

India's Counterforce Capabilities and Options



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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) organized a webinar on “India’s Counterforce Capabilities and Options” on 27th November 2020. The webinar was chaired by Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Former Defence Minister, Govt. of Pakistan). The guest speakers included Mr. Sufian Ullah (Research Fellow, CISS), Mr. Khalid Banuri (Advisor SPD), Dr. Rabia Akhtar (Director CSSPR, Islamabad), Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Prof. SPIR, QAU Islamabad).

The major takeaway from the webinar was that India’s counterforce pursuits are increasingly becoming a source of threat to the region’s strategic stability. Massive defence allocations, fast track acquisitions, modernization and the planned integration of its armed forces coupled with India’s recent collaborations with major powers such as the US, Russia and Israel has created a security dilemma for Pakistan. Consequently the deterrence equilibrium within the South Asian region is under threat more than ever before because the efforts aimed at making the deterrence fail have almost outweighed those aimed at solidifying it. Hence, the prevalent regional dynamics necessitate for Pakistan to reevaluate its counter value and counterforce options while simultaneously seeking help from its allies on the path to strategic modernization.

After offering a warm welcome to the participants and webinar audience, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema handed over the proceedings to the session Chair Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi. He explained in his opening remarks that counterforce capability is predominantly discussed in the context of nuclear war fighting, however, he implored the speakers to shed light on what is “counterforce” - is it only destruction of conventional forces or nuclear assets or both? Furthermore, is it a complete physical destruction or making it un-



useable through decapitating strike against command and control centers. He added that a sound counterforce strategy requires precision targeting with minimum collateral damage. This includes real time surveillance capabilities with accuracy and precision of high order along with a doctrine that demonstrates counterforce targeting. Moreover the capacity is another important factor which determines the potential to absorb and protect against or deter any reprisal. He said, keeping these points in mind, it would be interesting to see how this discussion will proceed.

Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi invited Mr. Sufian Ullah to present a short primer on “India’s Counterforce Capabilities and Options.” Mr. Sufian Ullah stated that the reliance on nuclear weapons in military strategy is increasing as nuclear armed states are continuously modernizing their nuclear forces. In the past, cities were the primary target of ballistic missiles and strategic bombers. This was because none of the states had the capability to precisely locate

and target adversary's nuclear forces. However, technological innovations have introduced the possibility to attack an opponent's nuclear forces and has made the counterforce nuclear targeting a viable military strategy. One such example is McNamara's 1962 famous "No City" speech, in which he proposed that the US would only target adversary's nuclear installations. This targeting capability which is commonly referred to as a counterforce targeting, has increased the dangers of the actual use of nuclear weapons. Such a strategic thinking allows the nuclear weapons to be perceived as more usable and hence increases the temptation for their use by the nuclear armed states.



He further stated that since 1998, the nuclear deterrence in South Asia is based on the notion of mutual vulnerability which has essentially prevented Pakistan and India from an all-out war. This belief was manifested in the joint statement issued by the two states in 2004, in which they recognized nuclear deterrence as a factor of stability in the region. A stable relation is the one in which mutual fears compel one to observe restraint and no side sees an advantage or temptation to conduct the first strike. However, this deterrent relationship is now changing because India pursues strategic supremacy instead of balance against Pakistan. Moreover, India's evolving nuclear posture also reflects a gradual shift from 'assured counter value retaliation' to 'pre-emptive counterforce targeting strategy.' For a counter value posture, a small number of survivable nuclear weapons which are maintained at low alert levels are adequate. However, on the other hand, counterforce requires relatively larger arsenal with precision strike capabilities and higher alert levels.

There are two primary drivers encouraging India to follow this posture: first one relates to India's traditional pursuit of acquiring strategic dominance and can instead be termed as its "strategic frustration" over its decade long inability to subdue Pakistan. As part of its escalation dominance strategy, India believes that its counterforce capabilities may allow it to escalate and defeat the adversary at every potential level of conflict. Second, there is a global trend where technological advancements offer lucrative options to pursue these targeting strategies. Now it is possible for a state to detect adversary's arsenals and target it with highly accurate delivery systems. India, of course does not want to be left behind in this age of technological innovations. Its strategic cooperation's with big powers and access to sophisticated technology is a great advantage in this regard. This international cooperation is not limited to the acquisition of BMD systems or hypersonic delivery systems, rather the latest developments such as the signing of Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) will facilitate India to use the US expertise on geospatial intelligence and enhance the accuracy of its automated weapons such as cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles.

