

India's Strategic Triad: Current Trends and Future Prospects

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Abstract

Although India still contends that it follows No-First Use option and maintains credible minimum deterrence, many of its ex-officials who served India on important positions trigger a debate in India about the likely changes in the broader India's existing drafts of nuclear doctrine. The paper conceptualizes India's possible shift towards counterforce pre-emptive strike targeting strategy where India will find potential space for limited military/nuclear war against its adversaries as one of the major changes in its strategic triad. India's aerial assertion against Pakistan post-Pulwama incident is likely a step towards this direction. Similarly, India's strategic triad deterrent force posture also manifests the comparable goal to achieve. In this back drop, this paper concludes that as India develops bigger deterrent force projects, it is aimed at both counter-value and counterforce targeting options. It would hence bring challenges for both India's evolving nuclear strategy in general and to the South Asian deterrence stability in particular.

Keywords: Strategic Triad, counterforce, nuclear doctrine, deterrent force, arms race, conflicts

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Introduction

This article elaborates India's nuclear posture with regard to its deterrent force development and modernization that subsequently reflects India's assertion against its adversaries in the greater South Asian region. When it comes to India's deterrent force development, it is imperative to understand that India is fast mastering the technology of missile program in order to successfully complete its strategic triad. India under the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has successfully developed different variants of missile, that is, land, sea, and air based deterrent forces with varying ranges and payload capabilities. It is to argue that India's triad would substantially include all types of missile ranges up to the range of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) with its operational capabilities to carry all types of warheads for targeting purposes. The targeting plans may include the mixture of both counter-value (targeting cities) and counterforce nuclear options (targeting military installations, naval bases, airfields, deterrent forces, oil and water essential components etc.). Currently, India debates about the possible modifications in its existing 1999 and 2003 Drafts Nuclear Doctrine (DND) towards counterforce pre-emptive strike strategy where it could find space for fighting limited military and nuclear war against its potential adversaries.²

The recent India's aerial assertion against Pakistan post-Pulwama 2019 incident can be a reflection in this direction. Although, it will be difficult to derive a conceivable distinction between these two types of targeting options because of the complexity involved yet, when it comes to an actual warfare, each missile ranges variant forms a broader part of India's strategic triad.

² Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2016) and Prakash Menon, *The Strategy Trap: India and Pakistan under the Nuclear Shadow* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2018).

It however, may have a particular aim to hit the targets they are designed for. Therefore, this article perceives a use of short ranges missile variant for counterforce targeting option by deriving distinction between various ranges of missiles including recent anti-satellite test of missile (AST). The intermediate ranges may be used for counter-value targeting strategy, and the longer ranges up to the ICBM level can possibly be used for power projection element and mass destruction strategy while targeting multiple cities.

Despite this classification, this paper argues that since India might preferably be opting for counterforce pre-emptive strike strategy, it may identify and prepare a large scale plan to hit as many of its adversary's targets as it can. India could use all types of missile ranges ready to be deployed for both counter-value and counter-force targeting options. Nevertheless, as India develops large scale deterrent force projects with its growing strategic partnership with major powers including the United States, India not only provides incentives for a bigger arms race, but also drags its adversaries into this in the greater Southern Asian nuclear politics. In doing so, India brings challenges to its evolving strategic triad deterrence posture in general and gradually affects the South Asian strategic stability in particular.

With this background, this article first elaborates a brief evolution of India's missile development program to understand its existing efforts for a strategic triad. It then critically analyzes its various missile ranges for both counterforce and counter-value targeting purposes. The challenges for India's evolving large scale projects with regard to its strategic triad have covered its broader nuclear strategy for the South Asian region is followed henceforth. It argues to face its potential strategic adversaries –China and Pakistan.

The Evolution of India's Missile Development Programme: A Road towards its Triad Completion

In order to understand India's strides for missile development programme, it is imperative to analyse how the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) played a significant role in boosting Indian missile development programme. On the contrary, Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) suffered in the past because of less investment and lack of political attention. Moreover, ISRO has demonstrated a significant progress in paving the way for missile development programmes. Originally, SUPARCO was the first to move into space venture compared to the ISRO when it comes to India and Pakistan space programme competing strategies.

