

India's Counterforce Temptations



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Compiled by: Amber Afreen Abid
Reviewed and Edited by: Haris Bilal Malik

**STRATEGIC VISION INSTITUTE (SVI),
ISLAMABAD**

Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) organized a webinar on “India’s Counterforce Temptations” on 10th March 2021. The webinar was chaired by Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema (President/ Executive Director, SVI). The speakers included; Dr. Adil Sultan (Acting Dean/Chair, FASSS, Air University, Islamabad), Dr. Rizwana Karim Abbasi (HOD, IR, NUML Islamabad), and Amb. (R) Zamir Akram (Former Permanent Representative to CD/ United Nations, Geneva).

The major takeaway from the webinar was that India’s counterforce temptations are continuously becoming a threat to the region’s strategic stability. The Indian Nuclear Doctrine is ambiguous, regarding the First Strike or No First Use, and these fluctuations or drifts are a matter of great concern for Pakistan since it is principally affected by India’s nuclear posture. Consequently, the deterrence equilibrium and the strategic stability in the South Asian region are under threat given the Indian hegemonic temptations. Hence, the prevalent regional dynamics necessitate for Pakistan to reevaluate its 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 started the session with his introductory remarks. He briefly shed the light on the different dynamics of the subject and left the details to be deliberated by the distinguished panel. He said that since the release of its Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) of 1999, India has been shifting its nuclear doctrine from the aspects mentioned in DND. India claimed the policy of NFU in DND, which was presented by the NSA Brajesh Mishra in August 1999, only a year after the nuclearization of South Asia. However, after Operation Parakram, in the operationalization of its nuclear doctrine India qualified or linked its policy of NFU with “chemical and biological weapons” attack or attack on Indian forces “anywhere”. Thus, in both conditions, India reserved the right to use nuclear weapons. These both points were significant changes in Indian Nuclear Doctrine from what was announced in August 1999 in DND.

He further added that since then we have been seeing continuous changes, statements, and writings coming from senior Indian officials like former NSA Shivshankar Menon, current

NSA Ajit Doval, various academicians and scholars, which are warning the world about changing nuclear doctrine of India. These statements urge one to think that where India's nuclear doctrine stands today, as it stands today where it was in August 1999 or certain changes have to be kept in mind. These fluctuations or drifting is particularly concerning matter for Pakistan because we are principally affected by India's nuclear posture or India's nuclear doctrine. Since both countries are located in the same region and due to our adversarial relations, we along with China are the first targets of India's belligerent actions. Many statements have been made so far by the Indian scholars and academicians on the shifting nature of Indian nuclear doctrine, but one significant statement in this regard was made by Vipin Narang back in 2016 at Carnegie Endowment. He deliberated that India will not allow Pakistan to go first and will conduct the "splendid first strike" and take out Pakistan's nuclear assets in a preemptive attack if India feels that Pakistan is preparing to deploy its nuclear weapons.

To explain Indian inclinations towards counterforce Dr. Cheema also gave a reference to the former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon's Book "Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy" in which he wrote that it was considered many times by the Indian policymakers that India would not allow Pakistan to go for the first use of nuclear weapons. Dr. Cheema said that based on these, many Indian officials and political representatives have commented on the issue but he added that in his view there is still an "ambiguity" on the issue of preemptive strike/ counterforce. He further added that this ambiguity by India is deliberate, as sometimes the Indian officials issue statements that they adhere to NFU which we declared in August 1999, and then come times where statements come which negate the policy of NFU and explain that India would do as it pleases. Lastly, he asked the panelists to comment on this deliberate ambiguity during the webinar and to further implore the issue.

The first speaker, **Dr. Adil Sultan** reflected his insight on “India’s Evolved Strategic Thinking and its Counter Force Temptations”. He said that it is important to have discussions on these important topics because amid COVID-19 and actions like ceasefire on LOC people forget that what India is doing or what its ambitions are. Like for instance, recently news came that India is buying 30 Predator Drones from the US. This acquisition will have an impact on India’s doctrinal



and strategic thinking and would provide an incentive to launch an aerial surgical strike by using these drones against Pakistan, which would create an impact on strategic stability in South Asia. In his presentation, Dr. Sultan covered four aspects which were; a brief history of evolving strategic thoughts in India, its military developments especially after nuclearization that are impacting its doctrinal developments, and options for Pakistan.

