



# VISION

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# Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

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## SVI Foresight

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*SVI Foresight* is a monthly electronic journal. It has a multi-disciplinary perspective highlighting contemporary strategic and security studies. The Journal is envisioned to be a collection of policy-oriented articles written by its Research Associates, Visiting Faculty and professional experts. The objective is to provide the readership with a concise all-round and real-time policy oriented discourse on contemporary strategic regional and international developments, highlighting their relevance to Pakistan.



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## *Editor's Note*

India's negative nuclear posturing and irresponsible sabre rattling has continued to wreak havoc with the region's purported stability. It has done nothing else than rile up old enmities at a time where both sense and restraint are required across the board. With the ill-effects of the BJP's tumultuous electioneering still comprising much of India's foreign policy discourse, Pakistan has gone to great lengths to take up the mantle of leading peace and stability in the South Asia region, while dealing with a neighbor that perceives regional peace as anathema to its domestic political agenda.

As evident in its continued military posturing with respect to its ballistic and cruise missile tests, India's bid for regional dominance has thus remained clear as day throughout the last decade. With little changing in its defense and strategic outlook, the present state of strategic stability within the South Asian region seems locked in its path of escalating tensions with little chance of any form of reconciliation. As is, a much-needed breakthrough is required on the diplomatic front, which already stifled by a glaring lack of dialogue perhaps needs a greater impetus along the Track 2 approach that was employed with some success 15 years ago.

On the wider stage of international politics, the much-touted shift from a uni-polar global order towards a multi-polar one seems increasingly attenuated by both the US's tumultuous internal politics as well as the challenges posed by an increasingly assertive Russia in combination with an economically powerful China. These dynamics are at the present clearly on display in Turkey which being a key strategic partner for Pakistan represents a whole host of lessons to learn from considering its close historic-cultural affinity as well as similar foreign policy with respect to Pakistan.

We hope that this issue will help readers in staying up to date with the current political environment and find the analyses useful. The SVI Foresight invites and highly encourages contributions from the security and strategic community in the form of opinion based short commentaries on contemporary political, security and strategic issues. Any suggestions for further improvements are welcome at our [contact address](#). Previous issues of the SVI Foresight can be accessed [here](#), and can also be found on our [Facebook page](#). For more information, please visit our website at [www.thesvi.org](http://www.thesvi.org).

Senior Research Associate  
M Waqas Jan

# *The Current State of Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability in South Asia*

*Haris Bilal Malik*

Strategic stability in South Asia has been the dominant regional and global concern for quite some time. Several dynamics, such as conventional asymmetry, a burgeoning arms race and the presence of nuclear weapons have created a dangerous atmosphere of instability throughout the region. The addition of ballistic missile development, including India's supersonic cruise missiles in the absence of a non-proliferation regime and a crisis stability mechanism, serve as some of the most destabilizing factors that affect strategic stability in South Asia. Over the last few years, all these factors have contributed to the creation of an action-reaction spiral between India and Pakistan that is adversely impacting the regional security, stability and strategic equilibrium.

In recent years, India has continuously enhanced its counter-force offensive posture vis-à-vis Pakistan with the notion of 'Surgical Strikes' and its proactive war doctrines which include the [2017 Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces](#) (JDIAF) and the [2018 Land Warfare Doctrine](#) (LWD). All of them are based on a proactive strategy and indirect threats of preemptive strikes against Pakistan. Against the context of these notions and doctrines, the self-proclaimed surgical strikes of 2016 and the 2019 Post-Pulwama Balakot Strikes, which subsequently resulted in a short-lived military engagement between India and Pakistan, clearly demonstrate India's ambitions of achieving escalation-dominance throughout the region.

Recent technological advancements which form the very basis of India's military expansion include its missile development programs, its ballistic missile defence systems (BMD), space capabilities for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance (ISR), and its recently inducted nuclear submarines. India's recent anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons test is also indicative of this continuing trend. These technological advancements are clear indicators that India's policies are aimed at deliberately destabilizing strategic stability in South Asia.

