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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 the SVI Research Officers, 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

SVI Foresight for the month of March brings about a number of discussions on topics related to South Asia. It touches upon some extremely significant issues, including the nuclear signaling, handling of conventional and unconventional weapons, crisis escalation and the China's growing influence in the region and beyond.

The issue discusses the major issue of nuclear signaling, as it plays an important role in the Strategic Stability of the region. It can be asserted that the working communicability framework of the region over the years has discouraged Pakistan and India from exchanging their strategic arsenals but has failed in resolving pivotal conflicts. Moreover, the rapid Indian arms buildup has generated an arms race between the two states. Furthermore, India fails to handle the sophisticated technology or is intentionally misusing it, as the incidents of misfiring are often seen at their end, which leads to instability in the region.

Pakistan has never initiated any conflict but has always responded befittingly to any nefarious designs against its territorial integrity. The advancement and perusal of tactical and strategic weapons by Pakistan to restore a military balance in relation to India are inevitable conflict management tools that Pakistan is compelled to employ to ensure deterrence stability in South Asia. The issue also contains an insight into India's holding of G-20 Summit being held in IIOJK, and China's growing influence in the Middle East which shows how successful Beijing's push to field itself as a global peacemaker proves in the long haul.

It is hoped that this issue will help readers in staying updated with the current strategic environment and they will find the analyses useful. 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, nuclear, and strategic issues. Any suggestions for further improvements are welcome. 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](#).

Amber Afreen Abid
Editor, SVI Foresight

Nuclear Signaling in South Asia

Sher Bano

Nuclear signaling in theory can be advantageous for both transmitter and receiver if signals are understood properly. The weak or misinterpreted signals can lead towards further deterioration of the situation especially at the times of crisis. The complex and arbitrary nuclear signals pattern of South Asian region has sometimes strengthen and at sometimes deteriorated its strategic stability.

This inconsistency and lack of proper communication channels have resulted in major crisis between India and Pakistan and these crisis were often deescalated by the third party intervention. Based on the core assertion that nuclear signaling plays an important role in the Strategic Stability of the region, it can be asserted that the working communicability framework of the region over the years has discouraged the two nascent nuclear nations from exchanging their strategic arsenals but has failed in resolving pivotal conflicts.

South Asian conflict chronology includes events like Kargil conflict, the Indian parliament attacks and the moderately less intense Mumbai Attacks. If nuclear signaling were not transmitted between the two parties, these events could have advertently or inadvertently escalated to a point of no return i.e., nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan. In this context, deterrence diplomacy and strategic communicability were preventive measures which deterred and encouraged confronting parties to diplomatically engage. India and Pakistan are

a diverse nuclear dyad with more than one reason to obtain an aggressive tone with each other which eventually translates to military readiness or standoff.

Post-Pulwama military engagement between the two states is also the incident in which nuclear signaling was done and war hysteria was created by the BJP government. Anti-Pakistan rhetoric was central to the election campaign of the BJP party and Modi even succeeded in achieving his short-term political goal but this anti-Pakistan propaganda resulted in a negative impact on regional stability. Irrespective of the highly tense environment Pakistan's leadership responded with maturity at the same time making it clear that the attack won't be left unresponded. On the other hand, India's reckless attitude during the whole crisis and its use of the nuclear card was a very dangerous trend.

Moreover, the rapid Indian arms buildup has generated an arms race between the two states. Procurement of conventional weapons and sophistication of nuclear weapons is also a factor that plays a vital role in deterrence and consequently concludes that this can be a major fissure in the deterrence maintained by the two states and can eventually erode the fabric of deterrence. With the induction of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) as well as plans to enhance strategic arsenals to thermonuclear proportions as well as induction of Ballistic Missile Defence Shield Programs, India and Pakistan have also opted to induct active conventional doctrines with sophisticated and upgraded arsenal as precursors to controlled warfare. However

the prospective induction of nuclear triad, thermonuclear weapons and considerations to alter or amend its 'No First Use' doctrine as well as maintenance of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system by India have not only proved to be disparate signals but have also sufficiently destabilized the deterrence patterns of South Asia. This implies that Indian nuclear signals in non-existence of restraint or control signals, have been not only hyper aggressive but have also remained detrimental initiatives to the overall structure of deterrence. Moreover the induction of nuclear submarines capable of deploying surgical strikes by the Indian navy as well as BMD countermeasure systems to deter aggressive responses are also signals capable of initiating arms race in the region.

