

However, since the anti-Pakistan narrative is the mainstay of Hindutva's agenda, any suggestion to ignore the threat or effort to trivialize it must be treated with caution. As a result, Pakistan should strictly avoid treating the BJP-led Indian government as a rational actor.

This holds all the more concern when considering that Pakistan's strategic planning at the present is more "Realist" oriented - in that it treats its adversaries as rational actors. This must change. Rationality is the first causality of the *Saffronisation* of Indian strategic culture. Consequently, there is a strong need to consider the evolving changes in Indian strategic culture, which could potentially motivate New Delhi to act irrationally and recklessly. Furthermore, any irrational move will not be constrained by the question of capability because there is a qualitative and quantitative improvement in Indian military capabilities.

A BJP-led India is likely to exhibit a preference for offensive use of force, and how we preempt or prevent it is the million-dollar question.

The second speaker, Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, followed with a detailed exposition of “India’s Enhanced Strategic Military Capabilities: A Re-assessment in view of its Joint Armed Forces and the Land Warfare Doctrines”.

He started by pointing towards an alarming increase in the Indian defence budget for the year 2020 announced on February 1, 2020, that figured to the US \$ 73.5 billion. This represented an increase of about 9% as compared to the previous defence budget. The growth rate is 5% whereas the rise in the defence budget is 9%, which represents a major shift in India’s strategic and military thinking dominated by the RSS’s Hindutva ideology.



Indian strategic and military thinking is aspired by the great powers based on which India wants to become the regional hegemon. There has been a clear understanding of Indian strategic hierarchy that without enhanced capabilities India cannot achieve its objectives. Pakistan remains a primary objective in Indian Military Doctrines regardless of whether it is the 2004 Cold Start Doctrine, 2017 Joint Armed Forces Doctrine or the 2018 Land Warfare Doctrine.

Under the Joint Indian Armed Forces and the Land Warfare Doctrines, India is in the quest for looking an opportunity for short, limited and intense warfare with greater speed

maneuverability and strategic outreach. The Land Warfare Doctrine of 2018 is in conjunction with the Joint Armed Forces Doctrine of 2017. These tri-services doctrines provide a documented base of pre-emption against Pakistan by encouraging the use of ‘surgical strikes’ and provision of punitive response options for India to dominate the escalation ladder.

There are five key features of India’s military modernization under the Joint Armed Forces and the Land Warfare Doctrines;

- Offensive defence (High preparedness)
- Develop counterforce capabilities
- Modernizing military escalation dominance
- Provision of limited war (Surgical strike)
- Strengthening of the armed forces (Modern equipment)

India has already assured the nuclear triad, based on credible land, sea and air-based delivery systems that include SU-30 MKI modified to launch a supersonic missile, sea-based BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, land-based supersonic and cruise missiles. Moreover, India has signed agreements with Russia for the S-400 air defence system and with France for Rafale multirole jet planes. On naval front India has the objective of becoming a blue water navy with the provisions of aircraft carriers, a network of naval bases and nuclear-powered submarines.

Furthermore, India’s enhanced marmite cooperation with the US is also alarming for instance how India has projected its maritime significance to the US. Aspired with that, the US has renamed the Asia Pacific region as the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region and has re-established it as the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).

Third speaker, Mr. Sufian Ullah, analyzed the “Development of India’s Nuclear Force Posture: An Analysis of Counter Force Capabilities”.

He explained that based on growing strategic competition across the world, as well as a result of rapid technological advances, there exists a marked trend where nuclear weapon states have moved from counter-value targets towards counter-force targets. This has led to serious implications on the ideas of nuclear survivability as well as posing issues based around the first-strike capability.



India’s acquisition of counterforce capabilities is inherently dangerous for regional peace and stability for multiple factors. Nuclear deterrence, which is based on the threat of retaliation – or in other words, Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) – is eroding in South Asia. India’s evolving nuclear posture reflects that it is gradually shifting from assured counter value retaliation to preemptive counterforce strategy.

India has traditionally pursued acquiring strategic dominance over Pakistan. However, the strategic frustration because of its decades-long inability to strategically subdue Pakistan now compels India to adopt an ‘escalation dominance strategy’, which envisages that India escalates and defeats its adversary at every potential level of engagement. New Delhi’s adoption of a counterforce targeting strategy is part of this broader strategy. This perceived confidence that India may control escalation dynamics in a nuclearized environment is highly destabilizing and increases nuclear risks in South Asia. Furthermore, New Delhi’s unrestricted access to sophisticated technologies – such as the Russian S-400 missile systems and joint production of BrahMos cruise missile – and intelligence sharing related agreements with the US – such as Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) all add to these dynamics.