The present state of strategic stability in South Asia, which is primarily based on nuclear deterrence equilibrium, is thus facing considerable challenges from India's proactive strategies to deter Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan's threat perception has, over the years, become even more inclined towards its Eastern border. Due to its conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis India and India's quest for limited conventional war (which it claims would remain below the nuclear threshold), Pakistan has continued to rely on nuclear weapons to overcome this asymmetry in case of any limited war or breach of its sovereignty. In this regard Pakistan's nuclear deterrence approach over the years has evolved from 'minimum credible deterrence' to 'full spectrum deterrence'. This posture provides deterrence against all forms of aggression from India with the combination of conventional forces and nuclear capabilities.

Based on this India centric threat perception, Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence' has existed since the operationalization of tactical nuclear weapons. Pakistan's timely and calculated responses have all played a significant role in the preservation of minimum credible deterrence and the assurance of full spectrum deterrence at the strategic, operational and tactical levels; measures include developing sophisticated military technology, e.g. intermediate range ballistic missiles (Shaheen III), short range ballistic missiles (Nasr), multiple independently reentry targetable vehicle (MIRV-Ababeel), air and sea launched cruise missile (Raad and Babur) and the development of a naval second strike capability. Moreover, Pakistan's induction of the tactical nuclear-capable 'Nasr' missile in response to India's limited war and proactive strategies is widely regarded as a 'weapon of deterrence', which aims to deny space for a limited war and avoid any escalation-domination from India.

India's approach to achieve escalation-domination in the region is also evident in the February 2019 short-lived military engagement between India and Pakistan. India, under its notion of limited war and proactive strategy, threatened Pakistan with a 'preemptive splendid first strike' and had reportedly entered Pakistan's air space with fighter jets; this led to a dangerous escalation of hostilities at the political and military levels between both countries. The whole episode has also questioned the existence of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and, ever since there has been an ongoing debate at the domestic and international levels about nuclear deterrence and its applicability to such a critical situation.

The situation had also led to numerous observers asking whether nuclear deterrence between the two countries had failed during this crisis or whether it had been instrumental in preventing further escalation and eventually an all-out nuclear war. Though India's conventional strikes were met by Pakistan conventionally the very next day, nuclear deterrence remained applicable during the whole episode because of the widely regarded perception that if both countries escalate further, the situation might turn into nuclear war.

Hence at the present, strategic stability in South Asia faces severe challenges due to India's conventional and unconventional military modernization and its proactive strategies against Pakistan. At the same time, Pakistan has been in an asymmetric equation of conventional forces vis-à-vis India, an equation that has led the former to preserve its security with the assurance of nuclear deterrence. In this regard, Pakistan has been relying on its nuclear program and has evolved its delivery systems accordingly to overcome conventional and unconventional threats from India. Pakistan's full spectrum deterrence has assured the concept of a counter 'massive retaliation' in India's strategic hierarchy, which enjoys an edge in terms of conventional forces and military hardware. The possession of nuclear weapons has obviously preserved Pakistan's sovereignty in the challenging security environment of South Asia.

<https://strafasia.com/the-current-state-of-nuclear-deterrence-and-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/>

## ***India's Enhanced Missile Development Program***

*Syeda Saiqa Bukhari*

India's long-term military modernization plans are driven by its regional and global hegemonic designs. In pursuit of this, India is involved in several military technological advancements and expansions. The development of an advanced and highly effective missile system is one of the key components of its military technological advancement plans. Over the last six months, India has carried out various missile tests in the nuclear realm of South Asia. These tests reveal India's growing military ambitions in South Asia. Its military modernization is also widely regarded as one of the core objectives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's more aggressive approach to India's defence and foreign policy.

Since January 2019, India has test-fired a number of missiles including ballistic and cruise missiles. Recently, India conducted a successful test of the Prithvi-II tactical surface to surface short-range ballistic missile. In cruise missiles, it has also successfully tested the Nirbhay and Brah-Mos missiles earlier this year. The Nirbhay test and the successful air-launched version of the Brah Mos reflect the operationalization of New Delhi's nuclear triad as well as its ambitions of strengthening its BMD capabilities. India also conducted a successful flight test of the indigenously developed [Hypersonic Technology Demonstrated Vehicle \(HSTDV\)](#) on 12 June. This comprises of its long-standing work on developing hypersonic cruise missile technologies.

