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Compiled & Edited by:
Haris Bilal Malik

Strategic Vision Institute
Islamabad

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SVI Foresight

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

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Editor's Note

Afghanistan's political and security situation is quite precarious given the intensity of Taliban advances, lack of progress in intra-Afghan talks, and, most importantly, the accelerated US withdrawal. This is the last chance that Washington has to determine a clear policy for Afghanistan. Anything less will not work. If the US puts considerable pressure on Kabul, Islamabad continues its sincere efforts, and the Taliban show willingness to compromise — then, the Afghan quagmire may be settled, leaving the US free to respectfully withdraw. As the US starts pulling out of Afghanistan, the Taliban are advancing across the Afghan territory indicating their victory in the war against the US-led NATO and ISAF troops. The Taliban being native knew Afghan dynamics well and they utilized what they needed for expanding their clout, as well as exposing the Afghan government's weaknesses. This perhaps is the core of the winning strategy of the Taliban. Based on this, they have been portraying themselves as real nationalists for the last one and half decades, working for their homeland and getting the foreign troops out.

Yet another incident of the capture of nuclear-related materials (6.4 kilograms of Uranium) from unauthorized persons in India has made headlines in the Indian media but largely ignored in the international media on 4th June 2021. What makes it even more alarming is that this is not the only incident of illegal uranium trade in India. The occurrence of back-to-back nuclear theft-related incidents especially in recent months has further exposed India's nuclear credentials and its non-adherence to international practices of nuclear safety and security. All such incidents are evidence of India becoming safe-heaven and a black market for illegal trade of nuclear-related materials. In South Asia, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its military applications has made significant progress in recent years. Specifically, India is impatient to dominate this domain and has shown deep interest in the application of AI for defence and security purposes. Though the occurrence of nuclear war because of AI is not visible soon, however, its application in nuclear capabilities and force postures will affect the strategic stability in South Asia.

This volume of the *SVI Foresight* provides a very thought-provoking insight given the India-US Enhanced Strategic Partnership; reaching new heights in recent years, it has brought long-lasting implications for regional security. Both the US and India pretend to have expanded their strategic partnerships on the pretext of cooperation on common regional interests. However, it seems that the agenda of both countries is way divergent. India still has a long way to go to cope up with China since its internal problems and lack of cohesion are way bigger than its long-term aspirations.

Pakistan has recently conducted military exercises in various regions across the country to demonstrate its conventional military capabilities. It is opined that the conventional imbalance in the south Asian scenario is not worsening; in fact, it is aptly controllable for Pakistan. The show-casing of such rigorous exercises is not a part of any aggressive posture; instead, it incorporates towards the peace efforts. As evident from the historical perspective in South Asia, deterrence has always been a key factor in the evasion of war and conflict. Hence, such exercises with high standards of preparedness in peacetime become the guarantor of peace in the volatile South Asian region. One of the articles analyzes how the proliferation of space technologies in the South Asian region has been quite a worrisome phenomenon. India has been working rigorously to enhance its space program at the indigenous level and also through cooperation with the US. With the development of advanced space technologies by India and integrating it with ground-based ballistic missile defence systems, the probability of a nuclear first strike has also increased. In the same vein, given the Indian pursuit of Network Centric Warfare (NCW) capabilities, the strategic stability of South Asia would be further undermined since at the core of adaptability of network-centric capabilities by India is its desire to manipulate the levels below the nuclear threshold of Pakistan. Based on this, India's military and doctrinal development which focuses on swift, fast, controlled, limited, and intense warfare with Pakistan would become more devastating.

It has been further deliberated that despite the military might and politico-economic muscles of the US; China has emerged as a strategic competitor that has considerably challenged US supremacy. Now, the US has been trying to confront China in various ways; either through utilizing Quad and now launching the B3W project to revamp and boost up its economic imperialism agenda. The B3W has been insinuated as an alternative being offered by the US to challenge the Chinese BRI under which billions of dollars have already been invested by China.

It is hoped that readers will find a good blend of articles focusing on various aspects of the contemporary security discourse in South Asia.

The *SVI Foresight* team invites and highly encourages contributions from the security and strategic community in the form of opinion-based short commentaries on contemporary political, security, and strategic issues. Any suggestions for further improvements are welcome at our [contact address](#). Please see [here](#) the copy of the *SVI Foresight* electronic journal. You can find us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and can also access the SVI [website](#).

Research Associate

Haris Bilal Malik

The US Endgame in Afghanistan

*Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai**

Afghanistan's political and security situation is quite precarious given the intensity of Taliban advances, lack of progress in intra-Afghan talks, and, most importantly, the accelerated US withdrawal. This is not to overlook the American quest to establish bases in the neighborhood to keep an eye on Afghanistan.

Yet things seem to be proceeding in the absence of either the required calculations or realistic considerations. The US is now reportedly departing by the new unconditional deadline of July 4, American Independence Day. That this has been unilaterally revised upwards since the mid-April announcement of an extended final date of September 11 — suggests that Washington's Afghan policy is in the doldrums.

The American quest to find neighboring countries willing to host its military bases indicates that the US wants to maintain a presence in the region on the pretext of counterterrorism efforts while holding those elements at bay that could harm its interests. However, this policy remains both suspicious and vague. The Taliban, who have around 100,000 men in their ranks control 57 percent of the district headquarters and 70 percent of the urban area; that is, they either have control or are struggling to take control according to reports. The Taliban have also strongly condemned the US intention to maintain some of its forces in neighboring countries — especially Pakistan — and warn of serious consequences if any nation hosts or leases out bases.

There are likely two reasons for the US's haste to exit Afghanistan.

Firstly, the US overstay is delaying intra-Afghan talks and any subsequent outcome. Consider, President Biden's initial delayed timeline announcement paved the way for the Taliban to refuse to attend the Istanbul conference. Since then, there has been no substantive advancement either in Doha Afghanistan, and Pakistan, except the efforts to convince the Taliban on Istanbul. The Taliban, after insistence from many countries — especially Pakistan — agreed to conditionally participate in the Istanbul conference by sending a small and low-level team. However, this thwarted any concrete result and actually killed the purpose of the meeting. Hence, Washington may assume its rapid exit can inject new impetus to the peace process; which has to be the final objective of US disengagement. The Americans, after all, want a face-saving end to the Afghan war where they were unable to dismantle the Taliban even after two decades of intensive struggle.

* Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai is a Senior Research Associate at the Strategic Vision Institute. His areas of interests are South Asia, Central Asia, Iran, and great powers involvement in the region.

Secondly, the July withdrawal could also signal a warning bell for Kabul to negotiate sincerely and seriously a way forward for intra-Afghan peace, thereby providing the US relief. Thus, Washington will be able to say that it played a positive role in ensuring the US-Taliban peace deal and then the intra-Afghan agreement. President Ghani has been opposing the US proposal regarding any final peace settlement since the Taliban-US Doha agreement of 2020. Indeed, the Afghan president the very next day announced that Kabul would not release any Taliban prisoners as a goodwill gesture, thereby delaying the intra-Afghan talks for at least six months. Similarly, when the Biden administration floated the idea of an interim government, which would have seen Ghani step down, he refused the idea and stood firm. Presently, the peace process has stalled and the US departure timeline is looming. The message is clear: Kabul must prepare to secure any sort of peace deal with the Taliban — no matter if it favors the latter, as in the case of the Doha agreement. The Ghani administration knows that it cannot withstand the Taliban, which have accelerated their advances in recent days. In such a situation, Kabul must seriously think about the country's future and do the needful.

Elsewhere, Pakistan is quite concerned for two reasons: no progress in intra-Afghan talks and the rapid US withdrawal. Pakistan's national security advisor recently told the media that Islamabad wants a responsible American withdrawal. To Pakistan, this means a done deal on Kabul-Taliban peace. If the current violence endures and Washington pulls out — the security situation will likely deteriorate and spill over into Pakistan. In addition, the potential refugee influx, if civil war erupts, will have drastic consequences for Pakistan's debt-ridden economy. Lastly, Pakistan may well hope to see a group enter the Afghan political scene that has a soft spot for this country.

This is the last chance that Washington has to determine a clear policy for Afghanistan. Anything less will not work. If the US puts considerable pressure on Kabul, Islamabad continues its sincere efforts, and the Taliban show willingness to compromise — then, the Afghan quagmire may be settled, leaving the US free to respectfully withdraw. And to claim that it helped resolve the Afghanistan conundrum.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/770799/the-us-endgame-in-afghanistan/>

Incidents of Uranium Theft in India: Depleting Nuclear Safety and International Silence

*Ahyousa Khan**

Yet another incident of the capture of nuclear-related materials from unauthorized persons in India has made headlines in the Indian media but largely ignored in the international media. On [4th June 2021](#), as reported in the Indian media, the authorities arrested seven people possessing approximately 6.4 kilograms of Uranium in the Eastern State of Jharkhand. This is the second time in less than a month where Indian authorities have captured such a gang in an attempt to sell uranium illegally. An incident of the same nature was reported just a few days ago in [May 2021](#) where authorities apprehended unauthorized persons, who were trying to sell nearly 7 kilograms of natural uranium on the black market. Notably, Indian authorities themselves believe that these events might be linked to a “national gang involved in illegal uranium trade”. This is a very serious issue because it means two things; first, that Indian local uranium reserves, radioactive nuclear materials, and facilities are not protected and are prone to black marketing. Secondly, this scenario has emerged because India is not adhering to international bindings of nuclear safety and security such as UN resolution [1540](#) and (Convention on Physical Protection on Nuclear Material) [CPPNM](#) under IAEA to secure its materials, reserves, and facilities. But, the most damaging aspect in this scenario is the discriminatory behavior of the international community, which is criminally silent on the violations of norms, practices, and regulations necessary for nuclear safety and security.

Though in both incidents, Uranium was in natural condition, which cannot be used for making bombs; however; it should be of great concern, as even in its natural state the Uranium can spread considerable radioactivity if used with [conventional explosives](#). Moreover, Indian authorities themselves are considering that these activities could be linked with national gangs involved in the illegal supply of uranium. This raises the point that actually how much natural uranium is illegally sold in the black market by India. Since these are only incidents that are being reported in the Indian media, there might be many incidents that have never been reported. Also, this gang was captured from near the area where Indian Uranium mines of Jharkhand are allocated, the likelihood of access of non-state actors to these mines cannot be denied. These incidents are critical for international security and stability because such radioactive material when sold in black markets could be brought by the non-state and states aspiring for nuclearization. Unfortunately, in such a scenario all the efforts currently going on to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons would be hampered. The recurring of these incidents reflect that India, despite being a member of CPPNM is not ensuring the protection of its nuclear materials from theft and sabotage by proper regulations, stringent mechanisms, and

* Ahyousha Khan is Senior Research Associate at Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad. Her areas of Interest are nuclear deterrence, non-proliferation, nuclear doctrines and emerging new technologies

control. Other than CPPNM, India has also signed UN resolution 1540, which makes it mandatory for the states to ensure security regulations, mechanisms, equipment required for the security of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) from the non-state actors. But, surprisingly, so far the UN or any other international organization has not taken notice of these recurring events. Rather, these mishaps by Indian authorities are shoved under the carpet. These incidents have been reportedly re-occurring in India, media reported these events in 2003, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2016, 2019, and now again in 2021.

Nuclear safety and security is a national matter of any state; however, against the backdrop of the potential damage, which these weapons can bring, they have become an international concern. Specifically, to an extent, where states are sometimes criticized, lauded, and sometimes rewarded for their behavior in this realm. In this regard, India appears as an exceptional case, where the formation of Nuclear Suppliers Group NSG to stop such events in the future has its roots in the Indian so-called peace nuclear explosion (PNE) in 1974. Ironically, a few years down the road, the same NSG gave a waiver to India for conducting nuclear export. Moreover, India was made part of many other regimes such as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Australia Group, and Wassenaar Arrangement. Although, these decisions were carried out in lieu of geo-political realities, where the West regards India as a balancer against China but it gave a free hand to India. Even the US-based NTI Report on Nuclear Security Index gives India less score in nuclear safety and security regulations. At a time when many nuclear theft-related incidents have occurred in India in recent years, disgracefully, India still desires to become a member of NSG based on its so-called nuclear record.