Nevertheless, the ISRO immensely contributed in the initiation of Indian missile programme ever since it was founded in 1969. During the early 1970s, Indian space programme was initially meant to achieve satellite-launch facility for communication and educational purposes; it however, also aspired for the capability "to match the weight of nuclear warheads with those of scientific satellites." Similarly to convert India's programme for a credible missile technological development was a simultaneous effort.³ The ISRO aspired for converting Indian satellite launch into medium-range ballistic missiles so as to establish robust missile programme.⁴

Further, in the early 1970s, India had geared up to equip the Indian Department of Space and Space Energy Commission to work on multiple scientific projects such as a short-range rocket, a medium-range rocket, a space launch vehicle, scientific satellite

³ Omkar Marwah, "India's Nuclear and Space Programs: Intent and Policy," *International Security* 2, no. 2 (fall, 1977): 96-121, 103.

⁴ *Ibid*, 102-104.

fabrication, and several other scientific capabilities to provide India a foundation for a credible missile development programme.⁵ In doing so, India developed and successfully test-fired the Rohini-560 two-stage rocket with 100kg payload capable of reaching at the altitude up to 334 kilometres, and SLV-3 space booster to 334 kilometres with 40kg payload.⁶ The Indian space development programme immensely contributed towards developing an inertial guidance and telemetry equipment, on board computers, gyroscope, head shield, nose cones, electronic payload systems and a number of high specific-impulse solid and liquid propellants.⁷ It is imperative to know that in a short span of the 1970s, India was able to launch at least three space satellites such as Aryabhata, Bhaskara Seg-I, and Rohini thereby further paving the way for the Indian missiles development programme.

In the 1980s, India continued to show significant progress both in its space and missile development programmes. For example, in 1983, the US under the Reagan's administration had announced its Strategic Defence Initiatives (SDI). It urged the US scientific community to provide the US a defensive shield to protect the US homeland and its allies from incoming strategic missiles. It would also provide the US a credible foundation for developing Ballistic Missile Defence system (BMD). Similarly, while taking an inspiration from the US, India also embarked upon the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP) in July 1983. It had a 10-year budget of \$260 million that was managed by India's Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL). The programme was a broader part of India's central military research

⁵ Omkar Marwah, "India's Nuclear and Space Programs: Intent and Policy,"103.

⁶ Dinshaw Misty, "India's Emerging Space Program," *Pacific Affairs* 71, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 151-174. Harsh V. Pant and Gopalaswamy Bharath, "India's Emerging Missile Capability: The Science and Politics of Agni-III, *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 4 (2008):376-387.

⁷ Marwah, "India's Nuclear and Space Programs: Intent and Policy,"103.

and development facility - DRDO. It has been actively involved in the development of India's missiles programme. Although India continued to progress in its space development programme, yet, the initial response of India in the same year (1983) had opposed the US SDI initiative. It stated that this could increase arms race between the states in the outer-space as well. The then Indian minister for external affairs, P V Narasimha Rao, warned that "extension of arms building to outer space would mean a permanent goodbye to disarmament and peace and (would) plunge mankind into a perpetual nightmare."⁸ Similarly, the Indian Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament (CD) Muchkund Dubey and the then leading Indian defence analyst, K Subrahmanyam also opposed the SDI programme in its initial years emphasizing for the initiation of arms control negotiation to prevent the arms race in the outer-space.⁹ However, despite such opposition, India resolutely continued to develop not only its space programme to enhance the credibility of its missiles development programme, but also kept on maturing its nuclear weapons programme as well. Indeed, different types of Indian strategic missiles have become credible delivery systems for India's nuclear weapons. Ashley Tellis in his seminal work has described this scenario:

Throughout the 1980s, while the United States pursued various SDI initiatives, India focused on its own nuclear weapons program at two levels;

- i. Indian diplomats sought to draw international attention to Islamabad's steady new acquisition of nuclear capabilities, while seeking to prevent the emergence of international

⁸ Ashley J. Tellis, "The Evolution of US-Indian Ties: Missile Defense in an Emerging Strategic Relationship," *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 113-151, 114.

⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

political or legal restraints on India's right to develop a nuclear arsenal.