It is worth noting that India is ambitiously enhancing its missile force as evident in the fact that India tested [seven](#) missiles including ballistic and cruise missiles in 2018. During 2019, in just six months, India tested [five missiles](#), including its first ASAT (Anti-Satellite Test). With this progressive attitude, India is enhancing its missile program with the agenda of gaining operational superiority over potential opponent states. Additionally, these missiles also provide a great strike advantage to the Indian armed forces. These enhanced missile development programs are thus a clear indicator of India's destabilizing behaviour towards the existing nuclear equilibrium of the region. It is quite unfortunate that the international community continues to turn a blind eye to these developments at their own peril.

Based on these developments, it is also clear that instead of simply gaining regional hegemony, India is aiming to increase its sphere of influence at the international level as well. In this regard, after securing power in the 2019 general elections, PM Modi is seriously taking steps to change India's foreign policy from being more of a balancing state towards making India a power which productively shapes global rules. Therefore, based on these developments it is obvious that India is enhancing its missile program with two objectives: the first is to counter regional rivals such as China and Pakistan; the second is to emerge as a dominating state at the regional as well as global level. To achieve these objectives, India is not only indigenously developing sophisticated technologies but has also signed major defence deals with the US, Russia and Israel.

Moreover, India is already taking advantage of its strategic bilateral partnerships with the US, Russia and France to expand its regional influence. These strategic partnerships would be well served for India's

quest for strategic dominance in sophisticated technology. Moreover, these partnerships are also significant as India needs such partners that are willing to allow it to expand its strategic capabilities and strengthen it as a great power in and beyond South Asia.

Furthermore, it is also quite unfortunate that the great powers are maintaining their lucrative strategic partnerships with India to achieve their own objectives in South and East Asia, all at the cost of overlooking India's missile proliferation record. India's enhanced missile program has continued to weaken existing non-proliferation norms. However, the majority of western countries, especially the US, have turned a blind eye to these developments. Instead, they continue to argue that New Delhi has maintained a spotless non-proliferation record and that its entrance into the existing non-proliferation regimes could only enhance non-proliferation efforts at the international level. The US and Russia are not considering India's enhanced missile development program as a threat to non-proliferation rules. They are only focusing on drawing India as a mere tool for their own strategic objectives within this region.

In all, India is acquiring sophisticated missile technologies to become a regional hegemonic, as well a prominent global power. India's regional cum global dominance ambition is marked by its massively developed missile capabilities. Furthermore, India's quest to dominate the region by developing a nuclear-armed ballistic and cruise missile is also influencing the strategic calculus of other states in the region. Through their enhanced missile development program, New Delhi is dragging South Asia into an impending missile arms race between India and Pakistan, while the US and its allies watch in silent approval. As a result, the future of strategic stability in South Asia under such developments remains under considerable threat, both from within and outside the region.

<https://strafasia.com/indias-enhanced-missile-development-program/>

## ***Gambling with the Nuclear Button in South Asia***

*M Waqas Jan*

Over the last decade, India's rapid expansion of its conventional and nuclear arms capabilities have presented a worrying dilemma with regard to the South Asian region's security and stability. This holds especially true considering how its clear ambitions to translate its economic rise into a menacing projection of hard-power have remained on full display particularly under the BJP's tenure. While many observers have come to regard these ambitions as the ruling party simply pandering to the populist vote, the steady consistency with which this policy has been carried throughout the last decade represents a dangerous mindset that appears to have become deeply engrained within India's civil and military bureaucracy. This mindset and its obsession with external hard-power is further evident in the institutionalization of concepts such as Cold Start and Surgical Strikes both of which have been formalized as part of the Indian State's official policy as well as its military doctrine.

For instance, both these concepts have been defined at length in the Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces that was released in April 2017 as well as the Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine that was published the following year. As a clear signal of its regional ambitions, both these documents have also unmistakably identified Pakistan and China as India's principle source of threats. In order to counter these threats these same documents advocate the development of military strategies aimed at pre-set and purportedly restrained instances of minimal force projection that allow India to remain well within the nuclear threshold. This threshold that currently pervades throughout India's strategic rivalry with both Pakistan and China is arguably the key to maintaining the delicate strategic balance that currently pervades throughout the South Asian region. A region that otherwise comprises of a key locus for the world's future economic growth and development.