To sum up the situation, the occurrence of back-to-back nuclear theft-related incidents has further exposed India's nuclear credentials and its non-adherence to international practices of nuclear safety and security. If legal bindings such as CPPNM and 1540 would not be implemented in the future by India, the South Asian stability, as well as the international security, would be undermined. Moreover, if the international non-proliferation continues to remain lenient towards states like India, the rest would likely regard the international non-proliferation mechanism not just as discriminatory but even as hoaxing. Many states might prefer to proliferate for their own interests, which would not serve the non-proliferation mechanism and regime. A very candid example is that today even after two years of the last NPT review conference, the next has not been conducted and chances are that it might not be conducted this year.

https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/06/12/incidents-of-uranium-theft-in-india-depleting-nuclear-safety-and-international-silence/#disqus_thread

Illegal Uranium Sales in India: Non-Compliance with International Nuclear Security Norms

*Sher bano**

In the most recent incident, on [June 4, 2021](#), the Indian police arrested seven people and seized about 6.4 kilograms of uranium. The culprits were trying to sell this nuclear-related radioactive material at the black market. Surprisingly, this is the second consecutive incident of such kind within a month. Quite recently in the last month, the Indian 'ATS' (Anti-Terrorism Squad) arrested two men for the illegal possession of nearly [7 kilograms](#) of highly radioactive natural uranium in the Western state of Maharashtra. These consecutive incidents are the recent examples of a thriving nuclear black market in India. Ironically, for so many years India has been running propaganda against Pakistan that the latter's nuclear program is endangering the world. Whereas, Pakistan on the other hand has been adhering to the international practice of nuclear safety and security to make its nuclear assets secure. This is further evident from the fact that Pakistan has been ranked as the most improved country in theft ranking by NTI report 2020. Pakistan has raised serious concerns regarding the illegal uranium trades in India that clearly show enforcement and regulatory mechanisms and also non-compliance with the international nuclear security norms.

What makes it even more alarming is that these are not the first incidents of illegal uranium trade in India. There have been various other incidents in the past that indicate India has become the hub of the nuclear black market. In Thane, India the police found about [9 kilograms](#) of depleted uranium in 2016. It was believed to be the consignment worth 27 crore Rupees that was smuggled from gulf nations to be sold in the black market. In Kolkata, five men were arrested by the police with [1 kilogram](#) of uranium enclosed in plastic bags in July 2018. Later on, it was revealed that the substance in the bags was uranium resin that previously came into contact with radioactive uranium. In February 2021 in Indore, the police arrested four men that were trying to sell [2gm](#) of uranium in one plastic bag and three glass bottles. Similarly in March 2021, Law and enforcement agencies of Katmandu arrested four Nepalese nationals for the possession of [2.5 kilograms](#) of unprocessed highly radioactive uranium. As per the details shared with media by the police the uranium was smuggled by the arrestee's father-in-law from India, who used to work in a uranium mine about twenty years ago.

All such incidents are evidence of India becoming a safe haven and a black market for illegal trade of nuclear-related materials. Deeply concerned by this, Pakistan's Foreign Office has urged for the detailed investigation of illegal uranium trade in India. The way the radioactive

* Sher bano works as a Research Affiliate at the Strategic Vision Institute. Her areas of research are; Nuclear security and domestic and regional politics of South Asia.

material is being smuggled in between South Asian countries should be alarming. That's why a thorough investigation of India's nuclear black market and its uranium/nuclear assets must be conducted. Even though the amount of uranium that was seized is not enough to make a bomb, it can do considerable damage if used in a dirty bomb. Since India has been included in NSG even though it is not a member of NPT, the IAEA and other international bodies must hold India accountable for being a threat to international security.

It is worth mentioning here that India is bound to ensure the security of all nuclear material and facilities since it is a signatory of IAEA's ['CPPNM'](#) (Convention on Physical Protection on Nuclear Material). Moreover, as per the United Nations Security Council Resolution [1540](#) that was passed in 2004 under United Nations Charter VII, it is obligatory for all the member states to strengthen security measures and to make sure that the equipment that can be used in 'WMD' (Weapons of Mass Destruction) is not acquired by the non-state actors. The recent nuclear smuggling incidents in India are clear violations of both of these obligations and expose the serious deficiencies of the nuclear safety and security architecture of India. Further, according to UNSCR 1540, all the states should make laws that deal with incidents of nuclear theft and create an implementation mechanism; however, deliberately, the charges imposed on recent arrests are of disposing and concealing stolen property. Hence this is also a violation of UNSCR 1540 by India. The incidents that involve smuggling and theft of nuclear material are reported to ['ITDB'](#) (Incident and Trafficking Database) of IAEA. Since it is not clear if India had shared any such information with 'ITDB'; the international community should be concerned about the increasing incidents of nuclear theft in India.

Even though ensuring nuclear safety and security is a national responsibility, all the states would have to face the repercussions of their actions or inactions that could threaten international security. Hence it has become necessary to discourage such trends by holding such states accountable for their non-compliance with the international obligations and practices of nuclear safety and security. Inevitably, Pakistan has urged the international community to access the nuclear facilities of India for the safety of the entire region and also demand transparency.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/14062021-illegal-uranium-sales-in-india-non-compliance-with-international-nuclear-security-norms-oped/>

The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Strategic Stability in South Asia

Amber Afreen Abid*

Technological innovation has always been a significant point in the military realm. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a candid example of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). AI is a dual-use technology with implications in both military and civilian spheres. It is not a new concept; rather its use in the military domain has been there for years. The advancement in AI can significantly alter the strategic landscape. The modernization in AI could potentially shape the future global nuclear order; since the functionality of AI in nuclear weapon systems is improving. Thus, the improvement in technology will play a significant role in transforming the nature of warfare.

AI has a wide range of impacts on intelligence, information gathering, command and control, and defence, on one hand; and casts doubt on the survivability of one's second-strike capability, on other hand. This could lead to both over-trust as well as under-trust in technology, as the machines would be difficult to handle in case of crisis or calamity. The vulnerabilities in cyber security along with the rapid change in technology, the force postures, and nuclear policies of the states will also be significantly changed. The use of AI in the non-nuclear military realm can also potentially affect the nuclear sphere.