- ii. Given the growing evidence of both continuing Chinese proliferation of nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and Islamabad's program towards acquiring nuclear weaponry, Indian nuclear research and development turned towards completing the preparatory work necessary to weaponize India's 1974 device design.¹⁰

The DRDO continues to be one of the most influential defence organizations of India that affects its strategic and defence policies both at the regional and international levels. During the 1980s, the DRDO actively worked on multiple missile development programmes also. The missile development projects under IGMDP comprised of short, medium and intermediate ranges of Indian ballistic missiles. In the 1980s and the 1990s, DRDO effectively utilized IGMDP to further launch the development of various families of missile development programme - such as Prithvi and Agni. However, in the 2000s, the DRDO eventually announced the closure of IGMDP because of over delays, cost-overruns, and several failures of missile programmes. Nevertheless, DRDO developed and expanded other significant features of Indian missile families that included both short and long range missiles such as, K-15, K-4, Brahmos, Nirbhay, and Agni-III to Agni-V. In the early 2010s, the DRDO has been actively involved in not only expanding Indian missile programme, but also making almost all of these missiles more sophisticated, and nuclear capable that could carry the nuclear payloads to the assigned targets.

¹⁰ Tellis, "The Evolution of US-Indian Ties", 120

Rationalizing India's Evolving Strategic Triad Strategy:

Counterforce and Counter-value Targeting Options

As India strived hard to successfully complete its strategic Triad comprising all major components of deterrent forces including sophisticated delivery systems, it appears to deploy most of its nuclear capable deterrence forces including nuclear powered submarines that will be ready to be launched for both counterforce and counter-value targeting purposes. Although the distinction between these two targeting options can get blurred when it comes to real moments of warfare between the two nuclear weapon states, it is imperative to rationalise as to what each variant of India's deterrent forces can best be contextualised either for counter-value/mass destruction targeting strategy or counter-value targeting. However, in doing so, this section concludes that although the theoretical distinction between these targeting strategies can be made, in practice it becomes extremely difficult to contextualise or specify for each variant of deterrent force as a broader part of India's strategic triad. More simply, India may use its bigger ranges of deterrent forces for both counter-value and counterforce targeting purposes. It may not be guaranteed that the strategic triad specified for counterforce targeting may avoid city-busting or collateral damage though. Therefore, strategic triad deterrent forces specified for counterforce targeting strategy, if ever used, could possibly damage the population centres especially when these targets are located closer to cities or within cities. Nevertheless, for the sake of understanding and contextualization, deterrent forces and their ranges can still be specified for both counterforce and counter-value targeting purposes.

Short Range Missiles for Counterforce Targeting Option

India can contextualise its short range missile carrying nuclear warheads as its broader part of strategic triad for counterforce

targeting option. These short range missile variants comprise of land, air, and sea family with gradual increase in yield and speed. They can ensure penetrability into the India's adversarial territory to hit their targets. The short range missile variants from the Indian evolving strategic triad include all spectrums of missiles development. For example, the land based surface-to-surface Prithvi-I (SS-150km) and Prithvi-II (SS-250km) can be launched from short distances to hit the counterforce targets. Prithvi-III (SS-350km) is also known as Dhanush that is basically a sea based missile. India has been considering replacing Prithvi-I (150km) with the short-range Prahaar (150km) tactical nuclear weapons carrier that India tested in July 2011, though it still keeps many of Prithvi missiles as part of deterrent forces. In addition to the Prithvi missile variants, India's DRDO has developed other short-range missile variants such as Shaurya (750km to 1900km) a canister surface-to-surface hypersonic nuclear capable missile, Prahaar (150-300km), and BrahMos B-1 and BrahMos B-II supersonic cruise missile (290km). The sea-based short-range missile comprises of K-15 Sagarika (750km) that can be fired from submarine. The DRDO has claimed that Shaurya could also be fired from submarine.

As India continues to develop its Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) for waging a limited war against parts of Pakistan, India might consider these short range missile variants particularly Prahaar for counterforce targeting option. However, India can face challenges and/or security dilemma with regard to its counterforce targeting strategy while considering its short ranges of missile variants as broader part of its development of strategic triad. On the one hand, India cannot place these short ranges of missile of its strategic triad away from its adversary's territory because these short range deterrent forces will lose their deterrence capability for what they are designed for. The more they are placed away from the adversary's border, the more India can be discouraged to use these

deterrent forces effectively and lose their deterrence value. On the other hand, as India brings these short ranges of missile variants close to the adversary's territory, India will be under a significant strategic pressure either to use this land, air, and sea based short ranges of missile variants or loses them to its adversary's preemption. It is difficult to get away from such a security dilemma particularly with India having serious crises and deploys its short range missiles ready for launch. It is hence observed that India must be considering increasing the ranges of its missiles up to intermediate level so that it can strike further away from its adversary's border. In order to achieve this goal, India perpetually increases the ranges of its strategic triad deterrent forces.