While explaining the strategic thought or doctrinal thinking of India, Dr. Adil said that India’s doctrinal thinking is prestige-driven, where India wants to be recognized as a major power, globally. Moreover, whatever, it is developing in terms of its military capability or doctrinal developments that are intended to enhance India’s stature. Moreover, its rivalry with China provides it justification to de-hyphenate its security question from Pakistan hyphenates with China. He further added that growing distrust between the US and China is also giving Indian ample room to exploit this rivalry for its own political and military advantage by arguing its case that India could be a potential bulwark against China. Ironically, the US and other western powers are buying that Indian narrative and helping India with military technology and help it in attaining its political objectives as well. But, one thing on which Pakistan should be clear must be that India and China are never going to fight a war as there is so much at stake in terms of economics. They have more than \$ 90 billion of bilateral trade. So, what India doing at the international level is the “India way” of strategizing? He also talked about India’s doctrinal dispersions because they have their way of interpretation of different strategic jargons, how to use the nuclear capability globally as well as at the regional level. He also deliberated on the genesis of strategic thought in India, where soon after independence bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had a deep impact on Nehru and the political leadership of India, who saw

nuclear weapon as a great equalizer that if India has to emerge as a major power globally eventually it must pursue nuclear weapons capability and that is how we saw that India continue to progress on its dual-track nuclear program. While not admitting publically that it was building nuclear weapons. China was never an existential threat for India; in fact, during the 1950s China-India relations were very cordial and friendly. So, China never posed that kind of threat which could have provided the incentive to India to build its nuclear program. Dr. Sultan mentioned the statements from Homi Bhabha, the founder of the Indian nuclear program in 1958 that India can potentially build a bomb within a few months if the political leadership gives the order. So, India from the very start has had this ambition to build a nuclear program because of the prestige factor and had no serious or legitimate security threat. Moreover, this is also the reason India named the nuclear explosion of 1974 as “Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE)” because India could not justify any threat to its security and it took 24 more years for India to come out of the closet and declare itself a nuclear weapons state in 1998.

Dr. Sultan further added that the statement which came from India in 1998 was “India is a nuclear weapon state and it must be recognized as such”. This statement reflects on the thought and currently how India wants to be treated as equivalent to global powers. This particular thought of India, later on, became the basis of future negotiations of India with other global powers. Such as in the Indo-US deal, where India wanted to be seen and treated at par with the other international powers. In a joint stamen of July 18, 2005, India argued that it should be treated as equivalent to other countries as the US.

Dr. Adil then elaborated on the military dimensions. He said the 1998 nuclear test helped Pakistan to restore equilibrium in this part of the world and these tests were counterproductive for India. It made it difficult for India to use its conventional military advantage against Pakistan for a limited political objective to wage a war against Pakistan. So, to deal with this fallback India introduced the Cold Start Doctrine in 2004, the whole objective of the CSD was to create space to fight a limited war while remaining below Pakistan’s perceived strategic threshold. Dr. Sultan said that the word “perceived” is used because India perceives that if they indulge in limited nuclear war probably it will not push Pakistan to cross