AI does not function alone. It is integrated into other technologies, and its effect depends upon the type of technology it is integrated with. It has exceptionally wider applications and is more convenient than nuclear technology. AI is thus not limited to the direct application of nuclear weapons, its appliance on non-nuclear technology increases the chances of detection of nuclear arsenals by the enemy, thus making the first strike of the enemy more successful. The precision targeting of the conventional weapons could also be increased, thus enabling the target of hardcore military assets. AI also opens an array of domains of warfare, thus increasing the vulnerability of nuclear technology and amplifying the chances of retaliation.

The risk of the use of nuclear weapons has increased significantly, considering the multi-polar world, the competitive inter-state strategic environment, and the continuous innovation in technological affairs. The application of AI could significantly increase the speed and decision-making time, which could grind down the Nuclear Command and Control Systems, thereby increasing the chances of escalation in a conflict. If the means of intelligence gathering would be compromised, the probability of a first strike or blind strike would significantly increase.

* Amber Afreen Abid is a Research Associate at Strategic Vision Institute. Her research interests include nuclear politics, nuclear deterrence, proliferation and non-proliferation regimes, and changing nuclear strategies in south Asia.

In the South Asian context, the emergence of AI and its military applications has made significant progress in recent years. Specifically, India is impatient to dominate this domain and seems to prefer the military application of AI over civilian use. In this regard, it has shown deep interest in the application of AI for defence and security purposes. Though the occurrence of nuclear war because of AI is not visible in the near future, however, its application in nuclear capabilities and force postures will affect the strategic stability in South Asia.

The nuclear deterrence stability is evident in the South Asian scenario, and the stability-instability paradox is vividly observed. This illustrates the picture of stability at a higher level, with the absence of all-out war from the panorama; however, low-level conflicts continue to prevail. Strategic stability exists when the belligerents lack any incentive to indulge in provocative action. Any minor advancement in the realm of AI could potentially disturb the South Asian deterrence equation.

India is advancing towards the nuclear doctrine of First-Use, considering the shift in the counterforce postures. Moreover, India is continuously enhancing its precision-strike capability, and making technological advancements in various military domains, including the purchase of BMD, ASAT weapon technology, the quest for hypersonic and continuous modernization of nuclear arsenals. Thus, considering all the developments, the South Asian scenario is gradually moving towards instability, owing to India's regional hegemonic dreams. In such a scenario, any advancement made by India would potentially disturb the regional strategic stability. The innovation in Artificial Intelligence would flare the innate instability in the South Asian region.

The absence of any bilateral agreement between the South Asian nuclear rivals, both in the nuclear and conventional realm, tends to worsen the strategic state of affairs. Both countries should effectively cooperate, to mitigate the potential risk that could be caused by AI. Moreover, no matter how much advancement could be made in the technological realm, the magnitude of human control should never be relinquished, and Pakistan might never accord the decision-making role to AI, no matter how expedient the role of AI could be.

<http://southasiajournal.net/the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/>

India-US Enhanced Strategic Partnership: Where does it stand today?

*Haris Bilal Malik**

During the cold war, India and the Soviet Union have remained strategic partners of each other since the major bulk of the Indian defence needs were fulfilled by the latter. Likewise, even today India remains one of the biggest arms markets to Russia. However, soon after the cold war, when the US re-prioritized its policies vis-à-vis South Asia and the Pacific region. India found this change in US policies as an opportunity to further open its foreign policy options and quested for new alliances and partnerships. In this regard, both the US and India tended to enhance their relations which were to an extent slow during the cold war. In the later years during the Bush administration, in particular, the bilateral relations of both countries were significantly boosted. The signing of the [US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement](#) of 2005-06 is regarded by many as a watershed moment towards developing a strategic partnership. The subsequent US administrations continued with the trend and ultimately both the countries moved to establish a strategic partnership. This enhancement of relationship continues to date since the evolved regional dynamics have further paved the way for a long-term bilateral strategic partnership. With reaching new heights in recent years, the India-US strategic partnership has brought long-lasting implications for regional security.

It is quite notably important to discuss that both countries have signed various defence procurement agreements worth millions of USD in recent years. These include the supply of high-tech military hardware for the Indian forces by the US. In this regard, the [agreements](#) of acquisition of various advanced platforms for the Indian Navy which include torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, helicopters, anti-submarine, and patrol aircrafts for the Indian Navy are quite significant. The US is also in the process of supplying Apache AH-64 helicopters to the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force. Apache is widely regarded as one of the most advanced helicopters available in the world. Moreover, there are various reports that India and the US might sign another landmark agreement for the supply of the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System-II ([NASAMS-II](#)) to the former.

Apart from these agreements, the US has signed [four](#) very important and foundational agreements with India. Starting from the year 2002, these include; General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), the Logistics Exchange Memorandum Agreement ([LEMOA](#)) of 2016 when the US gave the status of 'Major Defence Partner' to India. Later on, in 2018 both the countries signed an agreement named Communication, Compatibility, and Security Arrangement ([COMCASA](#)). The last agreement in this regard, Basic Exchange and Cooperation

* Haris Bilal Malik is a Research Associate at the Strategic Vision Institute. He works on South Asian Security and Nuclear Security with a special focus on nuclear deterrence.

Agreement ([BECA](#)) that was signed between the two countries quite recently in 2020 is very significant. Without going into the technical details, these all agreements are meant for enhanced high-tech military cooperation. Specifically, such agreements, the US has till now only signed with its closest partners; and now India is among them.

While being deeply concerned and perhaps feared by the Chinese expanding foothold in almost every part of the world, the US has been trying to counter the latter for many years. In its quest of having a strong anti-China alliance in the region, India holds immense significance in the US strategic calculus. The US holds that while having a strong strategic partnership with India that would involve enhanced cooperation at the military, economic and diplomatic levels is a key to counter China. In this regard, the India-US ties have considerably become more materialistic in the last two decades as compared to the past.