Intermediate Range Missile for Counter-value Targeting

In order to increase the survivability and credibility of its deterrent forces, India increases the ranges of its missiles up to intermediate level. Since India is geographically huge, it requires longer ranges of missile variants of its evolving strategic triad so that it could hit its adversary targets without getting closer to its adversary's border and risking the possible pre-emptive strikes. Once India undertakes these mega projects, it may indulge into multiplying its warheads to not only increase the yield of these types of deterrent forces, but also enhance the greater impact of these deterrent forces. Some of the intermediate range of missiles as part of its strategic triad mega project includes the Agni series of missile variants such as Agni-II (2000-3000km), Agni-III (3500-5000km), and Agni-IV (3000-4000km). Agni-V (5200+km) and Agni-VI has more than 8000 km ranges. However, this is considered as ICBM thereby making India the sixth nuclear state to have developed the ICBM as a credible deterrent force carrying warheads to the longer distant targets. When it comes to sea variant of missile capability, India has already tested K-4 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) (3500km). India further intends to develop K-5 SLBM with much increased

ranges as India deploys its indigenous nuclear powered submarine. With increased ranges of SLBMs, India intends to develop more nuclear powered submarine. The more India develops nuclear submarine, the more fissile materials it would require, the more warheads it could develop, and the more targets it would look for. In doing so, India is considering turning most of its land and sea based missile variants into Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRV). India drags itself into a bigger arms race in the South Asian region.

Although, these intermediate range missiles can apparently be designed for counter-value targeting strategy, most of them especially when they are MIRVed can also be used for counterforce strategy. Therefore, India might consider the value addition of these types of deterrent forces by enjoying the combination of both counter-value and counterforce targeting options. Much depends on the Indian security leadership when, where, and how they may consider these missile variants for targeting purposes. After having successfully testing its intermediate range of missiles, India would make sure that it could cover all of China. The limitation of India's intermediate range of missile variants may not cover whole of China particularly, since India would want to bring most of the Chinese deterrent forces under its targeting range from anywhere of India. Therefore, to overcome this weakness, India has recently tested the bigger ranges at the ICBM level missile variants in order to cover entire China under its targeting range. India might be developing its sea-based ICBM type SLBM soon in order to be able to hit any part of China from deep blue sea when India successfully develops an assured second strike capability. It intends to develop more nuclear powered submarines in the near future especially under the auspices of its growing strategic partnership with the major powers including the US.

Long Range Missiles (ICBMs) for Power Projection and Mass Destruction Strategy

In a consistent and an unending arms race in the South Asian region, India continues to perfect its strategic triad by developing not only long ranges of SLBMs as discussed in the preceding section, but also develops long range of its Agni missile variants. India has recently tested its ICBM type Agni V ballistic missile (5000+km). It is imperative to note that although India has already tested Agni V ballistic missile in 2012 and 2013, it still continues to test fire the Agni V in 2016 and 2018, with the same payload. However, the difference between them is that 2012 and 2013 Agni V tests were in “open configuration” while the 2016 and 2018 were fired from “a hermetically sealed canister mounted on a Tatra launcher truck.”¹¹ This reflects India’s strides for more technical excellence and maturity in the field of its missile expansion program. According to some reports, India has made key improvements in the Agni-V system with canister launched ability. The canister launched system suggested that Agni V missiles could be mated with their warheads. This would give India capability to shift from its “recessed deterrence posture” to a “ready deterrent posture.” The recessed deterrence posture is a posture in which missiles are not mated with their warheads. While in ready deterrent posture the warheads are mated with the delivery systems. According to Debalina Ghoshal, “Agni-V would surely prove its mettle as a weapon system that enhances India’s nuclear deterrence but could also become a diplomatic weapon that could ensure India’s ability for coercive diplomacy vis-à-vis China.”¹²