its nuclear threshold and they will be able to achieve some limited military objectives. However, in response, Pakistan came up with its concept of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) that was intended to rule out all the possibilities of any military conflict ranging from a limited to an all-out war, which neutralized the Indian CSD. Frustrated by these military developments and setbacks India developed the doctrine of Surgical Strikes in 2016 and claimed that it had launched a surgical strike against Pakistan near LOC in Pakistani administered Kashmir. Pakistan did not respond to 2016 Indian claims of surgical strikes because it believed that nothing happened, so it does not need to respond. But in hindsight, several observers have said that even if India had not conducted a surgical strike Pakistan should have responded because this could have preempted or reduced the incentive for India to launch aerial surgical strikes in 2019. So, probably lack of action from the Pakistani side in 2016 encourages and emboldened Modi to launch an aerial surgical strike in 2019. This surgical strike doctrine also has been discredited because Pakistan was able to shoot down two of the Indian aircraft and India could not use the situation for political gain or assert its military dominance over Pakistan. So following that if one goes by the stories reported in Hindustan Times and Reuters during the 2019 crisis India mobilizes its missiles, so the Modi government had the intent to launch missiles against Pakistan, which was dangerous development but it also indicates the mindset of the political leadership in India. So, these dispersions are deliberately built by Indian policymakers in Indian nuclear doctrine to make a case for a preemptive strike against Pakistan. But, 2019 was the first incident when political leadership mobilized the missiles to use against Pakistan.

He further looks into four elements or dispersions in Indian strategic/doctrinal thinking. The first one is the policy of NFU, where India has been using it politically to tell the West and international community that it is a responsible country and it follows NFU and its neighbor is not as responsible and they do not adhere to NFU policy. But, even that is the Indian way to interpret NFU. Pakistan knows that its 2003 doctrine included the points where India reserved the right to use weapons first in response to chemical and biological weapons which violates its own NFU commitment. However, more importantly, since 2016 we have seen some senior decision-makers especially members from the nuclear command authority, former defense

minister, current defense minister, former NSA, former Army chiefs have been doubting their nuclear policy which is creating and opening a space for dispersion where India can justify in future to use its nuclear weapons first against Pakistan in a preemptive strike. The second element Dr. Sultan mentioned the development of BMD capability, which in his view between India and Pakistan will not going to work. But, it can lead to a false sense of security amongst the Indian decision-makers and could provide an incentive for the first strike. The third element is the second-strike capability, where the same logic will apply. The most important development is hypersonic missiles because of their speed and precision and they are considered as more effective against ballistic missiles or missiles that are placed on transportable launchers, such as Pakistan's short-range ballistic missile "Nasr". So, India's development of hypersonic weapons could be a sign to deter Pakistan from deploying Nasr batteries and theatrical level and simultaneously create space for limited warfighting against Pakistan. It is a disturbing situation because it can lead the miscalculations and Pakistan would be forced to take remedial measures.

While concluding his talk, Dr. Sultan also listed some of the options that Pakistan could utilize, which include the development of hypersonic weapons but it is a costly option. Moreover, it could review its policy of FSD and commitment to retaliate massively against any preemptive strike. Third, it can increase the number and mobility of its short-range missiles and also move towards the development and operationalization of its second-strike capability.



The second speaker **Dr. Rizwana Karim Abbassi** presented her views on "India's Enhanced Nuclear Capabilities: An Analysis of Counter Force Options". She started her presentation by stating that since 1998 Indian has been testing its NFU policy. She said that the nature of India's evolving doctrine, postures, and capabilities have been highlighted in the statements, comments, and writings of Indian officials and politicians, where they urge to review India's NFU policy.

Many international reputed scholars and observers have referred to the Indian counterforce temptations too. These developments and debates are not a surprise for Pakistan as we have