All these factors will provide a cushion to India to adopt an aggressive posture that is based on a set of counterforce capabilities. These include capability to develop MIRVs, ballistic missiles greater precision and short range use options (such as Prahaar having the range of 150 Km that may launch key strikes closer to India's borders), and cruise missiles such as Nirbhay and Brahmos and anti-satellite weapon systems that India tested in 2019. These system indicate the ability to launch a first strike and destroy opponent's ability to conduct a retaliatory strike. It is also pertinent to mention here that the role of sea based nuclear forces is also transforming. This component of a nuclear triad is generally seen just as second strike capability to conduct counter value retaliatory strike. However, improved accuracy of submarine launched ballistic missiles has made it an effective counterforce weapon. Indian officials have suggested that India may use its submarine launched ballistic missiles in counterforce strikes. This was also witnessed in February 2019 crisis in which India was not reluctant to deploy its submarines too early in a conflict. Mr. Sufian Ullah added that these capabilities make little sense for an assured retaliation or a minimum deterrence posture. Likewise, any consideration of counterforce options runs contrary to a credible No first Use (NFU) commitment that leaves no space for the possibility of pre-emptive nuclear use. Therefore, irrespective of what Indian doctrine proclaims or what Indian political and strategic leadership has been saying, one can tell only by looking at the development side that India's nuclear posture has now shifted to counterforce targeting strategy. This would have a direct bearing on strategic stability and would only weaken the deterrence equilibrium between Pakistan and India.

In his concluding remarks he stated that this shift towards counterforce targeting shows that India is trying to escape the stalemate and hence mutual vulnerability vis-à-vis Pakistan. Such a strategic environment leaves little space for pursuit of any arms controls measures but only intensifies the strategic competition. Likewise, this posture may also encourage India to initiate limited war against Pakistan because of the perceived confidence that the threat of its counterforce strike would prevent Pakistan from using weapons first in a limited war. But at the same time, it is also counterproductive for the first strike capability because the assumption that India may use these weapons in a limited conflict would encourage any potential victim to attack before India attacks. None of the nuclear adversaries would want the other side to go first. Furthermore, these developments in the nuclear first strike capabilities carry implications for crisis stability and implications for arms race stability. So any pursuit of counterforce options is inherently dangerous for deterrence equilibrium in South Asia.



The session Chair then invited Mr. Khalid Banuri to deliberate on the “Dynamics of India’s Counter Force Preemption against Pakistan.” He pointed out three broad aspects to explain India’s pursuit of counterforce strategy. First is India’s budgeting and acquisitions for its forces and their capabilities. This includes Indian military modernization that has been going on for years significantly in the last three decades in the conventional and maritime domains. This aspect is also reflected in India’s long-term integrated planning that focuses on its capacities, annual acquisitions, and increased spending. According to estimates by SIPRI, India is one of the largest spenders and is the top importer of military capabilities in the world for over a decade. India also ranks at the top of the list in terms of its imports involving several collaborations. In short India has been enhancing its capabilities in the air, surface, and maritime equipment with aircrafts, tanks and submarines etc. India’s defence budget for the year 2020-2021 alone has been over US \$67 billion. So several of these ideas suggest significant budgeting and planned acquisitions.

Another important aspect is the Indian collaborations. He stated that most of the collaborations are with the US, Russian federation and Israel. A wide variety of weapons and technologies are being acquired by India through these collaborations. However, while these acquisitions are quite significant, they come with certain challenges too. Acquiring diverse strands of technologies with varied cultures and different kind of backgrounds, may pose a challenge of consistency. There also might be training challenges as these technologies are quite new for India. Nonetheless, India’s collaborations with major arms suppliers such as the US, Russia, and Israel, and its collaborative diplomacy are intensifying. BECA is one recent example, which is the continuation of series of agreements between India and the US. These collaborations might suit the interests of other countries but it has considerably enhanced the security dilemma for Pakistan. Pakistan will need to examine it and react to what it can do for itself. Unlike the traditional technologies that usually require a heavy industrial base, the emerging technologies and their several strands do not require huge industrial base and hence smaller countries can feel tempted to acquire them. He further stated that India is using the collaborative diplomacy in its favor by trying to build pressure on its collaborative partners in the matter of interests such as FAFT etc. through indirect diplomacy.