The key counterforce capabilities in Indian inventory include tactical nuclear weapons, land-based medium to long-range ballistic missiles, and Pakistan specific submarine-launched ballistic missiles, higher nuclear readiness, and alert levels ensured through canisterization, ballistic missile defence systems and so on. These weapons may encourage India to initiate limited war with Pakistan in the backdrop of confidence that these counterforce capabilities would deter Pakistan from using nuclear weapons in a conventional limited war. This not only is an inherently destabilizing proposition but also carries serious ramifications for first-strike stability in the region. Since counterforce weapons significantly increase the vulnerability of one of the adversaries, India’s evolving nuclear posture would further weaken deterrence stability in South Asia. With the growth of these capabilities in Indian inventory, the arms race is only likely to increase. This emerging scenario is particularly worrisome in the absence of any escalation control mechanism between Pakistan and India that exacerbates the risks of conflict escalation.

### Questions-Answers Session



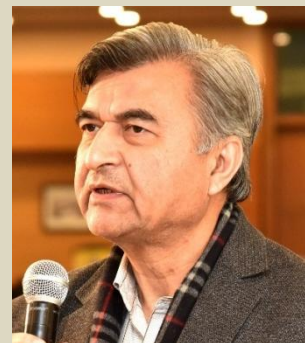
The first question was posed by Dr. Azmat Hayat (Former Vice-Chancellor University of Peshawar) who while referring to Dr. Khurram Iqbal’s presentation asked if Indian think-tanks were doing so much about influencing and shaping key policy decision, what was Pakistan and its own nascent network of think-tanks doing to counter that. Answering the question Dr. Iqbal replied that there is a growing realization in the Pakistani strategic community on the role of think tanks. Recently we have seen the creation of very specialized research centers and think tanks, for instance, the creation of ‘India Study Center’ at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. There are also specialized research centers focusing on the maritime domain. There is however an obvious need for more semi-state actors to pool in greater contributions both in terms of experts and resources as the question of who takes the lead has often hampered such developments. Yet, based on recent developments it seems that we as a whole are on the right trajectory.

The second question posed by Mr. Zeeshan Hayat, (Graduate of National Defence University) also to Dr. Iqbal was based on examining whether there was a difference between the BJP's strategic culture and India's strategic culture. Dr. Iqbal replied that one of the most salient examples of how India's strategic culture has changed under the BJP is evident in how there is no space left for a diversity of opinion and or even simple discussion amongst key policymakers. Compared to Congress's tenure there still existed space for ideas like the Gujral doctrine. However, in the current BJP setup, any dissenting voices are immediately crushed or suppressed out of an unfound fear of reprisal. This has set an extremely dangerous precedent that directly goes against India's own prized ideals of being the world's largest democracy. While responding to the same question, Dr. Jaspal explained that there was still a certain continuity to India's overall strategic thinking, the roots of which can be traced back to 1972. Briefly outlining the historical trajectory and evolution of India's strategic thinking he explained that although the BJP may have injected a certain sense of immediacy via a more radicalized and even irrational outlook there has remained a certain continuity in India's posturing against Pakistan.



Brig (R) Dr. Saif-ur-Rehman Malik (Director India Study Centre, ISSI) raised a question addressing Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal that given India's hegemonic designs and naval advancements, could there be a possibility that India might give a surprise to Pakistan in the naval Domain if a crisis situation arises in future? Responding to this question, Dr. Jaspal said that keeping in view India's naval buildup, it is worth considering that this is the only domain that India has impressively sold to the US. In the same way, the US redesignating the Asia Pacific region into the 'Indo-Pacific' region is the recognition of India as an important maritime power in the region. While Indo-US cooperation in this domain is also enhancing and during the upcoming visit of President Trump to India it is expected that both the countries will sign a deal worth the US \$2.6 Billion for helicopters meant for monitoring the Indian Ocean, it is evident that India is seriously focusing on its naval buildup. India was also exposed to the deployment of Arihant submarine against Pakistan during the Balakot crisis. Therefore, Pakistan needs to be very much careful vis-à-vis Indian naval blockade.

Prof. Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid ( Dean DASSS, Air University Islamabad) in quoting Kenneth Waltz stated that for a great power to not behave like one would be a strategic anomaly. Such a realist outlook is what has defined most of the way Pakistani academics have viewed India particularly within the purview of defence and strategic studies. Yet such a purely realist assumption perhaps overlooks the complex and even irrational nuances that have led to





the current situation. How much is it useful to address such a situation with a different or alternative lens?