With the induction of proactive and aggressive conventional force doctrines in India as well as precedent behavior of engaging in surgical interventions in Pakistan through conventional forces, Pakistan has suffered from what can be called a 'proportionate signaling vacuum' because of its conventional disparity and willingness not to engage in conventional confrontations in a nuclear environment. The induction of TNWs thus became the only compensatory signal to secure territorial and conventional force disparity. Where TNWs are signaled to be defensive last resort retaliatory signals, the Indian counter signal of enhancing its missile programs as well as induction of more long-term strategic arsenals can be termed as an 'imbalanced, disproportionate misinterpretation of nuclear signals. Hence there is a need for both countries to fine-tune their nuclear signaling by developing a proper strategic language and by removing

the filter of mistrust and bias while receiving signals from the other side.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/03042023-nuclear-signaling-in-south-asia-oped/>

Sher Bano (Research officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad.)

India's Botched Handling of Military Capabilities

Amber Afreen Abid

A military exercise or war game is a measure to test the performance of the armed forces without engaging in the battlefield. Military Exercises are often used by nations to display their military might by showcasing weapons, systems and well-trained soldiers. The exercise goes flunked if a state is unable to achieve its goals. Moreover, using the exercise to build up a situation of war is a way of not sensitizing the consequences attached to it.

In a recent exercise by the Indian army in the Pokhran field firing range in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer, three surface-to-air missiles have been misfired, which went out of range and hit different areas in different villages. According to Indian media, the missiles were test fired by the army but deviated from the path due to a technical glitch.

This technical glitch excuse has been given by Indian officials last year as well when an Indian Brahmos missile was accidentally fired into the territory of Pakistan. The Brahmos missile was able to carry nuclear warheads. In two years it is the second incident of such mistakes at the strategic level in India. Though, India is translucent of the fact that such an incident could trigger a major disaster and potential war between the two nuclear-armed neighbors, still behaving immaturely. India's botched handling of military capabilities inflicts significant risk to the South Asian region and shows India's callousness towards regional peace and stability

The missile misfiring at Pakistan's border could be an Indian attempt to recreate the Indian General Sundarji idea of Brasstacks, by planning to provoke Pakistan to respond; or to create a new trend in lieu of misfiring to check Pakistan's response and deterrence calculus. This is a greater possibility when the missiles are in the hands of a fascist regime, making slogans of 'night of murder' in public rallies. India has lost its credibility by repeating such episodes and proving itself to be an irresponsible nuclear weapon state as well. This fascist regime isn't allowing India to move beyond its war-prone behavior toward Pakistan.

Pakistan has never initiated any conflict but has always responded befittingly to any nefarious designs against its territorial integrity. India should be loud and clear that these are not the paper planes that go here and there but should be kept responsibly. Pakistan will not remain silent to any act of aggression being made against its country and will reciprocate with Quid pro-Quo Plus, as already given in the demo in 2019. Pakistan's policy of 'Quid Pro Quo Plus' (QPQP), which has been assured with the combination of nuclear deterrence and conventional capabilities, seems to be an appropriate and reliable strategic resort given the emergent security dynamics of South Asia.

India should mind its behavior and should act responsibly for the perseverance of peace and stability in the region. Moreover, the international community should also look towards this child state and should review its geo-economic preferences in favor of geo-political realities and stop viewing India through the lens of a trade destination. This hegemonic and power-pursuit dream of India

will all go in vain once it will confront Pakistan, as it will result in disastrous consequences.

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<https://strategic-times.com/blog/2023/03/30/indias-botched-handling-of-military-capabilities/>

Crisis Escalation in South Asia and Response Options for Pakistan

Komal Khan

Operation Swift Retort provides a clear precedent and communicates Pakistan's resolve and ability to pay back promptly to India's offensive operations against Pakistan, especially at time when the international support and partnerships with India against China has been abused by India to pursue its regional hegemonic objectives under a far-right nationalist government.