The third important aspect is that of doctrinal issue. Mr. Banuri highlighted that the BJP’s 2019 election manifesto was largely built on ideas about what BJP wanted to do for its country. One such idea was that India’s military strike capability is inadequate and there is a need for it to be enhanced. India’s military acquisitions appear to be in line with that recognition that there are some inadequacies which needed to be dealt with. Mr. Banuri emphasized that one should not ignore that the concurrent BJP manifestos have carried strands that came out as commitments

and were followed through in subsequent years such as the issue of Article 370 and 35A of the Constitution of India. Hence these positions within the Indian policy making circles exists with obvious commitment to counterforce posturing. This is evident from the diversity, types, and the medium of weapons that India is acquiring. In the doctrinal domain, another important aspect to consider is the issue of brinkmanship which has traditionally been followed by the Indian and Pakistani relationship. However, this is quite significantly visible not just in terms of an overall environment of hyper nationalism around the globe but specifically in case of the BJP and Narendra Modi's administration - that has been sustained and seems to be on the rise. This involves other aspects as well such as maintaining aggressive posturing to satisfy the domestic audience through arms buildup. This conventional build up tends to lower the nuclear threshold in a region that is riddled with lingering disputes, and where the issue of balancing between restraint and response continues.

Regarding these new technologies or the counterforce capabilities, one of the important assessment that was made some time back was about how to look at the issue of sheer numbers, variety of weapons, and the military capability vs the impact it can create. There are a couple of areas that are looked into in order to deal with the balancing out when the numbers and the acquisition of weapons cannot be matched. These areas most importantly include military skill, especially for the countries in the South Asian region which lack the capability to surprise and where the terrain is often in the favor of defender. Simultaneously, the fog of war can bring in its own dynamics. The issue of counterforce suggests that where complete surprise is not likely, the air power would have a truly transformative capability. This also means that a short skirmish can have a significant impact. India is incapable of surprise preemption to cripple Pakistan air force. Therefore, Indian air force would instead aim to create some local air superiorities, however, the experience suggest that it has not been able to achieve that either. India aims to have air dominance like the US, but it is not possible in the present situation. The initial arrivals of the newer technologies such as Rafale and S-400 seem to suggest that a significant amount of time and robust training is required before they can become any real time threat. On the other hand it is going to take India a significant amount of time if it chooses to go for local productions.

In his concluding remarks Mr. Khalid Banuri stated that no conventional strategy can independently tackle adversary's threat of use of nuclear weapons. It instead requires a well-coordinated air, land, and sea strategy but the decision makers are often faced with this dilemma. These various dynamics and indicators show that arms racing will become part of the security dilemma resultantly lowering the nuclear threshold. Other than that, the brinkmanship especially with the states that have short strategic warning time is significantly problematic. Pakistan needs to have smart acquisition of indigenous technologies. He ended his presentation with McNamara's statement wherein he raised a flag and cautioned to 'please learn from our mistakes.'

The third speaker Dr. Rabia Akhtar presented her views on “India’s Counter Force Capabilities and Deterrence Equilibrium in South Asia.” She believed that it is quite clear from the onset “that a nuclear weapon state (India) is in the process of acquiring counterforce capabilities is only a reflection of its discomfiture with deterrence equilibrium that is in place. It is within this context that I will place India’s flirtations with counterforce capabilities in this discussion.” She pointed out that the deterrence equilibrium is being



put to test more than ever before in South Asia today, simply because efforts aimed at making deterrence fail are more than those aimed at solidifying deterrence. The cat is indeed out of the bag, we must not shy away from saying this that an ideologically motivated polity such as India, is uncomfortable with the notions of mutual vulnerabilities and status quo ante. Thus, the logic of deterrence does not sit well with fast becoming rogue state.

She divided her presentation into three broad points. While first mentioning the last point she stated that Bernard Brodie in 1946 proposed deterrence with the main purpose of nuclear weapons as war prevention and not war fighting. Today, the chief purpose of the counterforce capabilities is to erode adversary’s deterrence capabilities and thus disrupt the equilibrium or parity in place and gain dominance. Kissinger wrote in 1947 that after a certain point, superiority in destructive power no longer pays strategic returns. So, does Pakistan needs to worry about Indian counterforce temptations? We need to ask ourselves this question at the outset. Does technical parity always equal strategic parity? The answer is that it does not. If one has SLBMs, they are more threatening to a naval power and less threatening to a landlocked country. Technological developments do not operate in a vacuum, instead they are relative to the overall strategic situation. So, for Pakistan what will matter is relative force sizes and relative force postures, to have an influence on technology, enough for us to know, whether that technology has evolutionary or revolutionary implications for deterrence thinking. Hence, Pakistan must understand and take comfort in the fact that parity, whether it be in our personal relationships or state to state relationships, is a fleeting phenomenon. There is no such thing as equilibrium in terms of technology-based capabilities.