Air Commodore (R) Khalid Banuri (Former Director-General, ACDA, SPD) in posing a similar question stated that while the prevalence of such ‘irrationality’ in India’s strategic thinking has been repeatedly highlighted by many as the dominant force within India’s strategic culture, is there perhaps a method behind this madness? Dr. Iqbal while responding to both questions stated that he acknowledges Dr. Mujaddid’s reference to the Waltzian or more realist approach to such issues, he agreed that there was a definite need to apply alternative approaches as well to broaden overall understanding. The realist

assumption which relates to Waltz is based on the idea that state actors engage in a rational cost-benefit analysis of their relations with other countries. He explained that the idea of strategic culture which he had referred to in his particular talk, however, was based more on a structuralist or constructivist approach that is focused more on the idea of norms and other ideational factors. It is based on this framework that such actors can thus be termed irrational based on their established norms and practices. Hence, there is a definite need to incorporate a different lens that looks beyond the realistic lens on a deeper philosophical level as well to help broaden our understanding.

### Session-III

The third session of the seminar which was a continuation of the second session “Modernization/ Development of India’s Strategic/ Military Capabilities” and was chaired by Air Commodore (R) Khalid Banuri (Former Director-General, ACDA, SPD). He thanked Dr. Cheema for honoring him to moderate the third session comprised of some very eminent and highly qualified speakers on their related subjects. These include; Air Vice Marshal (R) Faaiz Amir HI(M), Dr. Adil Sultan and a Keynote speaker, Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Saadat NI (M).



The first Speaker, Air Vice Marshal (R) Faaiz Amir HI(M), gave a comprehensive presentation on the “Dynamics and Probability of India’s Counter Force Preemptive Strikes against Pakistan”.

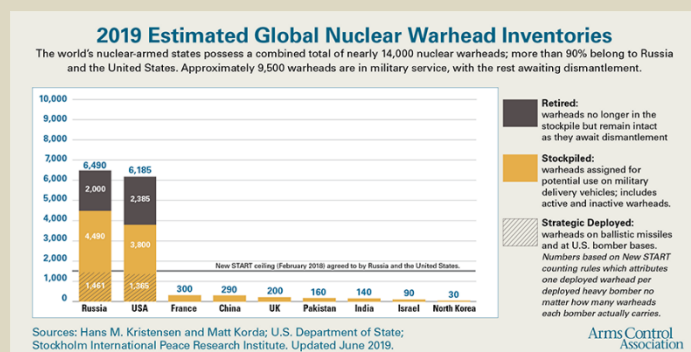
He started with a brief preamble of Indian aspirations to revisit its nuclear policy. This has been specifically asserted by prominent Indian scholars including; Vipin Narang, Shivshankar Menon, and others as the abandoning of the NFU policy.

While highlighting on the India’s capability of counterforce preemptive strikes against Pakistan, he maintained that India has benefitted from global technological advancements in developing a nascent spot and hit capacity. This includes:

- Long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles
- Visual spectrum and synthetic aperture radar imagery (indigenous and commercial) RISAT series
- Intelligence from friendly foreign governments
- Land-based and sea-based ballistic and cruise missiles (ICBMs and SLBMs)
- Indigenous ballistic missile defence capabilities; Prithvi Air Defence (PAD) missile for high altitude interception, and the Advanced Air Defence (AAD)
- Russian S-300 and S-400
- Integrated Air Defence System (Latest purchase from the USA)
- India recently tested a modified Prithvi Defence Vehicle exo-atmospheric kinetic interceptor against one of its own satellites, demonstrating for the first time a counter space capability.
- SAR-equipped satellites, now able to find mobile targets, have the potential to transform counter-TEL operations.

Equipped with X-band synthetic aperture radar, RISAT-2B will be able to look through the clouds to observe Earth's surface day and night. India has four of these. Now it can target much of Pakistan with a variety of land-based and sea-based ballistic and cruise missiles as well as target growing portions of Pakistan with air-launched weapons and missiles. India is heavily investing in both indigenous ballistic missile defence capabilities and imported systems such as the Russian S-400. These capabilities would be wholly inadequate to stop a Pakistani first strike, but they might have some ability to intercept residual Pakistani weapons that remained after an Indian disarming strike.

Air Vice-Marshal (R) Faaiz Amir HI (M), deliberately explained Indian Counterforce Effectiveness with the help of a graph as follow:



As the figure suggests, as of today, India has lesser warheads for one-on-one application against Pakistan's arsenal in counterforce mode. India targeting only half of the Pakistani arsenal, assuming the other half would be intercepted by its air defence system, would amount to raining 70 nuclear weapons on a limited geographical entity if one warhead was assigned to one target.

While discussing the probability of India's Counter Force (CF) Preemptive Strikes against Pakistan he analyzed that in near to medium term for Indian disarming strike to be successful, the probability is zero. However, Indian accumulation of capabilities in weapon accuracy and sensors, which has encouraged its policymakers and scholars to toy with the idea of forsaking No First Use in favor of counterforce pre-emption merits a positive measurement in the longer term. The probability, even if it is rated as any value beyond zero say 0.1 then it should raise alarms about deterrence stability in the region. Lurking threats of CF would automatically trigger an arms race between the two neighbors.