always categorized the Indian NFU as bluff and gimmick. India realizes that this NFU claim is shallow and not true because India never accepted the Chinese policy of NFU and kept on developing and modernizing its nuclear deterrence and capabilities in parallel. So, if there was any doubt left regarding the Indian bluff of NFU, it was clarified during the post-Pulwama crisis in 2019. She mentioned that in this regard Modi's statement regarding the utility of nuclear weapons and these weapons not for celebrations and "night of massacre" statement were to threaten Pakistan. These statements are the glaring contradictions between Indian political statements on the one hand and their actual actions on the other hand. So, the question here arises what is the factor that shapes the policy shift in India. In answer to this question, she said that firstly growing in Indian confidence in its misperceived military advantage against Pakistan. The perceived edge which India is supposed to acquire by virtue of new and emerging technologies and India's illusion that at the political level its narrative of being justified in taking actions against Pakistan of the false premise of actions against terrorism is also one significant factor. Moreover, among the technologies which facilitate the Indian pursuit of misguided strategies are the space technologies, which certainly provide precise data about the exact location of adversary assets. In parallel to these developments of hypersonic delivery systems, which reduce the response time manifolds and Indian induction of ballistic missile defenses including Russian S-400 seems to provide false security to India to attempt a misadventure against Pakistan. She further added that India is reputed to develop and acquire more technologies that suit the objective of conducting counterforce than counter value targeting. So, all these developments are being aided and embedded by exemptions exceptions granted to India, which allows it access to advanced military technologies and dual-use systems. US has also granted the STA-1 status to India which will allow India to purchase advanced military items without an individual license and several foundational agreements aimed at enhancing the interoperability of the US and Indian forces. This will enhance the precision striking capabilities of Indian forces, which are important in any counterforce or preemptive strike. So, in short India's temptation which is very hard to materialize at the practical level is undermining the broader strategic stability of this region thereby increasing nuclear risks and generating and fueling a new arms race. So far, India still fails to provide any assurances regarding its NFU

policy. So, India might be building its nuclear deterrent to fight a two-front war, where it wants to take out Pakistan's nuclear assets in a preemptive strike and maintain a credible second-strike capability for China is a pipe dream for India. However, Dr. Abbasi said that the sooner India shed those dreams the better it would be for India and regional and international security and strategic stability. She concluded her presentation by saying that both countries in South Asia will have to one way or another return dialogue on promoting risk reduction, avoidance of arms race, promote restraint and adopt CBMs, which is the only way forward.

The last speaker **Amb. (R) Zamir Akram** deliberated upon "Politico-Diplomatic Dynamics and Probability of India's Counter Force Preemption against Pakistan". He started his presentation with the event of India and Pakistani nuclear test of 1998 following which there was hectic activity between India and Pakistan at the diplomatic and political levels, as well as the major role by the international community in particular the US with which both sides interacted. So,



in this background first and important thing that we need to recall is that Pakistan and India engaged in a Comprehensive Composite Dialogue Process in which the issue of peace and security was one of the agenda items that essentially meant dealing with our nuclear capabilities and managing strategic stability in the region. He also highlighted that one of the major proposals that Pakistan made at the time to India was on the issue of a strategic restraint regime that called for restraint and abstinence from developing technologies that would be further destabilizing for the region. Among these were technologies for ballistic missile defense or submarine-launched ballistic missiles along with many other factors. At that time also the Indians were reluctant to engage with us on such a nuclear restraint regime but were willing only to make progress on some CBMs which are now mentioned in the Lahore declaration. But in real terms on the substantive issues, there was no real progress to ensure strategic stability. During those meetings, discussions were also made on various strategic doctrines. The Indian Doctrine has been mentioned, the DND claimed to commit to NFU and there was pressure on Pakistan from the US and other global powers that Pakistan should also make such an NFU commitment. From Pakistan's perspective of course India's NFU was not a reliable