¹¹ “India Conducts First User Trial of the Most Lethal Agni-V Missile Today,” *India Today*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/india-conducts-first-user-trial-of-the-most-lethal-agni-v-missile-today-1148398-2018-01-18>, accessed on Dec 2, 2018

¹² Debalina Ghoshal, “How Agni-V Induction will enhance India’s Nuclear Deterrence,” *This Week*, August 22, 2018,

In addition to enhancing its technological vitality by developing long ranges of missiles, India would like to enhance its diplomatic coercion against its adversary. Presumably, if India develops its range of missiles longer for power projection and mass destruction purposes against its adversary China in the broader South Asian region;

- India can claim that it is one of the nuclear weapon states that now possess ICBM.
- Secondly, India can also argue that these longer range missiles can be used to hit major cities of China.

India's long range ICBM's can also have the potential to go beyond China's mainland while targeting other parts of the world. This could be worrisome for the world and apprehend the Indian desire to go for nuclear warheads and bigger ranges of its strategic triad. India will have an opportunity to MIRV for most of its longer range missiles of both land and sea based versions in order to be able to hit multiple targets.

To sum up this section it is important to recap that although India's short-range ballistic missiles are supposed to be for counterforce targeting options, its intermediate and long-range ballistic missile variants are ostensibly designed for counter-value targeting as well. India could use its short-range ballistic missiles for tactical purposes against Pakistan. Its intermediate-range ballistic missiles could be used against targeting both China and Pakistan. While India's larger-range (ICBM) ballistic missiles go beyond Pakistan and become China-specific that in turn could cover major parts of China for counter-value targeting purposes as well. On a broader spectrum, India's consistent expansion of ballistic

missile variants as a growing part of its strategic triad provide India a mix of counterforce and counter-value targeting capabilities and options. However, the distinction between these two nuclear targeting dynamics could get blurred when it comes to a real war dynamics. This could become one of the potent challenges to India's evolving deterrent force posture and to its evolving missile development program. Given the conceptualization of India's motivation behind its missile expansion efforts, India may not only strategize to expand its security dynamics by maximizing its security against both Pakistan and China as part of its broader strategic calculus, but also that India may want to expand its strategic triad development program to the ICBM level for power projection purposes since India apparently aspires to rise as a regional power. These missile variants of different sophisticated ranges as a broader part of India's deterrent force posture would make India more assertive which in turn could bring more challenges to the strategic stability of South Asia.

Challenges to India's Strategic Triad

India's growing strategic triad development comprising of various ranges of missile, warheads, and other sophisticated delivery systems bring more challenges to India's deterrent force posture in general and South Asian strategic stability in particular. These challenges are discussed in the subsequent sections.

First, as India embarks upon large scale projects to successfully complete its strategic triad, it gradually moves away from minimum deterrence it earlier conceptualised. More mega projects and more warheads take India further away from the minimum deterrence. It is believed that Indian security leadership may no longer be interested in using the concept of minimum deterrence for its evolving nuclear deterrent forces. As India does this, India's evolving strategic triad may no longer remain

consistent with minimum deterrence it mentioned in its earlier Drafts Nuclear Doctrine (DNDs). Since DND remains open for more changes and credible modifications, there has recently been bigger debate in India that may help influence India's nuclear strategy. Hence, India's security officials that continue to argue that India follows No-First Use doctrinal posture under the rubric of minimum deterrence, India may eventually shift away while opting for a broader nuclear strategy that it may think would suit its growing strategic triad forces. In doing so, minimum deterrence will no longer remain minimum in South Asia.

Secondly, as India moves away from minimum deterrence for a broader strategic sufficiency, innovative and sophisticated technology could further enhance India's deterrent forces in terms of accuracy, ranges, penetrability, yield, and survivability. India's strategic partnership with many developed and technologically advanced countries including that of its growing strategic partnership with the US, would help India develop not only more on going deterrent force projects indigenously, but also fetch technology from these developed states. India has already agreed with the technologically advanced countries to modernise both of its conventional and nuclear deterrent forces. US, a prominent power especially in the Asia-Pacific region, will be much more interested than any other technologically advanced country to assist India develop and modernise its deterrent force capabilities as part of the US Pivot to Asia/Offshore balancing strategy to contain, if not necessarily fight China. Apparently, India is getting ready to exploit the current opportunities to induct more technologies in order to enhance credibility of its deterrent forces.