Providing scholarly account of India's strike package against Pakistan on February 26, 2019, Air Commodore (R) Kaiser Tufail states that India's offensive operation consisted of sixteen IAF Mirage 2000 planes that took off from Gwalior, including six armed with one Israeli Spice 2000 bomb each and four armed with Israeli Crystal Maze missile each. They were escorted by six upgraded Mirage 2000I armed with six MICA air-to-air missiles each and supported by an Il-78 in-flight refueling tanker and an Airborne Early Warning and Control System AEWCS aircraft for surveillance. Being across 40 km, five bombs fell in a forested area, a few hundred meters from the intended target near Balakot.

In response to India's violation of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty, Pakistan launched Operation Swift Retort the very next day. F-16 and JF-17 fighters of the Pakistan Air Force intercepted the IAF aircrafts that were following IAF attack package and two of them – Mig-21 and SU-30 were hit; the MIG-21 fell into Pakistan's territory while it is difficult to determine whether the SU-30 was downed, slightly damaged or evaded the

AMRAM missile fired by a PAF F-16 on February 27, 2019.

The PAF decided to go for a stand-off attack similar to the IAF's, with the crucial difference of going against military targets in Indian Held Kashmir (IHK). Unlike India, measured and controlled response was agreed upon by the civil and military leadership in Pakistan based on the responsible assessment of the conflict escalation potential to a point of no return. While on the other side, Modi's emphasis on winning the forthcoming elections caused him to prioritize punitive measures against Pakistan, disregarding the possible escalation dangers between two states possessing nuclear weapons.

An assessment of the Indian offensive implies that the Indian civilian establishment miscalculated Pakistan's resolve and ability to pay back promptly. Owing to the failure, India has presented the notion of "technical asymmetry" as a façade to conceal the operational and tactical deficiencies of the IAF.

The two nuclear powers were on the brink of a war is something which needs serious reflection, specifically for the initiator of the conflict. The Balakot incident indicates that the Indians also intended to keep the conflict limited, however, the event also demonstrates the tenuous state of deterrence stability in South Asia.

International support could enable Pakistan to go beyond what Pakistan already did in response to Balakot incident. However, unless Pakistan attains international credibility at diplomatic, economic, and political fronts, India would continue to maneuver international support in its favour,

particularly because India's strategic community has a considerable international outreach. International community is capable enough to put a restraint over India's offence towards Pakistan, however, they would use this clout in a manner that promotes their own interests at the cost of South Asian security.

Pakistan's counter-response to India's aggressive behavior by incorporating cross-domain deterrence as a crisis management mechanism to reinstate strategic deterrence has an impact on strategic stability in South Asia. Significantly, the U.S. and the West have recognized India as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific affairs, making it necessary for Pakistan to integrate cross-domain deterrence at operational level to deter India.

In response to the Balakot strike, Pakistan engaged in limited warfare, downing and hitting Indian fighter aircrafts. While Pakistan responsibly managed the situation by not escalating the conflict and restricting to a self-defense operation, yet the conflict had escalation potential. Furthermore, advancement in and perusal of tactical and strategic weapons by Pakistan to restore a military balance in relation to India are inevitable conflict management tools that Pakistan is compelled to employ to ensure deterrence stability in South Asia. However, in the long term, it may also be perceived as a challenge to strategic stability in South Asia.

It is possible that Modi may resort to a false flag operation to restore the IAF's lost reputation, which is a precarious scenario that the world should be cautious about. Significantly, the possibility of military attacks targeting strategic sites and surgical

strikes, which could be misinterpreted as pre-emptive strikes, poses a significant risk of nuclear escalation and undermines deterrence stability in the region.

<https://southasiajournal.net/crisis-escalation-in-south-asia-and-response-options-for-pakistan/>

Komal Khan (Research officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

China Gains Political Clout in the Middle East at the expense of the US's Indispensability

Hamdan Khan

There is yet another détente in the Middle East, but it is neither between Israel and Arabs nor has the United States of America (USA) played an intermediary. For a change, Saudi Arabia and its archrival across the Persian Gulf, Iran, have agreed to resume bilateral ties severed since the 2016 attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, and in a rather surprising first, the peacemaker happens to be China. Auspiciously for Beijing, it was uniquely placed to broker a detente between Saudi Arabia and Iran given its cordial relations with both countries — a feature that the “indispensable” USA lacked owing to its longstanding animosity with Iran.