While drawing some lessons from his presentation, he was of the view that;

- As arsenals become more vulnerable deterrence will weaken.
- The pervasive fear of pre-emption among national leadership creates an imperative to use nuclear weapons before the adversary.
- Perception of strong counterforce capability increases the temptation to attack, without having the assurance of perfect success, setting in motion a catastrophic chain of events.
- A counterforce strike will cause enormous civilian casualties in the target country, but also possibly in neighboring countries.
- The failure of a disarming strike will provoke a massive punitive response, ruling out the possibility of a controlled nuclear exchange.
- The danger of smaller nuclear arsenal is aggravated by improvements in non-nuclear means.
- No single strategy of survivability is ideal, because each entails important trade-offs. Hardening is time tested, but it comes at the cost of concealment.
- Nations will have to retain diverse retaliatory forces as a hedge against adversary's technological breakthroughs, to maintain the same level of deterrent threat.
- Indian overconfidence may lead it to believe it can execute a disarming strike, which would place the region and the world, in an incredibly perilous position.
- India, by enhancing its counterforce capabilities, would trigger an arms race and perpetuate other dynamics that aggravate political and military conditions.
- Policymakers and scholars should abandon the idea that nuclear war was winnable in any meaningful sense.
- To Brodie's followers, the fantasy of nuclear victory would lead to atrocious waste at best and a terrible tragedy at worst.
- Nuclear weapons do not solve the country's most fundamental security problems.

In Indo-Pak nuclear standoff, in near to medium term, India is far from achieving the potency to execute meaningful counterforce strikes against Pakistani nuclear targets. But as India digs deeper into the concept of counterforce, it is ratcheting up the risk. Its mere interest in such ability, however, is likely to provoke both an arms race as well as dangerous incentives for Pakistan to strike first and early in a crisis. In the event of an escalation, some Indian strategic

thinkers appear to have concluded that Indian aspirations for escalation dominance through credible ability to disarm Pakistan of its long-range nuclear systems would lead the region to atrocious waste at best and a terrible tragedy at worst.

The second speaker for this session, Dr. Adil Sultan, spoke on “India’s Counter Force Capabilities, Deterrence Equilibrium and Strategic Stability in South Asia”.



He started by saying that, both Pakistan and India continue to remain embroiled in a cycle of stability-instability with India continuously attempting to shift the military balance in its favor and Pakistan trying to restore, what can now be termed as South Asia’s ‘elusive’ strategic stability. As Gen Kidwai, the former Head of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division, in one of his recent speeches stated that: over the past fifty years India attempted to shift the balance of power in its favor, pushing the region towards instability, and by default, it has been a Pakistani responsibility not to allow the South Asian strategic stability to be disturbed to its disadvantage.

India’s more recent attempt to develop the ‘counterforce first strike’ option is part of similar thinking, which not only contradicts India’s declared posture of No First Use (NFU) but also poses a serious challenge to deterrence stability in South Asia. In response to these new developments, it would be once again Pakistan’s responsibility to take corrective measures to ensure the credibility of its deterrence posture and preserve strategic stability in the region.

He further elaborated on the difference between deterrence equilibrium and strategic stability; which although have similar connotation but deterrence equilibrium could be described as the overall balance of forces; whereas, strategic stability is a much broader concept encompassing several tangible and intangible variables that shape the behavior of states. Once viewed in the India-Pakistan context, it could be argued that despite the overall military balance being in India’s favor, it could not exploit the relative advantage due to the introduction of new weapon systems and doctrinal concepts by Pakistan that helped maintain strategic stability in the region. Notwithstanding these contextual differences, it is evident that India has been persistently attempting to alter the military equilibrium and introduce destabilizing technologies and war fighting concepts that continue to strain South Asian deterrence stability.

There are at least four major events in the past where India tried to destabilize the region but did not succeed because of Pakistan’s efforts to restore stability. First was India’s decision to introduce nuclear weapons in the region in 1974 that forced Pakistan to start its own nuclear weapons program. The second major attempt was India’s decision to formally declare itself as a nuclear weapon state in 1998, which led Pakistan to follow suit and become an overt nuclear-weapon state. The third attempt was to introduce a new war fighting doctrine of Cold Start or Pro-Active Operations Strategy in 2004 that led to the introduction of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) posture by Pakistan which aims to deter the entire spectrum of threats. And finally, the



more recent attempt to establish a ‘new norm’ of surgical strikes that were responded effectively as part of Pakistan’s policy of ‘Quid Pro Quo Plus.’