Thirdly, as India would gradually get away from minimum deterrence to strategic triad sufficiency, its deterrent force posture will appear to be aggressive to its potential adversaries, and this maximization in Indian deterrent force structure would entail

unintended consequences which could include the vicious cycle of arms race and security dilemma.

Hence, these steps could be significantly detrimental for South Asian nuclear weapon states and adds into their security dilemma. For example, the more India increases and develops its strategic triad deterrent force, the more it decreases the security of its adversary. The security dilemma in this context does not remain dormant any longer.

The idea of security dilemma is two and a half millennia old that can be traced back to the classical work of Thucydides - *The Peloponnesian War* that illustrates that security dilemma became one of the fundamental root causes of conflict between Athens and Sparta.¹³ Its conceptualization however, has a renewed appreciation in the nuclear age. The security dilemma tends to convey that “under many circumstances an increase in one state’s security will automatically and inadvertently decrease that of others.”¹⁴ When there is a consistent expansion of deterrent force bolstered by sophisticated delivery system by one state, it tends to expand the security dilemma. As a consequence, as the other state confronts unintended consequences its perceived security threat is also increased.¹⁵ In such an acute security dilemma, cooperation becomes hard between the two states and risk of more conflicts and serious crises increases. Under the circumstances, sooner or later, even nuclear weapon states despite possessing nuclear weapons find themselves in competing war-fighting strategies that

¹³ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, ed. Rex Warner (Penguin Books, 1954), 360.

¹⁴ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 53.

¹⁵ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978):167-214.

could eventually result in mutual annihilation if war breaks out of serious crisis.

Last but not least, the consistent arms race, acute security dilemma, and evolving competing war-fighting strategies in South Asia are significantly increased. The risk of war between China and India and/or between India and Pakistan would increase. This in turn could bring mutual destruction to all and military/nuclear victory to none in the contemporary nuclear age. All nuclear weapon states possess survivable and credible deterrent forces.

The acute border dispute between India and China remains consistent. It can bring the two competing and strategic rivals closer to conflict leading to a bigger military war. Doklam episode is one of such recent examples towards this risk of conflict between India and China.¹⁶ On the other hand, the competing war-fighting strategies between India and Pakistan particularly when India develops CSD and counterforce pre-emptive strike targeting strategies and Pakistan in response develops Nasr as part of its effective counterforce targeting strategy, there become serious challenge to the South Asian deterrence stability.

Conclusion

Based on the conceptual analysis and the contemporary debate in India regarding the possible modifications with regard to its nuclear strategy and draft nuclear doctrine, this article concludes that possible changes might be expected in India's broader nuclear strategy towards its potential South Asian adversaries, though India still officially claims to have brought no substantial changes in its existing drafts of nuclear doctrine. These changes could preferably include India strides for mega deterrent force projects completion

¹⁶Ankit Panda, "The Doklam Standoff between India and China is far from Over," *The Diplomat*, October 22, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-doklam-standoff-between-india-and-china-is-far-from-over/>, accessed on Dec 2, 2018

comprising of various land, air, and sea based missile variants with varying ranges. Each of these deterrent force projects as broader part of India's evolving strategic triad can then be classified into at least three major branches that Indian security leadership must potentially be focusing on. That is, its short ranges missile can preferably be used for counterforce targeting option, its intermediate range missile can possibly be for counter-value targeting, and its longer ranges missiles up to the ICBM level can be used for power projection and mass destruction strategy.

Although, this paper classifies these missile variants as part of India's evolving strategic triad, it also at the same time argues that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between the counterforce and counter-value targeting options. The deterrent forces designed for counterforce targeting purposes can advertently and/or inadvertently hit the cities. Similarly, the deterrent forces designed for counter-value targeting options can potentially be used to hit and destroy the counterforce targets. Therefore, the distinction between these types of targeting options may get complex and hard to conceptualise. Nevertheless, this article concludes that whatever India mega deterrent forces projects; its aim of evolving strategic triad forces will not only pose challenges to India's nuclear strategy against its adversaries, but also potentially affect the deterrence stability of South Asia.