Since the exponential rise in the significance of the Middle East owing to the discovery of oil, the USA has been an “indispensable” power player in the region. However, discernably fatigued by the decades-long military engagements in the region and adapting to a transformed global geostrategic environment, Washington underwent retrenchment from the Middle East in a bid to reorient its priorities to Asia-Pacific to counter China’s growing clout and recently towards Europe following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. On top of that, thanks to their lofty economic and technological ambitions, the gulf countries have been making overtures to China to further expand their already multifaceted relationship — a trend expedited by the frosty relations between the Biden Administration and some of the Arab monarchs.

During the past few decades, China made steady inroads into the Middle East under the garb of geo-economics. Beijing is the largest trading and investment partner of the Middle Eastern nations and buys more oil from the region than any other country. Furthermore, almost all the Middle Eastern countries have signed to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and as the Arab Monarchs aim to diversify their economies away from dependence on oil revenues, they are heavily counting on China for crucial investments and technological upgradations.

The growing economic influence did yield China significant political clout in the Middle East but until recently, Beijing has been cautiously reticent to publicly venture into the political arena. Nevertheless, it has gradually been propounding itself as a standard-bearer of United Nations (UN) principles and a proponent of win-win cooperation with reiterated stress on “dialogue and diplomacy” to settle disputes. The mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the first employment of “dialogue and diplomacy” entirely sponsored by China. Reportedly, Saudis — skeptical of Iran — only accepted the deal after China signed as a guarantor, and economically debilitated Iran participated in the dialogue without preconditions after being granted immediate financial concessions besides the previous pledge of grandiose economic partnership. Needless to mention that Beijing is leveraging its economic clout to influence political happenings and more importantly, is no longer doing it behind closed doors; rather is advertising it as a momentous achievement of its diplomacy.

In the larger Chinese scheme of geo-economics outlined via BRI, the Middle East is among the most important geographical spheres, wherein it eyes grand investments in infrastructure, energy and technology. The acrimonious Saudi-Iran rivalry undermined China's economic ambitions in the region and by brokering the détente, China aims to achieve not only its economic goals but has also announced itself as an influential political player in the region — an alternative to the “indispensable” USA.

Even though American officials welcomed the Saudi-Iran détente and have reportedly scoffed at the suggestion that the US influence in the Middle East is declining, in a zero-sum interplay between great powers, one side's gain is always the loss of the other side. With the USA already engaged in bitter competition with China in economic, technological, and military spheres, diplomacy is just another frontline where Washington faces a supercharged Beijing vying to carve out its share of international diplomacy — previously dominated by the USA. Saudi Arabia and Iran resuming ties at Chinese mediation — while the “indispensable” USA spectated from the sidelines — bears evidence to the scale of Beijing's political influence over Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular and all over the Middle East in general.

In addition, the diplomatic coup provides a clue about China's political ambitions, which

are not confined just to the Middle East. China — with frequent references to the UN charter and stress on diplomacy — has been trying to pitch itself as a peacemaker in various troubled zones. Just weeks before the Saudi-Iran mediation, China rolled out a 12-point position paper to bring an end to the hostilities in Ukraine. Although the plan did not receive a warm reception in the West, the message from Beijing couldn't be less ambiguous: China is no longer reticent to shoulder political responsibilities and seeks to play a global political role by applying “Chinese wisdom”.

The bid to play as a mediator in conflicts stems from the view in Beijing that in contrast to the USA — involved directly or indirectly in conflicts, such as in the Middle East and Ukraine — China has stayed neutral and is, therefore, best suited to play the role of an intermediary. It is yet to be seen how successful Beijing's push to field itself as a global peacemaker proves in the long haul; nevertheless, the USA's indispensability, lately circumscribed to the diplomatic arena, has essentially been dispensed with.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/03/26/china-gains-political-clout-in-the-middle-east-at-the-expense-of-the-uss-indispensability/>

Hamdan Khan (Research officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad.)