Going back to her first point she stated that India’s quest to buttress its counterforce capabilities cannot be dissociated from doctrinal thinking and by extension from its thoughts from dealing with Pakistan. Since August 1999 India discredited its own so called NFU policy. India has practically told the world that in order to do away with the Pakistan created strategic dilemma, India might draw first blood. It means that India will bring the threshold of nuclear use down - precipitously right down to the battlefield going forward. So, if the logic of nuclear targeting is anything to go by, India’s first use would be a foolhardy affair given that Pakistan will have its entire arsenal intact to wreak havoc on India. Thus, New Delhi would have to go first and

go big - something that will naturally compel its decision makers to atone their nuclear forces in a manner that can make damage limitation a reality. A doctrine driven push towards a counterforce strategy is visible today in the Indian strategic conclave. With a doctrine that accommodates nuclear compellence and challenges the very essence of deterrence, it is only a matter of time before India acquires full spectrum of capabilities that make counterforce a possibility, however distinct or dangerous it might be.

Dr. Akhtar pointed out India's journey towards adding more robust sets of counterforce options as are exemplified by the induction of more precise delivery vehicles, better surveillance and interception of Pakistan's strategic assets, a more flexible nuclear command and control structure, is denting deterrence equilibrium in otherwise fraught strategic environment. Further breaking it down, she stated that threat perception is the corollary of capabilities and intentions. So, with India openly threatening Pakistan with land grabbing and other forms of saber rattling, the intent is pretty clear. However, a bilateral deterrence equation has, to a great degree, attenuated India's ability to use force to achieve political lands. Thus, weakening this two-way deterrence in a manner that raises its prospects of successfully compelling Pakistan, is absolutely India's one of the objectives against Pakistan and Pakistan should not have any doubts about it. Deriding the potency of Pakistan's riposte capacity and tinkering with balance of vulnerabilities to elicit first move or first strike advantage, are some of the ways through which India could get out of what it calls strategic paralysis. Strategic stability is a function of deterrence stability and crisis stability and with counterforce capabilities in the mix, the overall strategic stability in South Asia will remain forever fragile. The question is: why would Pakistan, a smaller and a weaker state, not feel that, during the crisis, its behemoth adversary, armed with counterforce capabilities, will go for the kill? Inversely, why would India not be thrilled with the idea of taking out Pakistani nukes in a decapitation strike? Either way, with counterforce options added to the mix, the chances of inadvertent and accidental escalation increase manifold. The worry for South Asia watchers should be how and why India's accumulation of counterforce capabilities merits strategic reassessment within Pakistan. Would Pakistan's nuclear-use thresholds, nuclear command and control structures, and targeting strategies remain static in the face of India's ameliorations? The answer is a resounding no.

However, she stated that it should be a tad comforting to note that it is highly unlikely that India or Pakistan could destroy each other's arsenals in a manner that leaves no room for nuclear retaliation. However, it is good news so long as rationality does the talking. An Indian leadership that is infused with religious fundamentalism and superiority, does not and should not be expected to believe in the rational model of decision making. It is important to look into how India has favored the use of force over dialogue with Pakistan. A BJP leadership that feels it can get away with carrying out an air strike inside mainland Pakistan, can also be expected to miscalculate when it comes to using nuclear weapons. Even the mere thought that one might get

away with taking out dozens of Pakistani nuclear warheads, is a miscalculation that can have consequences of greater magnitude. Talking about the allure of counterforce, she said that this possessing and denying could pave the way for recklessness. With RSS-BJP bend, that is perhaps the only thing that Pakistan needs to worry about at the moment. A multitude of low yield systems can certainly be used against Pakistan. In short, India is diversifying its options to target Pakistan on the back of more numbers, precision and lethality. With all these heavy ticket items in its armory, who stops India from using Pakistan a convenient surrogate while signaling actually to China against which it cannot use all these items. So, with both these countries holding on to different sides of coercion spectrum, the equilibrium is disturbed and will be disturbed.

She concluded her presentation by raising two questions: who would convince Pakistan that India's counterforce forays are not aimed at it? and What would a state like Pakistan, that exacts deterrence by holding Indian cities hostage to a counter-value strike do, when a state like India is seemingly reducing its ability to dish out a credible threat of a counter-value? These two questions lie at the heart of the disquisitions on India's burgeoning counterforce capabilities. Survivability of nuclear arsenal such as hardening and concealment are already negated by technology driven capabilities. Hardening is negated by accuracy of nuclear delivery systems and concealment is negated by revolution in remote sensing. Pakistan must get on to acquiring high end capabilities in its guidance systems, sensors, data processing, artificial intelligence and communication to improve its deterrence against India. Dr. Rabia Akhtar wrapped up her talk with the belief that if there is a technology out there, now or in the future, which is destabilizing, there will be a countermeasure as well.