However, the fact that India's stated policy is to radically alter this strategic balance represents a dangerous mindset, that is based more on its own solitary potential for growth rather than that of the wider region. In what can be termed as nothing short of a myopic outlook to the entire region's trajectory, India's efforts at enhancing its force projection capabilities and tilting this delicate balance in its favor is replete with risks. Risks that are in turn deeply rooted in unqualified and broad-ranging premises that assume both Pakistan and China to remain as passive spectators to its aggressive military posturing.

Hence, by constantly aiming to raise the nuclear threshold, the above-mentioned concepts of cold start and surgical strikes are in essence aimed at downplaying the risks of a potential nuclear exchange in South Asia. From a purely rational perspective, this policy while appearing as nothing short of madness, openly flirts with the grave sanctity of the escalation ladder on which the region's strategic planners and decision-makers rely on when calculating the possibility of a potential nuclear first-strike. As a Nuclear Weapons' State (NWS) that shares disputed borders with two other Nuclear Weapons' states, India's dangerous posturing is thus heavily dependent on it being perceived as a responsible Nuclear power to

both Pakistan and China. However, it is this perception of being a responsible NWS which India is actively working to negate as evident in its leaders' jingoistic saber-rattling.

These include regular statements by Indian leaders in which by [openly alluding](#) to the death and annihilation of its strategic rivals, one can witness a certain normalization of nuclear brinkmanship which has become a modus operandi of sorts for Prime Minister Modi. Similar allusions to India possessing the '[Mother of all Bombs](#)' (in the form of perhaps thermo-nuclear weapons) also represents a kind of posturing that is aimed at upending the status-quo and provoking a response. These statements when coupled with the Indian military-bureaucracy's clear allusions to reneging its No First Use policy, have further led to even greater ambiguity with regard to India's strategic calculus. As a result, all these instances represent a dangerous precedent being set for what is considered as 'acceptable risk' by India's strategic planners.

While such negative posturing has been successful in communicating India's increased risk-appetite to its strategic rivals, what's unclear is whether these risks are based on a credible deterrence capability or quite simply, the egoistic hubris of its elected leaders and bureaucratic machinery. In what can perhaps only be described as an infantile staring contest; in which one's sole chance of survival from a nuclear holocaust is counting on the other party's willingness to blink first, the Indian state's projection of hard-power seems to be based on more of a wild gamble than the well-thought out contingencies of a major nuclear power.

Hence, with the Indian leadership's official preference of a defence policy steeped in the risks of nuclear exchange, the merits of institutionalizing its approach to brinkmanship is something that appears downright non-sensical in this day age. Especially during a time where economic growth and human development remain as some of the region's most pervasive challenges, India's aggressive regional posturing hark back to the politics of a bygone era in times that otherwise require a visionary approach to fostering regional peace and stability.

<http://foreignpolicynews.org/2019/07/16/gambling-with-the-nuclear-button-in-south-asia/>

# ***Negative Nuclear Signaling and Anti-Pakistan Rhetoric in India's General Election 2019***

***Haris Bilal Malik***

The Indian General Election 2019 that was held in seven phases between April and May reportedly involved 900 million voters to cast their votes, making it the world's largest democratic exercise. As predicted by analysts around the world, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an extremist right-wing Hindu nationalist party won the election.

The BJP's landslide victory was based on many domestic and external factors, out of which the 'negative signaling' of the BJP leadership against Pakistan during the whole election campaign played a crucial role. In this regard the BJP has a history of spreading hatred against Pakistan during election campaigns for achieving the desired electoral results.

Against the backdrop of the February 2019 escalation between India and Pakistan the BJP's election campaign was largely based on negative signaling and repeatedly playing the 'Anti-Pakistan Card'. The hatred against Pakistan has worked in favor of the BJP's extremist agenda as the party has now formed its government, with Narendra Modi elected as the Prime Minister of India for second consecutive term.

The anti-Pakistan card and the controversial Hindutva rhetoric have always as remained trump cards for BJP's electoral politics. In the recent election they proved as a decisive factor in securing a landslide victory for the BJP. The first term of Prime-Minister Modi has been widely criticized within India on economic grounds as it had reportedly failed to provide the promised employment to youth and relief for farmers.