In addition to some of the above-mentioned materialistic dimensions of their enhanced strategic and defence partnership, both the US and India have been involved in another transnational regional alliance known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) specifically in the last few years. In this regard, the [March 2021](#), virtual summit of Quad leaders was meant to deliberate on a framework to further institutionalize the alliance. Many speculate it as a US' move towards make-believe an "Asian NATO" intended to counter China. Though might be a bit exaggerated, however, the significance of this notion cannot be entirely negated since for NATO the common adversary was the Former Soviet, in Quad's case, apparently, China has been regarded as a common adversary of the Pacific states. While India, though not a pacific power, but in order to contain China, has been equipped militarily and given a key role in all this arrangement. In pursuit of this, the US is significantly increasing the military capabilities of India. On the other hand, India under its aspiration of great power status is willing to accept such an enhanced role that aims to serve the mutually beneficial interests of both the US and India. This creates a security dilemma for Pakistan as well, since India has troubled relations with almost all of its neighbors in general and China and Pakistan in particular. With its enhanced military capabilities, India would be in a much better position to undermine Pakistan's security. Consequently, the hostility between India and Pakistan would likely increase further. This would bring long-lasting implications for broader regional security.

Hence at the present, it becomes quite comprehensible that both the US and India pretend to have expanded their strategic partnerships on the pretext of cooperation on common regional interests. In this regard, however, it seems that the agenda of both countries is way divergent. The US wants to contain China with its ability to establish and then maintain diverse alliances in the region. While India aspires to become a great power at any cost; in pursuit of this India might not be willing and even capable enough to confront China directly at least for the time being. India still has a long way to go to cope up with China since its internal problems and lack of cohesion are way bigger than its long-term aspirations. This is further evident from

the way India was humiliated by China in the [Ladakh-Galwan](#) crisis of 2020. The situation seems to be not very different as of now or even might become a little bit more complex for India. In such circumstances, the region would likely become more vulnerable to crises. Last but not the least, Pakistan needs to remain vigilant of the changing regional dynamics and continue to further strengthen its relations with both China and Russia.

<https://strafasia.com/india-us-enhanced-strategic-partnership-where-does-it-stand-today/>

Pakistan Consolidating Conventional Deterrence through Military Exercises

*Amber Afreen Abid**

The guarantor of peace has always been a country's prepared military, with dynamic and vigorous training, exotic vigilance, and wholehearted preparedness. This concocts the military for the impulsive circumstances, and whatsoever the crisis falls upon it. Pakistan has recently conducted various military exercises in various regions across the country. The show-casing of such rigorous exercises is not a part of any aggressive posture; instead, it incorporates towards the peace efforts. As evident from the historical perspective in South Asia, deterrence has always been a key factor in the evasion of war and conflict. Hence, such exercises with high standards of preparedness in peacetime become the guarantor of peace in the volatile South Asian region.

Pakistan has conducted numerous exercises including the multinational naval exercises, [Aman 2021](#), with the aim to strengthen its control in the Arabian Sea; the exercise [Jidad-ul-Hadeed](#), to strengthen its foothold in the desert areas; the exercise [Taskskheer-e-Jabal](#) to augment its preparedness in different offensive and defensive maneuvers in mountainous and semi-mountainous terrain. All of these were aimed at achieving the concept of defence through extraordinary preparedness and perfection in the desired areas. The Pakistan Army did arduous exercises to ace synergy in numerous components of the forces, and to sail through the exceptional response measures under conventional operations setting.

More than twenty years have passed since Pakistan and India stepped into the nuclear world; conventional deterrence, however, has remained essential to the maintenance of strategic stability in the South Asian region. India in its quest for achieving strategic aims and regional hegemony has always tried to disturb the strategic balance below the nuclear threshold and always made an effort to embark on limited war strategies. The limited window below the nuclear threshold could become a conflict accelerator, if at all the two nuclear states climb the rig, the strategic stability could be disturbed. Thus, to relieve this pressure by entangling non-nuclear means below the nuclear belt, would add up to the deterrence stability of the region.

John Mearsheimer explains the concept of conventional deterrence, as the strategy not merely about the defensive or offensive weapons, but also on the political planning and considerations, and military strategy. The rationale behind conventional deterrence is to delay the attainment of the aim of the adversary, by delaying or elongating the war. Thus, deterrence

* Amber Afreen Abid is a Research Associate at Strategic Vision Institute. Her research interests include nuclear politics, nuclear deterrence, proliferation and non-proliferation regimes, and changing nuclear strategies in south Asia.

holds its significance, when the potential enemy believes that quick attainment of the objective is not doable. Thus, conventional deterrence deters the enemy from any misadventure under the nuclear overhang.

Pakistan was compelled to adopt a dual-track military strategy, both conventional and unconventional military preparedness, to overcome India's aggressive designs at both levels. Pakistan's unconventional deterrent posture of Full Spectrum has been successful in deterring India, as it withheld the chances of a full-scale war between the two nuclear rivals, however, the full conflict spectrum in south Asia still prevails. India, in its endeavor to create instability at the conventional level, with the soaring chances of low-level conflicts, the continuous Indian military modernization, and aggressive war doctrines has pushed Pakistan to remain more vigilant at the conventional end too. Pakistan requires unimpeachable military capability, training, and preparedness for making the war costlier and unthinkable for India. The incorporation and strengthening of conventional deterrence in South Asia will increase the cost of any misadventure and offensive maneuver for the Indian military, thus preventing the limited aggressive designs under the nuclear umbrella.

Given the evolving regional security threats, pragmatic and advanced training and exercises for operational readiness are imperative for the country's military. Pakistan has to be prepared for any proactive war strategies or any counterforce ventures that could be waged from the opponent's end. In this regard, it is quite worth mentioning that Pakistan has time and again nullified the practicality of the Indian much-hyped Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) through a combination of conventional and unconventional deterrence. This is further evident from the [Pulwama-Balakot crisis of 2019](#); when Pakistan's appropriate conventional response was quite significant and played the desired deterrent role despite the existence of credible nuclear deterrence.