The last speaker, Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal deliberated upon "Development of India's Nuclear Force Posture: An Analysis of Counter Force Options" where he emphasized that in order to analyze the counterforce, it is important to understand the Indian strategic thinking. Simply put, it is a "pre-emptive counterforce nuclear posture." India's nuclear doctrine's reviews and public statements increasingly suggest punishment and nuclear war fighting strategy. This is quite evident from the Joint Doctrine Indian Armed Forces (JDIAF) released in April 2017 and the subsequent developments. Furthermore, Chief of Indian Air Force stated that the Indian air force has the ability to independently locate, fix and strike tactical nuclear weapon batteries if necessary. Similarly, Vipin Narang, while interpreting India's former National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon's writing regarding the potential gray area about when India would use nuclear weapons first against a nuclear-armed adversary, has claimed that there is an increasing evidence that 'India will not allow Pakistan to go first. And that India's opening salvo may not be conventional strikes trying to pick off just Nasr batteries in the theatre, but could be a full comprehensive counterforce strike.'- despite the fact that the Indian air force lacks this capability at the moment.

India's nuclear force posture's objective is based on three important factors: one, the desire to compel Pakistan; two, to deter China from using its conventional nuclear weapons; and third, the most important factor which is also destabilizing, is demonstration of its status as great power in South Asia and the net security provider in the IOR region, enjoying support from the US. Talking about the direction of India's force posture with reference to India's election manifestos and development, he stated that India realizes that Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability limits India's ability to launch retaliatory strikes on Pakistani territory. Therefore, India has been developing BMD combined with precision guided weapons to prevent a possible Pakistani nuclear strike, which is similar to the US' "left of launch" concept. When applied to the Indian planners, this concept essentially mean the old fashioned counterforce against Pakistan. India is pursuing new conventional weapons technology to form the basis of its counterforce capabilities including precision guided munitions, missile defences, standoff weapons and cyber operations. We also cannot ignore India's investment in the multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, BMDs, Agni missile equipped with advanced technologies to enhance its precision strike capability. However, India has been struggling to acquire offensive capabilities including cyber to covertly disable Pakistan's missile launch systems and the supporting infrastructure before they can be launched. The COMCASA agreement signed between India and the US on September 6, 2018 and BECA agreement signed on October 27, 2020 are auxiliaries of India's counterforce development.

Furthermore, in case of Pakistan, its full spectrum deterrence provides the liberty to select from a range of counter-value, battlefield, and counterforce targets. This doctrine offers an appropriate arrangement to deal with the escalation dynamics while denying India's escalation dominance. Pakistan's inventory has battlefield low yield missiles, ballistic and cruise missiles, MIRVs and improved sea-based capabilities. According to 2018 report of the Atomic Science Bulletin, Pakistan is said to have 50 to 60 warheads which could be used by its aircrafts / fighter jets or short-range missiles for the counterforce purposes. However, it is important to bear in mind that if Pakistan is preparing for land, sea and air capabilities than India must be preparing too. Developing and fielding offensive capability, based on theatre or cruise missile operation, is a reasonable course of action but it requires an effective umbrella of surface-to-air missile defences. It is important to know whether Pakistan has such a defensive umbrella, or does it need to develop one? Additionally, there are certain limitations to acquiring the counterforce capabilities, the analysis of which present certain worst case scenarios. Unfortunately, while there is strategic or deterrence equilibrium, we are at the same time moving towards nuclear war fighting – which raises another significant question: whether India can conduct a pre-emptive surgical strike to eliminate Pakistan's deterrent with the support of the US? He suggested that Pakistan's strategic community should think of strategic perspective reframing specifically towards the US. Since two decades the US has been offering full support to India's Cold Start