India and the G20 Summit: A Bold Move or a Diplomatic Misstep?

Zukhruf Amin

The upcoming G20 Summit scheduled to be held in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK) in September 2023 is a cause of concern since India has decided to host the Summit in a disputed territory. Pakistan has rejected India's announcement, citing the internationally recognized disputed status of IIOJK. While India maintains that IIOJK is an integral part of its territory, Pakistan argues that India's stance disregards the globally recognized disputed status of the region. If India succeeds in hosting the G20 Summit in IIOJK, it will be the first international event to take place in the disputed region since New Delhi's unilateral abrogation of the region's special status on August 5, 2019.

The G20 comprises of 19 countries and the European Union, including major developed and emerging economies. Together, these nations represent a substantial proportion of the global population, international trade, and global GDP, with the G20 members accounting for 85% of global GDP, 75% of international trade, and two-thirds of the world's population. The decision to hold the G20 Summit in the disputed territory is viewed as endorsing India's false claims of normalcy in the IIOJK, which could potentially mislead the international community regarding the current situation in the region.

It is noteworthy that in the recent past, the BJP government has attempted to falsely project normalcy in the disputed territory by

organizing investment conferences. By attempting to host the G20 Summit, India is perceived as taking a further stride in this direction. Various international organizations, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, have reported Indian war crimes and atrocities against the people of Kashmir. India's attempts to alter the demography of the IIOJK are a blatant violation of international law, UN Security Council resolutions, and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, at an event in 2020, asserted that "what applies to the world also applies to Asia. A multipolar world must have its foundations in multipolar Asia." He also claimed that "the prospects for the global order depend on a more equitable and democratic distribution of power and resources. The world must be more multipolar. Such a multipolar world must necessarily have a multipolar Asia at its center. This can happen only if we, as Asian countries, consolidate our independence and expand our freedom of choice." In line with this belief, India seems to be using the Summit to enhance its soft power and position itself as a leader of the Global South. Moreover, the Summit is being utilized for domestic political benefits. Therefore, the objective is to divert attention from geopolitical issues and instead, focus on topics such as growth, development, economic and disaster resilience, corruption, food and energy security, and poverty reduction. However, due to differences over the Ukraine crisis, these issues have been overshadowed on the agenda.

During the G20 Finance Ministers' meeting and the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bengaluru and New Delhi, respectively, India failed to reach a joint communique due to differences over the Ukraine crisis between the US-led Western powers and Russia. While India remains at the core of the US' approach to contain China, it also maintains a significant relationship with Russia for defense procurements and the Russian oil's supply. In the aftermath of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, India's purchases of Russian crude oil increased significantly. India's oil imports from Russia rose from 2% in February 2022 to 23% in November 2022.

India's decision to continue dealing with Russia, such as in the purchase of high-value items like the S-400 missile system while simultaneously serving as the net security provider for the US in the region, is noteworthy. It also aims to uphold its "strategic autonomy" concerning its defense and foreign policy matters. At the same time, India has been pursuing strategic ties with the US and remains an essential partner for the US in its counter China drive. The growing strategic partnership between New Delhi and Washington has also paved the way for the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) waiver in favor of India, which is in contrast to the case of

Turkey's purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia. The Trump administration imposed sanctions on Turkey for its purchase of Russia's S-400 missile defense system.

It has been reported that China skipped the two-day G20 "Research Innovation Initiative Gathering" organized by the Science and Technology Department. The meeting was held in Itanagar, which is the capital city of Arunachal Pradesh, a northeastern state that China considers a part of Tibet. It is expected that holding the Summit in such a sensitive environment could be perceived as an outright insult to China, which may therefore boycott the Summit. Hence, the forthcoming G20 Summit poses a challenge for India, given the gravity of the Ukraine crisis and the presence of major developed countries. India cannot afford to avoid the debate on the Ukraine crisis during the Summit, as it may have far-reaching political consequences at the global level, possibly leading to polarization within the G20.

<https://strafasia.com/india-and-the-g20-summit-a-bold-move-or-a-diplomatic-misstep/>

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