commitment. Statements by Indian leaders themselves indicated that they would not fully commit to this objective and various other conditions have been introduced. He further added that the fact remains that Pakistan's nuclear tests neutralized India's major advantage against Pakistan which was its numerical superiority or advantage against the former. It was realized by India as well and it was publicly stated that as a result of nuclear test neutralization of India's conventional superiority became an issue that the Indian military was keen to rectify, which also led to the enunciation of CSD in about 2004-2005. India initially denied the CSD but then recently their army chief Bipin Rawat acknowledged it. However, from the very beginning, Pakistan was quite cognizant of the implications of CSD. This thinking of India was evident even at the end of the Kargil Conflict, when John Fernandez, the Indian Defense Minister claimed that conventional war below the nuclear threshold is possible. Thus, CSD persuaded Pakistan to develop a way to counter India and by 2011 Pakistan acquired the technological capability required for it in form of the development of low-yield nuclear weapons, which could be used in battlefield conditions. This enabled Pakistan to enunciate its FSD which enabled deterrence at three levels (strategic, operational, and tactical). These developments are important as they lead up to the situation on which discussion is about to begin. In these all scenarios, the important thing on the diplomatic side was the dialogue between India and Pakistan that had become dormant by this time and remains dormant. But for a considerable period, there were nine rounds of talks between Pakistan and the US in which the so-called security, strategic stability, and non-proliferation were held in which the real objective of the US was to convince Pakistan not to object to the start of the FMCT negotiations on CD. Moreover, they were also putting pressure on Pakistan to demonstrate restraint in the development of its strategic capabilities. In particular, the US wanted that Pakistan should not develop what they termed as tactical nuclear weapons; on it, they raised concerns about the NASR low range nuclear threshold. Moreover, the US also raised concerns over the safety and security of nuclear weapons and the command and control structure of these weapons. But, when these kinds of demands were placed on Pakistan, the US was not inclined in any such demands for restraint to India. On the contrary particularly during the Obama administration, global developments, plus growing hostilities between the US and China over the years led to the US opening the door for

civilian nuclear cooperation with India, which brought a qualitative change in the Indo-US strategic relationship that has progressed over the years since the Bush administration to present times in which the relationship is now part of strategic relationship based on the four foundational agreements and access to latest weapons technologies, highly encrypted data and as well as the targeting of adversary's assets. These agreements and partnerships have enhanced India's strategic capabilities tremendously and qualitatively in a different way while these agreements were made to help India against China as part of the so-called Quadrilateral alliance. However, the fact remains that the development of these offensive capabilities by India will also affect Pakistan.

From Pakistan's point of view, it is important to not distinguish between the counter-force and counter-value targeting, as sometimes the line is very blurred. So, what Pakistan needs to address in India's attempts towards attaining the capabilities for a splendid or disarming preemptive first strike. What this means is to have the ability to destroy all of Pakistan's nuclear assets potentially and retain the capability to blunt any Pakistani response from any residual capability that it may have. Moreover, regarding the debate of India's NFU commitment that people like Menon, Nagal, Parikar, the current defense minister Rajnath Singh, and even the former Prime Minister Vajpai after the standoff of 2001-02 have put into question the commitment towards NFU. Menon has also written in his book that there is considerable room in Indian Nuclear Doctrine for a first strike if the Indian policymakers come to the conclusion that Pakistan has been developing or putting in place its nuclear weapons in response to CSD type of attack and that India could go first. He raised the question that how India would be able to achieve such an objective is a point here and in his answer to this question he said that several technological developments point towards the operationalization of such a preemptive first strike. India has acquired an effective operational triad of delivery systems which includes land, air, and sea-based capabilities, it has the submarine-based second-strike capability and recently also conducted a deterrence patrol. Furthermore, India is building a BMD system based on Russian, American, and Israeli, and Indian technology. India is also experimenting and developing MIRV capabilities, cruise missiles, supersonic and hypersonic cruise missiles which have been mentioned, most importantly these technologies

are meant to attack Pakistan's nuclear assets in a preemptive strike and destroy the residual capabilities through their BMD systems. Amb. Akram further said that the possibility of such a scenario is however nearly zero because Indians are not stupid enough and their real rationale behind is to be able to have the potential to threaten Pakistan with such a preemptive disarming first strike in the calculation that Pakistan would be dissuaded to use its low yield in the event of an Indian limited conventional attack. So this is the whole scenario is an attempt to reassert and reestablish the salience of India's option to conduct a limited conventional war. But the reality is different from what India is trying to do or would like to achieve in a very limited short duration was demonstrated during the February 2019 crisis, when India could not even initiate the idea of CSD. The one lesson that can come out of the 2019 crisis is that nuclear deterrence remains in place given the fact that deterrence is dynamic and the fact that India is developing major capabilities. There is a need for Pakistan to take measures for its security and to ensure credible deterrence in the future.