doctrine, proactive military operation strategies and now the agreements such as BECA and COMCASA have also been finalized. Furthermore, the Ashley J. Tellis statement that has also stated that 'Trump administration gave India pride of place in the US national security thinking, offered it previously unavailable advanced military equipment, and supported it comprehensively in its crisis with Pakistan and China.' Instead of crisis de-escalation, the US supported India against Pakistan. Similarly, another statement by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued on 27th October 2020 after meeting India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval mentioned that the 'US will stand with India in its efforts to defend its sovereignty and liberty. Our Nations are committed to working together into expanding our partnership across many frontiers.' All these developments collectively provide sufficient rationale for Pakistan to go for its own counterforce or counter-value or real credible deterrence strategy. In a worst case scenario it is quite possible that India would carry out a pre-emptive surgical strike to eliminate Pakistan deterrent with support of the US. This could possibly be the reason behind agreements such as BECA and COMCASA, otherwise why would India compromise on its strategic autonomy despite the strong oppositions from within India against such agreements. India is now formally the US ally and Pakistan, while focusing on its counterforce or deterrent capability, will have to take into account India's alliance status with the US.

Some options available to Pakistan include building radar jammer capabilities and anti-satellite capabilities. Dr. Jaspal suggested that Pakistan must improve its space based ISR capabilities. Simultaneously, it has to strengthen its sea-based deterrence to ensure the survivability of second strike or retaliatory capabilities. If not possible now, this should be the aim for the near future where Pakistan will have to work on its ICBM capabilities. This will also provide effective deterrence against India's allies compelling them to cease their unwavering support to India. However, the development of ICBMs would require a number of satellites and an effective Circular Error Probable (CEP).

In his concluding remarks Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal said that must keep an eye on the US cooperation with India. Although India and the US claim it to be against China, these technologies are intensifying security dilemma for Pakistan. Last but not the least, the South Asian region is already inching towards mutually assured destruction. Though Pakistan is still trying its best to avoid arms competition with India, unfortunately it cannot be ignored when it is happening in the neighborhood. Hence, Pakistan must improve its capabilities while staying more vigilant about Indo-US strategic.

Observations and question & answers session:

Air Commodore (R) Tanweer Nazim Siddique (Former Chief Instructor, Air War College and Former Faculty member at DSS, QAU) elaborated on Dr. Rabia Akhtar's point where she

quoted Bernard Brodie mentioning that deterrent weapons are for war prevention not fighting. He added that the dilemma for India under BJP and RSS is that it can't digest the fact that Pakistan, a small country can deter and check their hegemonic ambitions. Hence India is all out to develop and acquire overwhelming capability for counterstrike because rational decision making is not expected from BJP. Agreements with Israel and the US have helped India to further enhance its counterforce capabilities. This is not a short-term threat. Pakistan will have to make adequate preparations now. It is only Pakistan's operational preparedness and resolve to massively retaliate that would deter Indian decision makers. Dr. Rabia Akhtar reiterated that India cannot digest that Pakistan has deterrence equilibrium in place right now with India. This parity does not sit well with its ideological inclination that is now overshadowed by the RSS/BJP Hindutva ideology which is militarized as well. Hence, Pakistan needs to have both its counterforce and counter-value options open. But in order for counter-value to work, Pakistan needs to have an assured second-strike capability. So that it has the capability to retaliate with a decisive strike back. Keeping both options open is Pakistan's best bet at this point in time. Though the only problem with this scenario is that India has allies on its side such as the US and Israel, who continue to help India upgrade and modernize both its conventional and nuclear capabilities. Pakistan also needs to look for allies who can help provide Pakistan with the required modernization because Pakistan lacks the economic power or the money that these big ticket items require. Mr. Khalid Banuri added that we must keep in view the issue of the paradox of deterrence. In order for the nuclear weapons to be never used, they need to be readily survivable and available. Which means that if escalation happens, it will get a response. My reference in the nuclear environment are the four R's of the OODA (observe, orientate, decide and attack) loop. The four R's include 'restraint', 'resolve', 'response' and finally 'restore' the strategic balance.

Mr. Sanaullah Abbasi (Student of IR department, NUML) asked, India is testing at least ten to twenty missiles after Laddakh tensions. India's missile testing and technological development has implications for Pakistan. So how can Pakistan balance out and maintain deterrence with India? Dr. Jaspal responded that at a certain level there are technological advantages and disadvantages. India's missile testing alone wouldn't eliminate the strategic equilibrium between India and Pakistan. Pakistan has also tested few missiles after the Pulwama incident. Missile testing is also done for the purpose of perfecting the technology or learning how to use it. So there are technological and training aspects which Pakistan is also undertaking. The only problem here is when a new technology or a new dimension e.g. BECA is introduced, then one has to worry. Other than that if India is going to test twenty missiles tomorrow I will not be a problem for Pakistan.