Despite these experiences, India seems not to have learned the true meaning of a ‘nuclear revolution’ and is in the process of developing a capability that could provide an option for a ‘pre-emptive counterforce strike’ against Pakistan. As part of this new doctrine, India is developing its own version of Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs) by modifying BrahMos cruise missiles with Russian assistance, besides improving the accuracy of its existing missile inventory. It is also building capability to intercept incoming missiles by developing a multi-layered defence shield which would also include the Russian supplied S-400 anti-missile system. India hopes that if Pakistan decided to retaliate in response to its counterforce strike, its missile shield would provide immunity against it, which remains an illusion as of now due to two main factors: first, the missile flight time between the two countries is too short for any BMD system to work effectively; and second, there is no foolproof system in the world that could provide complete immunity against incoming missiles, and in a nuclear conflict even if few missiles could reach their intended target, the objective would be achieved.

As per the 2003 nuclear doctrine, India declared that it’s “NWs will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere,” but the same document contained a caveat that “if attacked by biological or chemical weapons, it would retain the option of retaliating with NWs. This inherent contradiction became more prominent when several senior members of India’s Nuclear Command Authority publicly voiced their reservations on the NFU posture and indicated the possibility of a first strike against Pakistan. For instance, India’s former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, in his 2016 book wrote that there is a potential grey area as to when India would use nuclear weapons first. According to him, circumstances are conceivable in which India might find it useful to strike first if the Indian decision-makers concluded that the adversary’s nuclear use is imminent. According to Menon, if Pakistan uses or even contemplates the use of its Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs), it would free up India from its NFU commitment to undertake a comprehensive first strike against Pakistan.

Interestingly, several senior officials and Indian scholars have often conflated the two strategic constructs of ‘First Strike’ and ‘First Use,’ whereas, both have different connotations in the nuclear lexicon. A ‘First Strike’ would aim to neutralize adversary’s capacity to retaliate, whereas, ‘First Use’ could be part of the signaling once the crisis has unfolded to deter the adversary from further escalating, or it could be used as a war termination strategy. The use of these two terms interchangeably by the Indian decision-makers could be to maintain deliberate ambiguity, but most likely is a result of lack of clarity amongst India’s decision-making elite. Nevertheless, as an adversary, Pakistan would be compelled to consider a worst-case scenario and prepare for the possibility of a ‘pre-emptive counterforce strike’ by India.

Amongst asymmetric military powers, where a relatively smaller state like Pakistan has to deter the entire spectrum of threats through a combination of its conventional and nuclear capability, any attempt to neutralize or undermine its deterrence posture would lead to a 'loose or use dilemma' thus pushing it to move quickly on the nuclear escalation ladder. Some scholars have argued that if India launched a counterforce strike against Pakistan's nuclear weapons by using its BrahMos-II supersonic missiles mated with conventional warheads, it may make it difficult for Pakistan to justify retaliating with nuclear weapons against Indian population centers since it would be viewed as a disproportionate response. Such arguments are mainly intended to build justification for acquiring new destabilizing technologies besides crafting space for a conventional conflict by India.

India at present may not have the requisite weapon systems and the ISR capabilities that could ensure that its counterforce strike against Pakistan's SRBMs would be successful, but it does not mean that it will never be able to develop these capabilities. A counterforce strike by its nuclear-capable missiles or HGVs even if mated with conventional warheads would be a serious challenge for the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence.

Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) posture is premised on the principle of deterring the entire spectrum of threats by developing appropriate response options. Any attempt to neutralize or undermine Pakistan's deterrence potential to explore space for a limited conventional conflict is likely to trigger a response that could eventually end up into nuclear holocaust.

The development of a counterforce doctrine and acquisition of new and destabilizing technologies are part of India's ongoing efforts to assert its hegemony over its relatively smaller neighbors, but India has so far failed to achieve its objective due to yawning gap between its actual potential and how it projects itself to be a future global power. India's credibility dilemma is self-inflicted due to inconsistencies contained in its publicly declared nuclear doctrine of 2003 that is not in sync with its ongoing military developments. Without addressing these issues India's incoherent nuclear expansion would compel its adversaries to take remedial measures that could further push the region towards instability.

Finally, the role of major powers in helping India build its military stature for their own commercial and political interests at the expense of regional stability is a matter of serious concern. While the US is emerging as a major defense partner, India's current pursuit to acquire counterforce capabilities are based on Russian supplied BrahMos and S-400 anti-missile system. It is therefore imperative that these powers shoulder the responsibility of creating instability in the region. On its part, Pakistan is unlikely to give up on its sovereignty and would take all possible measures that could ensure its territorial integrity.

## Keynote Address



The two talks were followed by a keynote address delivered by Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Saadat, NI(M) (President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) and former Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force) who shared his views on “Emerging Indian Air Threat and Pakistan’s Response”.