In his concluding remarks Amb. Akram said that in his view Pakistan should take certain measures. Though, a lot of measures are already taken by Pakistan in this regard. But firstly, it would be necessary to enhance the safety and security of our nuclear assets as well as the command and control system. Secondly, Pakistan needs to increase the capability that would enable it to penetrate India's BMD, and this to large extent is already a capability that Pakistan has through the development of cruise and MIRV missiles. Moreover, we also need to develop a more effective and more credible second-strike capability, especially the one that is sea-based. Pakistan also needs to acquire longer-range missiles, Pakistan has the Shaheen missile series but we need to be able to have MIR capable Shaheen missiles, if possible. So, that Pakistan can cover the whole Indian Territory and its offshore islands and assets such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Other than that, Pakistan should be able to develop anti-satellite weapons capabilities because the future of warfare requires a very heavy dependence on satellite technologies for ISR and targeting. Since India has already acquired this technology which has brought the qualitative change that we need to equalize in the future. We also need to invest in new tech warfare technologies, given the fact that we have economic limitations. But still, we should be aware that in going forward new technologies such as cyber, AI and ML

will increasingly come into play. Lastly, we need to upgrade and continue to maintain a qualitative edge in our conventional capabilities through the weapon systems, through the training, which again has demonstrated during the 2019 crisis that our conventional capabilities also proved to be effective. It is important to focus on all these areas to send the message to India that any attempt or even any consideration of disarming preemptive first strike against Pakistan will be a futile exercise for them.

Observations/Question & Answers Session:

The first question was from Mr. Iftikhar Ali (Asst. Prof at Karakoram University, Gilgit), who asked: Does India indeed have a counterforce strategy or is it only facing temptation? Does India have sufficient organizational structure to successfully implement such drastic change in its nuclear strategy? If so, would it make sense for decision-makers on one side to opt for any counterforce first strike when they know the other has the secured second-strike capability? Amb Zamir Akram replied to the question and stated that India does not have that kind of capability as of now, this was acknowledged by Vipin Narang himself, who is one of the leading proponents of this Indian position, he made the statement in Carnegie Endowment in Washington, that 'India is not there yet, however, the fact is that the capabilities that are already being developed, certainly point in the direction in the ability to launch the preemptive first strike, whether that will be sufficient to prevent any retaliation, which is certainly not the case, so it will be really hard for India to do in the first place. But, the idea is not to launch the preemptive first strike, as they know; they are not going to take that kind of risk of landing one nuclear bomb at New Delhi or Bombay. Instead, they want to demonstrate that they can, if they can launch the preemptive first strike, in a hope that this will convince Pakistan not to use its low yield weapons, in case of India's limited conventional attack. So, there is a cause and effect kind of approach that they are thinking of, else it makes no sense, even the US at the height of the Cold War didn't imagine launching the first strike and getting away with it.

Dr. Rizwana added that India is quite ambitious to achieve its goals. India has somehow achieved its desirable second-strike capability; secondly, they have been given access to the international market, and they are procuring such technologies to achieve nuclear supremacy in

this particular region. Practically India is on the way and trying to achieve such capability, but also trying to increase the efficacy and effectiveness of its inventory, but at the same time, but the point is, why India wants to achieve its counterforce capability, they are on disadvantageous position, currently against Pakistan's low yield weapons, so to minimize that gap, they are destabilizing deterrence. So, to achieve and maintain peace, they are trying to and talk of fighting wars under the nuclear umbrella. These are dangerous actions and exploit peace, not between the two states, but in the region, which will have a far-reaching impact beyond the region as well.