Dr. Adil Sultan (Dean/HOD, FASS, Air University, Islamabad) commented on the few points raised by the panelists about the need for development of the ICBMs and to see the US as the ally of India. He said that Pakistan has to keep its national objectives in view. If the national

objective is to deter India from going to a war than adequate measures should be taken without going beyond this set goal and without over investing the resources. Developing a deterrent capability against a super power also does not match Pakistan's national objective and neither are there resources for it. He stated that there was also a comment made that Pakistan should develop its counterforce capability in addition to counter-value capability. This must be looked into from a doctrinal perspective to evaluate what the objectives are. Pakistan's counterforce is essentially in the context of what India was planning in its Cold Start Doctrine. It was not intended for a preemptive counterforce strike against Indian nuclear forces. This is not the counterforce capability or doctrine of the Cold War period when Soviets and the US could think about destroying each other's nuclear capabilities. The full spectrum deterrence articulated by Pakistan's military leadership and scholars had a specific meaning that if India launches a limited military operation, Pakistan would have the capacity to deter that. So, none of the senior leaderships ever mentioned that Pakistan would be planning for a counterforce preemptive strike against India. And that is why there is a need to understand that counterforce capabilities are primarily to deter India's specific doctrine and not to give a signal that Pakistan is developing a preemptive strike to destroy India's nuclear capability. Pakistan's national objective is not to wage a war instead it is to deter a war from India. Dr. Rabia Akhtar also commented that Pakistan's objectives are limited and it is quite clear that Pakistan wants to deter a war with India. But nothing exists in a vacuum and everything for Pakistan is relative here. If India is moving ahead in developing counterforce capabilities that might give it an edge or temptation of preemption, then Pakistan does need to go back and probably alter some of its objectives in order to cater for that temptation. At this particular point in time Pakistan's doctrine does not cater for Indian counterforce temptations which might lead it to use that capability to conduct preemptive first strike against Pakistan. The grounds and the landscapes have considerably changed since the strategic planners initially evaluated Pakistan's doctrine. There is a need to go back to the drawing board and see what is going to work for it now. What is survivable today, is going to be vulnerable tomorrow. That is the reality of the entire nuclear game and the conventional force posturing which leads to subsequent escalation. Hence, Pakistan needs to keep its options open. Dr. Jaspal also added that Pakistan's objective is to deter the adversary but can we deter the adversary by thinking within the existing strategy? I think no. Whatever we have today, tomorrow it might become obsolete or vulnerable. Secondly, no one is interested to have an arms race or create problem with the superpower. We do not need to have the matching responses to India as the countries such as North Korea are also surviving in the present world. If one wants peace, one also must prepare for the war as Brodie said that 'we make a strategy to fight a war but actually you are making a strategy to avoid a war.' In a deterrence we are going for war preparation without any intention to go for a war. In that context we must see America as an ally of India and while developing our deterrent capability we need to think out of the box. In order to live as a sovereign equal in South Asia we need to rephrase our strategic thinking or revamp

our deterrence strategy. Dr. Adil Sultan responded that deterrence is not static, it's a dynamic process and is evolving as per the looming threat. But we have to go back to the genesis why we developed this capability or what was the sole purpose of it. Yes as the economy and the national power grows, the national objective also starts to vary. But for now we should not deviate from our primary objective. If we perceive this as the threat complemented by a super power through this strategic alliance then we have to take certain actions but it's not a zero sum game. Even if it is the new cold war evolving, it is not likely to be like the Soviet Union and the US rivalry. Even China is not threatening United States because the realities are different now. We have to keep into account our power potential and the geostrategic environment. We should not be deterred or afraid of any external power. We are a nuclear power and have a credible nuclear deterrent but flaunting the nuclear capability against the potential adversary was not the purpose of the deterrence capability. The US and Indian partnership is not a new phenomenon, even in 1965 the US had its preference in the region but we had been maintaining that balance. So these things will continue to happen and the kind of relationships we have with our allies most probably China and US, we cannot afford to become another frontline state for either of the two countries. We have to maintain the balance without deviating from our primary objective that our principle threat is from our eastern adversary and we should deter that threat at all cost. I am skeptical about this over projection of threat because it's a strategic culture of almost all the nations where they tend to over assess a threat and then start investing in a capability that probably might not be required at that particular moment. One can afford to go beyond means if the economy is strong but in the absence of resources one should stay within its means by clearly identifying what is required to deter the primary threat. In theory we should discuss all possible scenarios and consider developing options but we have to be very realistic because credibility only matters if it matches the resources, national power potential and objectives otherwise it just becomes statement and loses credibility.