He started by highlighting the emerging Indian threat. Indian rhetoric lately has become more bellicose and belligerent. The Hindutva-driven politics of Narendra Modi is designed to garner political support of his RSS base in the face of dwindling economic performance of the government. Politics has always been divisive because emotions are easily stirred by the supposed evil of, and the real hatred for, the other, which in the present case are the Muslim citizens of India and the people and government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The wound of partition and the hurt of Muslim rule over India make the reconciliation with the past and the history apparently impossible for them. Pakistan’s refusal to cower before Indian hegemony adds salt to the Indian wounds. Therefore, there is this quest, urge, wish and ambition to deal a mortal blow to Pakistan. India’s perception of power potential differential makes it even wilder in the imagination of what could be done without being mindful of the cost that such an action may entail. February 2019 saw a manifestation of this calculus and ambition. It was a classical use of military means to attain domestic political ends. History is a witness that many a war has been started for diverting the public’s attention from domestic turmoil. May 2019 Indian elections were fought on the narrative of Modi being strong and unafraid of Pakistan.

The Balakot strike was the basis on which the subsequent narrative was based. Even though the IAF failed on both February 26 and 27, 2019 the media and the public accepted the lie that India was the victor on both days. Following that Mr. Modi won the elections in May 2019. So the plan worked well for him. This is what matters in the era of information warfare. The truth doesn’t seem to matter anymore, especially for aggressor nations. Mr. Modi takes his inspiration and cues from the likes of Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, Jair Bolsanaro and Victor Orban. Their success is predicated on the personal hatred and presumed evil menace, of the other. These leaders want the people they hate to vanish into thin air. Humanity just wonders at them. So Mr. Modi and his Hindutva driven associates are not going to change and we should expect more of the same from them. They would refrain from composite dialogue with Pakistan but wage a hybrid war against it. And whenever a diversion is required, a surgical strike would be thrown in.

Acts of hybrid warfare remain unowned but airstrikes are preferred options for maximum media effect and for claiming success. Each time India does this, it poses a dilemma to Pakistan’s political and military leadership in terms of where and how to respond. The military

tools India is gathering are intended to enable it to be more adventurous while aiming to reduce Pakistani military options. Therein lies the threat and Pakistani citizens and analysts are rightly concerned and worried.

Indian Army, Navy and Air Force have always been many times larger than Pakistan's and India has always accelerated the arms race in the region by acquiring new capabilities in the form of platforms and weapons. Yet India's frustration is unending. So it has reneged on its NFU policy. Now India would like to believe in the pre-emptive splendid first strike. It thinks that it would get rid of what can be called their Muslim problem through this magic bullet.

India's more recent and consequential acquisitions have been related to air operations. These have caused a lot of concern in the country. Acquisitions like Rafale, S-400, and BrahMos by India take the arms race to a new level. PAF will have to scramble, as in the past, to catch up. In a network-centric warfare environment, integration of data flow of various sensors and weapon systems remains a challenge. It becomes more acute when there's a diversity of origin of equipment and software.

There are five sources for Indian Air Force: Indigenous DRDO, France, Russia, USA, and Israel. The total threat may not necessarily be the total of capabilities of these weapon systems because of a lack of integration, at least in the short term. Over time things may get better. In stand-alone mode these weapon systems pose a considerable threat. Rafale has long-range air-to-air Meteor missile as well as SCALP stand-off air-to-ground weapon. These weapons are adequately suited to the Hindutva-driven strategy to launch surgical strikes. S-400, on the other hand, can give India a false sense of immunity from Pakistan's surface-to-surface missiles (SSM) or cruise missiles and embolden it to indulge in foolish adventurism. Irrationalism can never be ruled out totally and therein lays the danger. BrahMos is also a suitable tool for a surgical strike kind of operation.

The questions that come up are; where will the funding come from and will the Chinese release their leading-edge technologies to Pakistan? These two factors will depend on Pakistan's future war preparedness and response? India has always been ahead in arms or platforms procurement. India acquired the Jaguar in 1978 and suddenly the majority of Pakistan's air bases and other targets came within its radius of action. Then came the Mirage 2000 in 1982 followed by Su-30MKI in the 90s and the contest for prospective air superiority became more challenging. The F-16s, which Pakistan acquired in the early '80s, did not have a beyond-visual-range capability. The induction of Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) on F-16 restored some sort of parity though Indian frontline fighters had a 3:1 numerical advantage.

He further elaborated that, where Pakistan gained an advantage was in its indigenous JF-17 versus the Indian Tejas development. Pakistan managed to operationalize a larger number of aircraft quicker than Tejas. It was consequent to faulty Indian decision to build its own engine for Tejas while PAF opted for a proven Russian engine and built a weapon system around it. The

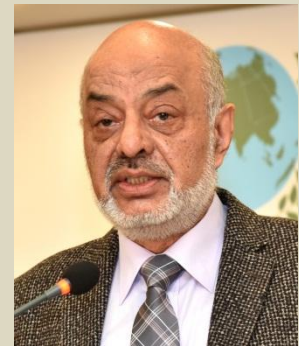


Indian engine was never built. Pakistan needs more capable aircraft and weapons. The region doesn't need an acceleration of arms race. With so many hundreds of millions mired in poverty and misery, this money could have found better uses but Hindutva hubris obviates this.