The second question came from Ms. Sher Bano (Research Affiliate, SVI). The question was addressed to Dr. Adil Sultan. Since India is moving from its initial nuclear doctrine to its warfighting counterforce, preemptive and disarming first strike posture against Pakistan. Is Pakistan's current nuclear capability enough to deter Indian nuclear designs against Pakistan? Dr. Adil replied, yes! As for nuclear weapons, numbers do not matter. Deterrence, though, is a psychological phenomenon; it could give an advantage to the adversary to test new options, as discussed (on the Indian side). Pakistan has credible nuclear deterrence, that's why India is continuously contemplating its doctrine, trying new thoughts and developing new options. He further added that the intent can change anytime; nobody ever imagined that PM Modi would mobilize its dual-capable missile Prithvi in the 2019 crisis, but it happens, thus, similar kind of leadership in the future; given this false perception by DRDO and military that they can take on Pakistan can go for such adventurism.

Ms. Adeela Ahmed (Research Fellow, PIPS, Islamabad) asked a question to Dr. Rizwana Abbasi. Is it warfare in South Asia or Social determinism? Or it is the technology that leads politics and everything globally, Dr. Rizwana said. Within the determining factors of shifts in Global Order, one determining factor is the technology that drives the system. Technology is the factor that has globally transformed the nature and dynamics of war. In South Asia, as well, a technological shift is observed and has changed the nature and character of war in the region. Presently, it's the era of smart wars. The states at the global level are trying to achieve their short, crisp goals without escalating the conflict to the civilian domain, to minimize collateral

damage and achieve swift goals and objectives. But it is very difficult to achieve such goals with the nascent technology. Anyhow, Pakistan is still keeping an eye on new technology, to minimize the gap which India is trying to create in deterrent capability in South Asia. In a nutshell, it's the technology that drives the system in international politics.

The next question was posed by Ms. Sadia Kazmi (Director Academics, SVI) and was addressed to Amb (R) Zamir Akram. She asked: As Vipin Narang argued that India's No First Use policy has far greater flexibility than generally recognized and that India could strike first if it considers the Pakistani strike to be imminent. Could this provoke Islamabad to use a weapon first in an escalating conflict, rather than risk losing the option to lose? Zamir Akram stated that Vipin Narang has taken this statement from Shivshankar Memon's book 'Choices'. PM Vajpayee in 2001-2002 has also said the same thing that if Pakistanis think that we are going to wait for them to use nuclear weapons then they are mistaken. Amb Zamir continues, that Pakistan has never accepted the NFU policy if India, and we have stated in our Full Spectrum Deterrence very clearly that Pakistan will not allow the exercise of the so-called Cold Start Doctrine by India to seek a conflict under a nuclear threshold, because if there is a threat to Pakistan's security or integrity, and other scenarios mentioned by the former DG SPD Lt. Gen Khalid Kidwai that if Pakistan's security is threatened, it will be willing to consider nuclear retaliation against a conventional Indian attack. But between the points of actual use, there is an escalatory ladder, the first step of the ladder is Indian mobilization and that cannot be hidden, even if it is Cold Start or proactive, we would be able to tell that such a mobilization is underway and will inform the Indians that if you attack us then our options are open. If the threat is imminent, the Full Spectrum Deterrence doctrine will continue to hold and will continue to deter.

A very significant question was raised by Air Vice Marshal (R) Faheem Ullah Malik (Director at CASS), with Pakistan's responses to 2016 and 2019 surgical strikes in front of us, do we see a Pakistani civil-military leadership will generate a first or second strike in case of conflict compulsion demands so? Amb. (R) Zamir Akram replied, the official nuclear doctrine of Pakistan maintains ambiguity, but there are certain scenarios as mentioned by Lt. Gen Kidwai,

in which nuclear weapons could be used. So, we are not seeking the first use of nuclear weapons, but we are not seeking the first use of force; and that's what we are trying to convince the other side. Our policy of FSD has ensured that situation. It is the paralysis on India's nuclear policy and military policy, which has been imposed by FSD that they are looking at these counterforce options. So this paralysis has somehow served to the strategic stability, which was held in the above crisis. Dr. Adil added that Pakistan's policy is not offensive, and it maintains that nuclear weapons will only be used as a last resort if all other options are failed to deter India.