Furthermore, the government was also accused of corruption charges in various defence deals with other countries. On the basis of these issues the ruling BJP was facing some of the worst criticism it has faced and it was widely believed that the party might not come up with a strong position to form a government for a second consecutive term.

Aspiring to change public opinion and exploit public sentiments, Prime Minister Modi and the ruling BJP were left with no choice but to intentionally create 'war hysteria' against Pakistan. During election rallies Prime Minister Narendra Modi confessed that he wanted to take revenge from Pakistan, and for that purpose had given a free hand to the Indian military for responding to the Pulwama suicide attack. In the same vein the Modi government had also politicized nuclear weapons by getting itself involved in negative nuclear signaling. For instance, while at a rally on 21st April 2019 Mr. Modi played with public sentiments by blaming Pakistan for threatening India with nuclear weapons and asked the crowd "whether India had saved these weapons for Diwali". He also threatened Pakistan with India's purported development of a thermonuclear bomb citing it as the 'mother of nuclear bombs.'

Based on such negative nuclear signaling, Mr. Modi tried to assert that India is no longer afraid of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. India's conventional and unconventional military modernization programs have made it capable enough to maintain the threat of carrying out nuclear attacks on targets across land, sea, air and in space.

Against the backdrop of the self-proclaimed Balakot aerial strikes by India, other top leaders of the BJP were also involved in negative signaling vis-à-vis Pakistan during its election campaign. In this regard the statement of party president Amit Shah is also evidence of the BJP electoral strategy in which he called on the Indian public to "choose a prime minister who can give a befitting reply to Pakistan".

Another BJP leader and chief minister of Gujrat, Vijay Rupani went as far as associating the Indian National Congress (main opponent of BJP) with Pakistan and asserted that "if Congress wins the election by mistake, then Diwali will be celebrated in Pakistan". The hype which Mr. Modi and other BJP leaders had created in order to shape public opinion in favor of them has likely impacted Mr. Modi's bid for becoming the prime minister of India for second time.

This impact is also evident in one of the surveys conducted by an Indian poll agency 'C-Voters State of Nation Tracker' soon after the dangerous escalations which could have resulted into an all-out nuclear war between India and Pakistan. According to the survey report, Mr. Modi's approval ratings which were at just 32 percent in January 2019 reached an incredible figure of 63 percent by March 2019. While during the same time period his main opponent, Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi's ratings went down to just 8 percent. The negative signaling which the BJP leadership had adopted soon after the Pulwama attacks and the escalations in its response had thus clearly worked in favor of the BJP's political agenda.

Hence, at the present the election results show that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has managed to secure 353 seats out of 543 seats of parliament. It could be assumed that Mr. Modi has succeeded in achieving his short-term political goal by shaping public opinion in favor of his party through exploitation of anti-Pakistan rhetoric specifically by leveraging the threat of nuclear war during his re-election campaign. He has used negative nuclear signaling and hatred against Pakistan as a tool to achieve his pre-determined political goals. By doing so he has secured a remarkable victory in the recent elections. However, he has done so by adversely affecting the strategic stability of the region which is likely to become even more fragile over the long-run.

<http://southasiajournal.net/the-negative-nuclear-signaling-and-anti-pakistan-rhetoric-in-indias-general-election-2019/>

## ***NPT RevCon2020: Troubled Waters Ahead?***

*Komal Ali Shah*

As the Non-Proliferation Treaty is set to commemorate its Golden Jubilee in 2020, significant challenges posed by the global nuclear order, increasing tensions and deteriorating relations between the de jure Nuclear Weapon States, specifically the US, Russia and China, await the upcoming NPT Review Conference.

The NPT's Quinquennial Review Conferences are held to evaluate whether the state parties are in compliance with the obligations of the treaty. Ever since the indefinite extension of NPT in 1995, these conferences have been acting as a watchdog on the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. With the beginning of next year's review cycle, the NPT's old disputes concerning its review process, nuclear arms reduction and cessation, safeguards under the IAEA as well as regional issues including North Korea, South Asia and the Middle East have come to the surface. These issues are quite disquieting for the success of the 2020 review conference of states-parties to the NPT.