Air Chief Marshal Kaleem Sadaat suggested that in parallel to new procurements, Pakistan needs to work on cyber warfare to disrupt Indian networks. That's a capability no one would give us so we have to develop it ourselves. It will take a while but it will ensure our safety in the long run. Similarly, to thwart the S-400 Pakistan has to work on our electronic countermeasure (ECM) capability too. The threat of anti-radiation missiles would force the S-400 systems to recede to the deeper Indian Territory. Nevertheless, he assured y that given adequate resources, the PAF can defend the aerial frontiers of the country effectively. It has always shown that it can do a lot more with a lot of courage. He concluded by raising a few profound questions; looking at the geostrategic environment with the Quad alliance of USA, India, Japan, and Australia encircling China, why can't Pakistan make China commit more strategically and wholeheartedly to the development and security of Pakistan? How can we make that happen? Right now CPEC appears to be export of China's surplus skilled manpower, industrial machinery, and bank finance. It does develop Pakistan's infrastructure but makes us pile up our debt, which needs to be seriously looked into.

### **Rapporteur Remarks**

In his Rapporteur remarks, Lt. Gen. (R) Syed Muhammad Owais HI(M) commended the SVI for highlighting the subject of constant deliberation. He generously admired the leadership of the SVI for being academically pertinent to the prevalent security situation. Underlining the evolution of India's force posturing against Pakistan, he maintained that it was from the times of the Sundarji Doctrine of the 1980s, that India has been provoking Pakistan into a frontal and/or even limited war as an excuse to destroy its nuclear facilities. This has been the focal purpose of the Indian military modernization apart from attaining the hegemon status in the region. Such defining lines had been a major cursor of the dynamism and frequency of the security developments in the region.



Logically sequencing its nuclear doctrine, India drafted its Nuclear Doctrine of 1999 soon after its second round of tests in May 1999. Doing away with its idealistic NFU policy as well as its emphasis on strategic restraint was already visible in its Pokhran Operation which represented a significant retreat from the DND.

In India, strategic culture and strategic thought merge into the democratic guidelines much more than that of the military might. The growing *Saffronization* is much more receptive to aggressive posturing particularly towards Pakistan. The Indian military modernization, however, represents the prevalent military culture but is still predominantly subservient to its political

thought. The think-tanks, the syllabi geography, history, domestic politics and international structure, all are interpreted from thereon.

Similarly, the strategic competition all across the world is directly influenced by the rapid technological advances. Reshaping of the counter-value targeting towards counter-force targeting is a major consequence of technological development invalidating the possibility of nuclear survivability as well while posing questions on first strike instability. The temptation to attack by the orchestration of technology, without having the assurance of perfect success is certainly a deep lead of irrationality.

Lt Gen. (R) Syed Muhammad Owais recommended that, based on the “realist” thoughts, Pakistan's strategic planning to treat its adversaries as rational actors need revamping by looking into;

- How to neutralize the strategic culture and counter the anti-Pakistan mantra.
- RSS hegemonic designs are progressive and Pakistan is the only effective hindrance.
- Pakistan needs to not only speed up its defence procurement structure but has to keep it constant, though under compulsion.
- The acquisition of modern weapons is necessary for Pakistan to ensure both the regional equilibrium and its security.
- Indo-Israel nexus must also be as closely watched as the Indo-US, as a vital component of India's defence policy.
- Letting the deterrence get weaker would be an irrational choice.
- Under the circumstances, putting its own house in order should be the prime concern for Pakistan.

### Questions-Answers Session

Mr. Zeeshan Hayat (Graduate of National Defence University) addressed his question towards Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Sadaat, referring to the divergence of lessons from February 27, 2019 Balakot incident which both India and Pakistan have learned. He asked whether it could lead to a similar kind of military engagement in the near future? Responding to the question Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Sadaat said that based on experiences of past escalations, for instance, the 2001-02 standoff both countries have learned different lessons. It is quite usual to draw different conclusions out of that conflict. The same happened during the Balakot crisis as Pakistan has deterred India from escalating after 27<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The other factor remains that Modi's political objectives were also achieved and BJP was successful in moulding the public opinion in its favor.