Amb. (R) Tajamul Altaf posed a question for Amb. (R) Zamir Akram, under the given circumstances, what would be the strategic policy of our partnership with China to counter any misadventure from India and Secondly, how can we cooperate with China in this regard? Amb. Zamir replied, the relationship with China is not only focused on this kind of nuclear exchange that we have with the Indians, the real issue is Chinese do not consider Indians, as equals in terms of nuclear relationship and they, do not wish to engage in the nuclear issue with India and Pakistan, however, Indian-US partnership is China-driven, aims at curtaining China, and the buildup of India's military capability, both nuclear and strategic are aimed to be as a counter way against China. So, at that counter, China has an interest in how the Indian strategic capability is developing. This allows Pakistan to enhance its strategic-military cooperation with China further. China has taken a very clear position on the Indian ambition of becoming a member of NSG with the assistance of the US. But we haven't had any coordinated dialogue with either US or China on how India is developing its strategic capability.

Mr. Khwaja Dawood (Senior Research Associate, SVI) asked; Why Pakistan lags in developing a comprehensive critical technology strategy. Dr. Rizwana responded that Pakistan possesses a comprehensive weapon program; secondly, we need to see our capacity resources and priority. Our priority is to maintain credible minimum deterrence and for that, we acquire technology we think and believe is sufficient for us to guarantee our survival against the adversary. Presently, our deterrence is maintained, but in the future, if there would be a shift in technology, then the required technology, which we think is sufficient to stabilize deterrence

in South Asia. We aim to preserve security, not prestige at a global or regional level. We already have a comprehensive network but still, our military-industrial complex is quite vigilant of what's going around.

Lastly, Ms. Anum Khan (Visiting Research Fellow, SVI) raised a question for Dr. Adil Sultan. Through Indo-US agreements like COMCASA, BECA, and quadrilateral alliance- some scholars believe that the US will exchange fifteen thousand personnel to be stationed in India, as well Indian personnel to be sent to the US. How will this US tri-service presence in India and IOR drastically change the dynamics of any future war between India and Pakistan? While responding to this question, Dr. Adil Sultan responded that India and the US have made a series of agreements before as well. Overall, they seem to portray these measures against China, but India is going to exploit them against Pakistan, to create hegemony in the region, and to increase its military superiority against Pakistan. The US doesn't seem to be interested in becoming a party in any military conflict between India and Pakistan. As we are not adversaries, and it doesn't suit US interests as well. But here the complications arise, as their interests emerge, and military doctrines get intermingled and their military capabilities become more interdependent, India could use those capabilities which have been provided against China, to be used against Pakistan. So that's the matter of concern as well since we still see the US as our ally, and that we have been raising our concerns to the US, it can establish a partnership with any country, including India, but that undermines Pakistan's security. The technologies gained from the US under BECA and COMCASA could be misused by India against Pakistan, but the US isn't going to be a direct party in the Indo-Pakistan conflict.

Amb. (R) Zamir Akram concluded that we should be very clear that the US is not a neutral party in Pakistan-India strategic environment, it is very clear that the US wants to prevent or will be involved in trying to prevent an outbreak of conflict between India and Pakistan because they are afraid of unintended or unintentional use or accidental use of nuclear weapons. But, the US for some years now, since developing a strategic partnership with India, has not been the neutral player towards India and Pakistan and has helped India in developing the capabilities. So a large measure of the responsibility of the existing strategic

instability in south Asia is a consequence of the American policy, which they have followed divinely to curtail China but have been oblivious to the impact that this policy had on strategic stability in South Asia. So, we must recognize this, we should not be persuaded to believe that the US is a neutral party.

In the end, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema (President/Executive Director, SVI) thanked all the panelists for their comprehensive presentations and for making their distinguished contributions. He also thanked the participants, who have joined the webinar and raised very significant questions.

Media Coverage:

The Coverage of the SVI webinar was reported in 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/watch/?v=1389454314734698>

THE NATION

<https://nation.com.pk/12-Mar-2021/pakistan-needs-credible-second-strike-capability-for-stable-deterrence-zamir>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8siasGjkVB8>