Concluded in May 2019, the final Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT conference failed to garner any consensus by the state parties for the next year's review conference. Although most state parties showed a sanguine attitude towards the prospects of the 2020 conference and emphasized on the importance of NPT related commitments, the debates during the two weeks of PrepCom 2019 pointed out the looming challenges for the upcoming RevCon in 2020, which pose serious threats to the treaty.

The following are the most significant threats that are likely to shape the future course of the conference:

The decision of the White House to pull out of the Soviet-era arms control treaty on account of rampant Russian violations has unravelled US-Russia relations, which is certainly not good news for the nuclear crowd. The Trump administration's withdrawal from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019 has not only increased the risk of another Cold War with Russia but also points to the potential failure of negotiations on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty whose expiration is due in 2021.

The START agreement has played a vital role in capping both states' nuclear warheads and strategic delivery systems to a great extent. Moreover, as per the reports by the US intelligence agency, Russia is advancing its nuclear arsenal by conducting low yield nuclear tests. Though denied by Russia, such allegations increase the risk of a reversal of non-proliferation efforts by nuclear-weapon states. The US in turn, might increase its nuclear arsenal as Trump's preference for elevating the role of nuclear weapons in the US defence system is no secret anymore. Not just the US and Russia but even China is also enhancing its nuclear capabilities at an exceptional rate. Such steps by the nuclear-weapon states go against the conventional wisdom that undermines the credibility of NPT and might impact the result of RevCon 2020.

In addition, the waning prospects for a Weapon of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East (WMDZME), which agitated a debate in the PrepComm '19, has also been one of the primary reasons for non-consensus on RevCon 2015. If not negotiated, this issue would seriously impact the overall environment of the conference.

Furthermore, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA would more likely worsen the issue. Despite complying with IAEA safeguards and NPT obligations, Iranian President Rouhani has already announced that due to increased US sanctions, Iran would increase its uranium enrichment and has threatened to end its commitment under the JCPOA.

After withdrawing from the NPT, North Korea's continued nuclear weapons and missile testing raise questions about the efficacy of the non-proliferation regime. A few weeks ago, one would be obliged to not consider North Korean nuclear program as a threat considering the positive developments showcased in the Trump-Kim meeting but Pyongyang's testing of the missile on July 25 tells otherwise. The inability of treaty members to involve North Korea in a meaningful dialogue over the disarmament and non-proliferation exposes the vulnerabilities of this global treaty.

Finally, there remains the contentious issue of abiding by article VI of the NPT, which calls upon state members to take effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race and disarmament. The confusion over the article of the treaty should be seen as an imminent danger as it can undercut the credibility and integrity of the global non-proliferation regime. After half a century, the NPT remains a vital component of the non-proliferation regime. Regardless of the fact that it seldom provided specific answers to the apprehensions of the international community regarding nuclear diplomacy, it is still a crucial part of the ongoing search for peace and stability that can only be achieved if non-discriminatory, comprehensively elaborated and legally binding norms are adopted.

Even though the expectations from NPT RevCon 2020 are not high, the international community cannot afford to let the treaty slide into insignificance. In order to prevent yet another failure of the review conference, parties should however scrap the outdated model of "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." Rather than determining the success of the conferences on the basis of consensus of treaty members, the parties should adopt a final document, which enlists the specific views and proposals along with countries supporting it.

One of mankind's highest aspirations and a stated goal of the NPT, nuclear disarmament must not be deferred for another 50 years. The 2020 Review Conference should venture to further expand the Treaty's aims and not just rescue the status quo.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/438595/npt-revcon2020-troubled-waters-ahead/>

## ***How Two S-400 Batteries Removed 100 NATO F-35s from Turkey***

*M Waqas Jan*

Last week's announcement by the White House regarding its decision to suspend Turkey from the F-35 Fighter Jet program marks the latest development in the steady deterioration of ties between the two NATO allies. The announcement which comes after Turkey received the first shipment of its Russian S-400 Air Defense System, represents the consequential outcome of Turkey developing closer strategic ties with Russia at the cost of estranging long-standing NATO allies such as the US.