Air Commodore (R) Tanweer Nazim Siddique said that keeping in view the Indian psyche, the NFU policy was never really a practical

policy. In fact, it was just a jargon to get a lot of high ground internationally. India since always wanted to use the counterforce or the preemption strategy. However, India will never mount to such an adventure, unless it has following three things; first India won't escalate unless it has overwhelming superiority both numerically as well as technologically. Second, India will ensure tacit as well as overt international support i.e. from Israel and from the US. Third, unless India manages to degrade Pakistan's resolve to retaliate, it will not resort to escalation. That is obviously not possible as long as Pakistan has its minimum credible deterrence. He was of the view that Air Chief Marshal Kaleem Sadaat rightly pointed out that instead of mounting into an arms race with India, Pakistan must go for the cheaper solutions, for instance, the Electronic Warfare, Electronic Countermeasure (ECM) and Electronic Counter-countermeasures (ECCM). He also acknowledged that Pakistan must further enhance its strategic partnership with China which obviously would likely serve as a deterrent factor vis-à-vis its relations with India.

Dr. Adil Sultan while commenting on India's NFU policy, acknowledged that it was never a practical policy for India. India already believes in its superiority in comparison with Pakistan. While commenting on the possibility of escalating the conflict with tacit and overt international support, he suggested that it is highly unlikely that India would escalate the situation. However, it is equally pertinent that Pakistan's resolve to retaliate must not be compromised.



Dr. Talat Farooq (Senior Research Fellow, IPRI) in her comments raised an important point asking, do we have enough intellectual capacity to understand the complexity of the contemporary situation and its impact on the regional security. As security itself has expanded from military security to other domains, for instance, human security. She also suggested that instead of looking at the contemporary situation from a strategic culture lens or a realist lens, there is a need to adopt a holistic approach to understand the whole phenomena. One thing remains clear at the end of the day that the desired outcome has always been the power enhancement. So, at the research and academic level, it is important to understand the fundamentals of power and the psychology of power. When we talk about the Indian strategic culture, the issue of identity which emerges from historical insecurity remains obvious. These issues need to be looked into and researched as Lt. Gen. (R) Syed Muhammad Owais has rightly said that it is a subject of constant deliberation. The deliberations should be both empirical and theoretical with a focus on the psychology of perception and misperception.

Dr. Rubina Waseem (Asst. Prof Strategic Studies, NDU) directed her question to Dr. Adil Sultan. Keeping in view the Indian military buildup which is threatening the stability of the region gravely, what should be Pakistan's likely response. Should it go for ICBMs or some kind of deal with Russia regarding the S-400 air defence system. She further asked does



Pakistan need to extend its closer relationship with Russia? Dr. Adil Sultan suggested that parity is not required in terms of equilibrium as India is spending the US \$ 73 billion in the conventional domain, which Pakistan cannot afford. India's continuous increment in force posture is ably addressed by the nuclear capability of Pakistan. He considered an aggressive and myopic political thought more worrisome. Lt. Gen. (R) Syed Muhammad Owais added that there is no doubt that S-400 is one of the best air defence systems in the world as far as its capacity is concerned and it needs a similar response from Pakistan's side as well. Pakistan cannot afford that system due to lack of resources. Therefore, Pakistan has to come up with an offensive response by enhancing the capabilities of its Airforce with ECCM so that the impact of S-400 can be neutralized.

Brig. (R) Ishaq Ahmed Khattak (Deputy Director-General, Pakistan House) raised an important question. Keeping in view the Indian objectives to destabilize Pakistan based on its military modernization, which Pakistan cannot match with due to the economic constraints, he asked what can be the possibility in the foreseeable future? Could there be a war, a limited war, a total war or a nuclear war? What should be Pakistan's response? Air Chief Marshal Kaleem Sadaat responded by emphasizing that Pakistan doesn't want any war with India and wants to live in peace. But when the war is imposed regardless of its nature, there will be no option but to fight back.



In the end Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President/ Executive Director presented his vote of thanks to the chair, the speakers, the SVI team and all participants of the seminar.



**Media Coverage:**

The seminar was live broadcasted on the SVI FB page and was also widely covered by the print media as is evident from the following links:

**Social Media:** The seminar was live broadcasted from the SVI facebook Page

- a) <https://www.facebook.com/svicom/videos/224087075393649/>
- b) <https://www.facebook.com/svicom/videos/793313724486145/>

**Print Media:****DAWN**

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1534277/chinese-military-technology-will-define-pak-response-to-indian-threat>

**Daily Times**

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/557805/ex-paf-chief-suggests-seeking-chinese-help-to-counter-indian-military-modernization/>

**DND**

<https://dnd.com.pk/expansion-of-strategic-cooperation-with-china-inevitable-ex-paf-chief/182242>

**Urdu Point**

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/pakistan-needs-to-enhance-chinese-cooperation-837822.html>

**Express Tribune**

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2156438/1-look-for-chinas-help-counter-indias-military-modernisation/>