Hence to summarize the whole debate, the all-encompassing Indian military modernization creates a security dilemma for Pakistan. Continuous military modernization and preparedness are essential to maintain strategic stability in South Asia and to prevent any future misadventures by the adversary. A strong conventional deterrence creates panic in the mind of the adversary, that the cost of the conventional limited war could possibly supersede the designed benefits, and could turn out to be a humiliating defeat. The conventional imbalance in the south Asian scenario is not worsening; in fact, it is aptly controllable for Pakistan. The incessant exercises at various topographies and stratum set off the military preparedness at the conventional stage. It augments the profound planning and befitting appliance of operational strategies and options to counter any future threat matrix.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/23062021-pakistan-consolidating-conventional-deterrence-through-military-exercises-oped/>

Indian Space Weaponization and Integration of its Ballistic Missile Defence

*Sher bano**

The proliferation of space technologies in the South Asian region has been quite a worrisome phenomenon. It has further complicated the regional security environment by significantly increasing the prospects of wars and conflicts. India aspires to have a military presence in outer space and to be regarded as among the few countries that possess this capability. Under its quest to achieve great power status, India has been working rigorously to enhance its space program at the indigenous level and also through cooperation with the US. India's space aspirations pose a serious challenge to Pakistan's security since the latter's space program is yet to take off. In this regard, a very alarming fact is that India intends to acquire more remote sensing satellites in '[LEO](#)' (Low Earth Orbit) which would further destabilize the region. Without having the remote sensing satellite in LEO the Indian enhanced '[BMD](#)' (Ballistic Missile Defence) systems cannot work proficiently. The more functional 'BMD' system would provide a higher probability of survival for the Indian arsenals and further ensure the second-strike capability. This integration of Indian BMD with its space satellites would increase the chances of war in South Asia.

In order to contemplate the first strike, '[ISR](#)' (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities are the prerequisite for any state. Space-based assets play a very important role in this regard by providing reliable 'ISR' data and early information at times when other military equipment becomes ineffective. To enhance its target acquisition capability, India has increased the constellation of navigational, communication, and remote sensing satellites. Similarly, the Indian dedicated geostationary satellite [GSAT-7](#) having 'C3' (Command, Control, and Communications) capability would support the delivery of Ballistic Missile in case of a war in the future. This capability would provide India with confidence that its BMD system is capable enough to detect any incoming missile during a conflict. It would embolden India with an advantageous position vis-à-vis Pakistan to go for a pre-emptive strike.

The rapid space weaponization by India has tilted the conventional balance in its favor. By providing the early detection of an incoming missile, the Indian network satellites in space would further strengthen its 'BMD' shield. Moreover, after the acquisition of [S-400](#), the world's most advanced air defence shield from Russia, India would likely integrate it with its space-based early information system. India has also developed anti-satellite ([ASAT](#)) capability owing to its BMD Program and its Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) development. The purpose

* Sher bano works as a Research Affiliate at the Strategic Vision Institute. Her areas of research are; Nuclear security and domestic and regional politics of South Asia.

of ASAT capability is to target the rival satellites and achieve complete space dominance over the region. Hence this disparity between India and Pakistan with regards to the dependence on space-based assets would likely compel Pakistan to take countermeasures.

India's development in domains like; ASAT and BMD, and its continuous attempts of space weaponization would bring severe implications for the South Asian strategic stability. With the provision of its increased capability of identifying the adversary's target, the temptation to perform the first strike also increases. Hence, Pakistan would be left with no choice but to ensure a higher level of alert and further rely on its nuclear capability to play the deterrence role. Moreover, if India opts for a nuclear first strike that is facilitated by its advanced space technologies, Pakistan might be facing a dilemma or scenario of use it or lose it. Acquisition of offensive space capabilities could also lead to the adoption of aggressive military doctrines and a hostile political outlook. Pakistan on the other hand would likely rely on its existing credible nuclear deterrence posture until and unless it decides to acquire such space-based capabilities.

In order to counter Indian space militarization while staying within the existing doctrinal posture of minimum credible deterrence, Pakistan needs to carefully re-evaluate both its strengths and shortcomings. It needs to capitalize on strengthening its missile program by developing the latest versions of cruise missiles and "MIRVs" (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles) systems that can penetrate the Indian advanced air defence shield. Under the vision 2047 of '[SUPARCO](#)', Pakistan needs to be very vigilant of the emerging Indian threats and develop an indigenous observation and surveillance capability that can be used to identify Indian offensive military assets. Moreover, Pakistan must continue its efforts for the demilitarization of space by highlighting the threat posed by the Indian endeavors regarding space weaponization in the region. Apart from these, Pakistan needs to be selective in its calculated responses since acquiring a BMD system or ASAT capability could be a long-term option. Hence, Pakistan can also focus on using disruptive technologies such as laser attacks; cyber-attacks, and jamming that can target Indian space assets at least for the time being.

Hence, the strategic stability of South Asia has become further undermined and the region has become more volatile since India has brought the arms race to outer space. With the development of advanced space technologies by India and integrating it with ground-based defence systems, the probability of a nuclear first strike has also increased. India's offensive military modernization drive along with the acquisition of advanced surveillance and situational awareness capabilities has further limited the prospects of conflict resolution in the region. This dynamic is exacerbated by space-based technologies that hold destabilizing outcomes for the overall regional security and stability.

<http://southasiajournal.net/indian-space-weaponization-and-integration-of-its-ballistic-missile-defence/>

How did the Taliban win the war against the US?

*Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai**

As the US starts pulling out of Afghanistan, the Taliban are advancing across the Afghan territory clearly indicating their victory in the war against the US-led NATO and ISAF troops. The US officials on one hand accept they have lost the Afghan war although in grim words, while the Taliban have been repeatedly and bluntly proclaiming they have won the war against the US. In an interview, “We have won the war, America has lost” a local Taliban commander told BBC last April. However, a change can be seen in the Taliban’s ultra-conservatism: they are softened as compared to the 1990s.

However, a few questions need to be answered: How did the Taliban win a war against the mighty superpower? What is their strength? What strategy have they been to take a superpower out of Afghanistan?

From the 1990s till their fall in 2001, the Taliban’s held a radical ideology where women’s rights were violated and non-Pashtuns and the Hazara were in a miserable condition. Girls were not allowed to go to school and women were barred from jobs. After their fall, their subsequent rise and struggle and then involvement with the outer world have made them soften and moderate. Besides, they have had some concrete strategies which put them on the path of victory against the US and ultimately paved the way for their role in the upcoming set-up on one hand and provided them legitimacy on the other. The Taliban after their resurgence adopted the following strategies:

Ideology is one of the major elements that provided strength to the Taliban. Their strong adherence to Islamic ideology has tightly tied their organizational structure. They believe in Jihad against the foreign forces and according to their interpretation of Islam. They consider war against the US and Afghan forces as jihad, which has two results: to be a martyr or survivor. In both cases, they see themselves successful.