Within this context, the White House's announcement is being widely perceived as the US finally going through with the ultimatum it had set for Turkey to; either choose the 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Fighter Jet which it had jointly developed with its NATO partners over the last two decades, or to choose the world's most advanced air defense system that is in effect designed to target and neutralize next-gen fighter jets such as the F-35. The White House made this clear by [stating that](#), "The F-35 cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities." As a result, Turkey's order of 100 F-35 Fighter jets including the two it had already taken delivery of in the US stands effectively cancelled as of last week.

While the US had already suspended Turkish pilots from training on the jet as part of this deal, this latest move also puts to rest the role of the Turkish Aerospace and Defense Industries which have so far been responsible for manufacturing around 937 different components for the F-35. These contracts estimated at around [\\$9 billion](#) over the course of the program included components for the F-35's cockpit display systems as well as its landing gear. Hence, the diplomatic fallout that has resulted from Turkey's choice of weapons systems also carry very tangible and far-reaching economic and industrial implications.

As such these developments also serve as the consequential outcome of what many perceive as a major diplomatic victory on Russia's part. This can be gleaned from the fact that the S-400 without engaging in combat nor launching a single missile has effectively struck down the F-35s designated for Turkey that had been a key component of the NATO framework. Russia's sale of the S-400 to Turkey instead stands as part of a successful diplomatic maneuver that has effectively created considerable dissent and discord amongst NATO allies. Extending beyond the realms of international peace and security, this also carries very tangible and far-reaching implications for the development of long-term defense and strategic relations between Turkey and Russia. Turkey's refusal to thus heed the US ultimatum represents a policy calculus which not only considers the S-400 as more strategically valuable than the F-35, but also a long-term partnership with Russia as being more important than the above-mentioned costs to its military-industrial complex.

This aspect is in itself immensely significant considering how Turkey has remained at the historical crossroads of Eurasia lying at the periphery of a NATO led Europe at one end, and a heavily Russian influenced Central Asia at the other. Not to mention its close historical ties and proximity to the volatile Middle East and Persian Gulf regions where both the US and Russian militaries boast a significant

presence. Over the last few years, Turkey has attempted to leverage its relationships with both the US and Russia against the backdrop of the volatile situation at its borders (such as in Iraq and Syria) to its own strategic advantage.

However, with the US going through with its ultimatum last week, Turkey's complex relationship with the West has just taken another turn for the worse. This recent episode has thus added to the growing list of US's grievances with Turkey that run across multiple fault-lines. These include the flare up over the Gulen-Bronson dilemma, the failed coup by allegedly pro-US elements in the Turkish military, and the Jamal Khashoggi affair all of which have considerably strained relations between both countries over the last few years.

Yet, it is perhaps keeping in mind these growing divisions that the US stopped short of lending a certain finality to its decision. With a view to maintaining unity within NATO the US has still said that it will continue to engage with Turkey as part of NATO and that it is only suspending Turkey's role in the F-35 program still leaving perhaps a way back in. This impetus for maintaining the sanctity of NATO is perhaps what Turkey has been counting on as leverage in its decision to go ahead with its purchase of the S-400. Another major factor in Turkey's decision has been attributed to President Erdogan's personal chemistry with President Trump in which the latter has laid the blame largely on President Obama's government for refusing Turkey's request for the purchase of the Patriot Missile Defense system a decade ago. Mr. Trump's personal bonhomie with President Putin too is also likely to play a major role where the decision if taken against Mr. Trump's personal inclinations are indicative of a likely rift between the White House on one side, and the State Dept and Pentagon on the other.

Therefore, considering how the S-400 has led to the creation of far-reaching political and diplomatic rifts within both NATO and the US politico-leadership, the above developments represent a major example of how Russia has come to exploit shifting geo-political dynamics to its strategic as well as economic advantage. Especially in a region where Russia has come to increasingly challenge the US's role as a major power broker, Russia's success in creating rifts within NATO and also perhaps within US policy circles represents a clear vindication of its strategic interests and approach to foreign policy not only with respect to Turkey, but also within an increasingly multi-polar world order.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/07/25/how-two-s-400-batteries-removed-100-nato-f-35s-from-turkey/>