Air Commodore (R) Khalid Iqbal (Former Assistant Chief of Air Staff, PAF) commented that the moment we start thinking about the nuclear war fighting instead of nuclear war prevention, we instantly move into the irrational model of state craft or strategic patterns. Warfare has changed quite a bit in our region and continues to change at a very fast pace. Therefore, the realities of Reagan era's 'Star Wars' may not be far away. So the way the war is going to be fought in our region is going to have a lot of implications on what we do and how we strategize ourselves. We do not wish to make the US our outright enemy by going into the realm of ICBMs or by making offensive kind of doctrines. Doctrines can stay mild. What we have to do is to address our capabilities and try to plug in the gaps. We should not make hefty doctrines where we might be unable to cope up with the capability to match that doctrine when the time comes. He further added that the US will not be an outright enemy as long as we can balance off India in our capabilities, America itself will have its limiting factors. America will not go all out for India as

long as it evaluates that Pakistan whenever has to fight a war with India will give India a tough time. Moreover, American interest with India is only China focused. He stated that Modi government has disappointed India first in the Doklam crisis and second time in the Laddakh crisis. Both the times India was unable to stand on its feet and proved that India has the capability that it has been talking about since the 1960s. In case of Pakistan we need to go for cutting edge technology and do not go for matching the numbers in our region or with any super power and maintain only India specific capability. India's problem is that its whole doctrinal philosophy and thinking has a big blanket of bluffing. So, once India's bluff is called either by China or Pakistan, it won't know what to do and that has happened so many times. The Indian political leadership especially the BJP does not indicate precisely to its military leadership that what the army is required to do. They deployed the army in Parakram operations for one year telling them that they are going to fight Pakistan whereas their political leadership knew that well before time that there will be no war with Pakistan. They also didn't tell their military that they are likely to have a war with China and when the war came on their head they didn't know what to do. These are the dilemmas and discrepancies between India's political leadership cooperation with the military leadership. So, these are the areas we carefully need to strategize ourselves by plugging in these gaps and taking advantage of these loopholes.

Mr. Ali Irfan Sahibzada (MPhil Student at Strategic Studies Department, NDU) asked Dr. Rabia Akhtar, we normally say India is probably developing emerging technologies which may affect the OODA loop but can we tangibly assess India's present or future capabilities in space, cyber and artificial intelligence? Dr. Rabia Akhtar replied, there is no question that India is going towards disruptive technologies that will give it a strategic edge. But the S-400 system is a mobile system and has launchers on it. What if you had an unmanned vehicle which could go and destroy that launcher and could disrupt that capability. You don't necessarily need to have an S-400 to match what S-400 can do. You need to have a disruptive technology which can disrupt your adversary's capability whether its counterforce or any other. Pakistan needs to think out of box as there are a lot of options available. We do not need to match weapon by weapon or number by number. Pakistan needs to use disruptive technology to its advantage and gain strategic benefit out of it.

Dr. Attiq-ur-Rehman (Assistant Professor IR department, NUML) asked, what is the actual issue, Indian acquisition of technologically advanced military devices or the supply of such devices to India? Dr. Jaspal replied, what India has been developing such technologies for many years such as its missile defence systems or its own missiles but they lack the accuracy. It was only after 1997 when India started taking the Arrow missile technology from the Israel, after which we came to know that India's Agni project was successful. Similarly even today India is purchasing a lot of technology from the US but it will create problem for India's interoperability. India's indigenous capability will not be destabilizing or will have lesser impact on the strategic

stability because Pakistan is also upgrading its technologies. But when India receives technologies from other states especially the technologies it is going to get after BECA, that is important and is going to make a difference in the region.

Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi stated in his concluding remarks that India alone is not capable of first strike against Pakistan. Pakistan on the other hand should strive for absolute second strike capability. Moreover, our doctrines and development strategies must strive to economize, simplify and yet create robust and credible deterrence.

In the end Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema (President/Executive Director, SVI) thanked the panelists for making their distinguished contributions.

Media Coverage:

The Coverage of the SVI webinar was reported in the print, electronic and streamed live on social media. The recording is also available on the SVI official YouTube Channel.

PTV World News

<https://www.facebook.com/svicom/videos/202932171383625>

Express Tribune

<https://tribune.com.pk/epaper/news/Islamabad/2020-11-28/MzA0OTBjNmM1MWVmNmRiNjUzNDA0OGUzMDc4ZWU1M2MuanBIZw%3D%3D>

DAWN

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Daily Times

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/694481/indian-actions-stressing-regional-stability-svi-webinar/>

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