Secondly, propaganda has been their great strength. They called the US an occupation force and advocated for the liberation of their homeland from foreign occupation. As the Afghan society is religious thus it was easy to convince people to wage a war against the foreign forces by joining their cadres. David Kilcullen in his book ‘Accidental Guerilla’ says that no insurgency can be successful without local support. Hence, if the Taliban had no local support, they wouldn’t be so successful in their campaign against the foreign forces.

* Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai is a Senior Research Associate at the Strategic Vision Institute. His areas of interests are South Asia, Central Asia, Iran, and great powers involvement in the region.

Thirdly, guerrilla warfare has been quite successful in the difficult Afghan mountainous terrain, Taliban used the strategy of hit and run.

Fourthly, bad governance and corruption greatly contributed to the Taliban's propaganda of calling the Kabul administration incapable of ruling the country. Corruption is the main indicator of a weak political administration. Afghan masses are fed up with a wide range of corruption at government departments, which compel them to search for an alternative that could help reduce the sufferings of the masses.

Fifthly, the Taliban's calculation of Afghan power politics has been quite accurate. The key decision they made was negotiating with the US first not the Afghan government, otherwise, the position they hold now won't be there today. Obama during his second term was persistently pressing the Taliban for negotiation with the Afghan government but they always dismissed the idea. The Taliban considered Washington as a power center that decided on Afghanistan.

Sixthly, the Taliban's diplomacy has been quite successful over the table with the US and western powers over the years. Taliban have rarely stepped back from their core demands. The troops' withdrawal was the Taliban's main demand since the commencement of the peace process in 2009. Similarly, it was unusual for the world that the US was recognizing the Taliban, previously terrorists, as a legitimate political force in Afghan. However, the Doha agreement was one of the huge political victories, a result of a decade-long negotiation, for the Taliban.

Hence, the Taliban being native knew Afghan dynamics well and they utilized what they needed for expanding their clout, as well as exposing the Afghan government's weaknesses. The Taliban who have been portraying themselves as real nationalists for the last one and half decades, work for their homeland and get the foreign troops out need to contribute to peace rather than chaos. It's time for them to deliver. However, at the same time, reasonable behavior is needed from the Kabul administration otherwise, achieving peace in Afghanistan would not be possible.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/779547/how-did-the-taliban-win-the-war-against-the-us/>

Analyzing the US (B3W) Initiative: Is There Any Prospective Role for India?

*Haris Bilal Malik**

The US is no doubt the world's sole superpower; but as many believe, in recent years, it has been facing various challenges to maintain its political, military, and economic supremacy. Based on its strong economic muscles, technological superiority, and military prowess, the US has ensured an overwhelming military presence primarily in the form of various combatant commands spread all around the world. Likewise, the US has remained involved in military intervention in various regions across the world. Specifically, during the last two decades, it has directly invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and led various indirect military campaigns in other countries most of which are located in the Middle Eastern and African regions. The US has been regarded as the sole security guarantor in some of the key regions of the world in general and the Middle East in particular. In addition to having strong economic muscles while being the largest economy in the world, its power projection has been referred to as a demonstration of its military supremacy. But now it appears that the US is trying to revamp and boost up its economic imperialism agenda. Specifically, this has become more relevant since China has launched its [Belt and Road Initiative](#) (BRI) worth trillions of dollars in the year 2013.

In pursuit of its agenda to deal with this considerable economic challenge from China, very recently, on 11th June at the G-7 summit that was held in Carbis Bay, England, the US came up with an initiative, which has created considerable hype in international media, known as a "[Build Back Better World](#)" (B3W). It has been insinuated as an alternative being offered by the US to challenge the Chinese BRI under which billions of dollars have already been invested by China. Though much of the details and framework of the implementation of the proposed B3W are not disclosed as of now, the massive project is intended to provide an estimated more than [40 trillion](#) US dollars that are to be utilized by the developing countries by the year 2035. Further, it has been proposed that the B3W would focus on investments in climate, health, technology, human and gender rights. Specifically, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic that has impacted the economies across the world, this project holds immense significance for the US vis-à-vis its global leadership role by offering an alternative to the BRI.

To further analyze, when the US was pursuing its power projection through military interventionism, China kept on strengthening its economic muscles and increasing its military capabilities without indulging in unnecessary military adventurism. This has been insinuated as the decline of the US and a considerable rise of China that can challenge the former in every

* Haris Bilal Malik is a Research Associate at the Strategic Vision Institute. He works on South Asian Security and Nuclear Security with a special focus on nuclear deterrence.

geostrategic aspect. While being on a path of sustainable development and foreseeable economic integration, China launched its BRI as a reminiscence of the ancient Silk Road. The project is aimed at connecting; Europe, Asia, and Africa through a network of corridors and massive Chinese investment in socio-economic development projects. Many believe that the BRI initiative is an expansion of Chinese influence and its strong economic foothold from Asia to Europe and beyond. This would ultimately challenge US supremacy in the longer term, since; a strong and sustainable economy is widely regarded as a prerequisite of military might to be maintained. On the military front, China, though still not is at par with the US military might, but has appeared as a challenge to the latter. In this regard, China has been developing the latest military technologies that were previously limited to the US and its traditional counterpart Russia. Thus, in the US perception, China has seemingly emerged as a country that can challenge its supremacy both at the economic and military front.

This is further evident from this very fact that during the last few years, this notion has dominated the US foreign policy re-orientation. For instance, the US Pivot to Asia that was announced in 2011 was more or less an acknowledgment of the Chinese forthcoming challenge to US supremacy. Subsequently, in the [US National Security Strategy](#) of 2017 China was described as a revisionist power along with Russia. Based on this, the former US President Donald Trump declared China as a strategic competitor; and the tensions between the two countries reached new heights in his era. Even now in 2021, the Biden administration's national security agenda, documented as the "[interim strategic guidance](#)" describes China as the only competitor that can challenge the US. This guidance specifically aimed at restoring the US global leadership role and boosting up alliance systems to counter China.

It is also notably important to discuss here that, at the military and diplomatic front, the US has already initiated the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad); a transnational security alliance to counter China in the Pacific region. Similarly, India has been deliberately given a significant role in the revamping of Quad since the US wants to counter China through strong alliance systems. In recent months, this has been insinuated by many as an Asian version of NATO. Now, on the economic front, the launching of B3W has been projected as a US version of economic integration like the Chinese BRI. There are widespread speculations that India is very likely to join the B3W. This is evident from the official statement of the Indian [External Affairs Ministry](#) that India would study the plan and then engage with the project subsequently. Even though it would be very early to say that India is going to join the project very soon, specifically, given the Indian enhanced role in Quad based on the US-India mutual interests vis-à-vis China, the likelihood of India becoming part of B3W cannot be entirely ruled out in the longer term.

While summarizing it all, it becomes quite apparent that the US considers China as a threat to its supremacy. The fact remains that, despite the military might and politico-economic muscles

of the US, China has emerged as a strategic competitor that has considerably challenged the US at various fronts. Now, the US has been trying to confront China in each possible way; either through utilizing Quad and now launching of B3W. China on the other hand has responded in a very unusual way; gone are the days when [a small group of countries](#) is to decide the fate of the rest of the world. This indicates and further establishes the notion that both the US and China are now in strategic competition; the level of which would likely intensify in the years to come.

<https://strafasia.com/analyzing-the-us-b3w-initiative-is-there-any-prospective-role-for-india/>

Network Centric Warfare Capabilities and Strategic Stability in South Asia

*Ahyousa Khan**

Network Centric Warfare (NCW) capabilities are meant to provide real-time information to a state in a war or conflict. It aims to not only give that specific state superiority over its adversary but also embolden it to defeat its adversary in an actual conflict. The core of NCW is primarily the amalgamation and integration of all aspects of forces, techniques, capabilities, procedures, and services involved in warfare. To ensure the synergy of all these components for achieving a successful strategy in modern warfare, many developed countries are adopting the NCW approach. In the South Asian context, given the Indian pursuit of NCW capabilities, its military and doctrinal development which focuses on swift, fast, controlled, limited, and intense warfare with Pakistan would become more devastating. These capabilities would enhance the coordination between Indian forces with the provision of improved intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, communication, situational awareness for decision making during crisis or conflict. Consequently, all these capabilities would become a challenge for strategic stability in South Asia because at its crux is the Indian desire to manipulate and overcome the notion of nuclear deterrence or mutually assured destruction in the region.

NCW does not just deal with the consolidation of the physical aspect but also focuses on the behavioral and human aspects. As NCW facilitates the synergy of all components of forces, therefore it enables militaries to have increased speed and greater responsiveness. NCW would be beneficial for Indian forces because they are spread across huge land-mass. Thus, to acquire quick responsiveness to any kind of crisis, conflict, and military action NCW would increase the combat effectiveness and chances of success. Moreover, it would decrease risks and costs by facilitating collaboration and coordination of forces. Although NCW is a modern and evolving concept there are few important components of this concept, such as; shared awareness, quick decision making by command, compressed operations, self-synchronization, informational superiority, and demassification. It provides militaries with timely information about the adversary and enables the state to utilize that information through effective communication. After the border standoff of 2001-02 between India-Pakistan, the Indian military realized that with its existing structure it would not be able to exploit the level below the nuclear threshold effectively, therefore it drafted the [Cold Start Doctrine](#) (CSD). As per the CSD, rapid military action would be taken against Pakistan with the help of integrated border units within a few hours across multiple locations. Thus, to carry out such quick action and operationalize CSD,

* Ahyousha Khan is Senior Research Associate at Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad. Her areas of Interest are nuclear deterrence, non-proliferation, nuclear doctrines and emerging new technologies

Indian forces require network-centric capabilities to have situational awareness for successful operation.

In 2005, Indian forces conducted the military exercise named “[Vajra Shakti](#)” to adopt the network-centric concept and assimilate its forces accordingly. In this regard, Force Multiplications Command Post (FMCP) was created to merge the information coming from sensors, radars, AWACS, and satellites to give ground forces better information in the fog of war. So, today after CSD all subsequent Indian military doctrines like for instance the [2017 Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces \(JDIAF\)](#) and the [2018 Land Warfare Doctrine \(LWD\)](#) are more focused on the integration of forces, limited war, surgical strikes, hot pursuits, and quick responses. These concepts and doctrinal developments are facilitated with the help of the development and acquisition of technology as well. One of the critical technologies in this regard is satellite, in which India has been investing heavily. Moreover, India has also signed agreements with the US, which will also give it access to satellite imagery and information. AWACS, UAVs, Surveillance radars, ISR systems, and tactical information and communication systems are also among the technologies in which Indian has been spending huge budgets for facilitating its forces in acquiring network-centric capabilities.

This situation is damaging for the strategic stability of South Asia because at the core of adaptability of network-centric capabilities by India is its desire to manipulate the levels below the nuclear threshold of Pakistan. In South Asia, nuclear deterrence is a key factor in keeping both nuclear rivals at bay. But, India’s continuous attempts to break free from the mutual vulnerability are driving it to acquire and develop offensive military technology and draft offensive military doctrines. Subsequently, Pakistan has been compelled to invest in such military technologies to maintain nuclear deterrence to enhance its security and ensure stability in the region. In response to the Indian much-hyped CSD, Pakistan has developed its concept of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) to bridge the gap between its conventional and strategic forces. In 2019, during the Balakot/Pulwama crisis Indian forces tried to implement their network-centric capabilities but the attempt resulted in the loss of a helicopter in [friendly fire](#) and two of its planes were also shot down by Pakistani forces. These developments reflect that though India is moving towards developing and acquiring such capabilities, it will take time to fully implement these concepts. This is perhaps beneficial for Pakistan as in the meantime it can carefully analyze the situation and develop its own network-centric warfare capabilities along with the role of strategic forces to counter India.

<http://southasiajournal.net/network-centric-warfare-capabilities-and-strategic-stability-in-south-asia>