

Prospects of Integrated Deterrence for Pakistan Amid Conventional Asymmetry in South Asia

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Abstract

This paper attempts to illustrate the relevance and importance of integrated deterrence in one of the most unpredictable regions of the world where India and Pakistan, have inched closer to crossing the nuclear threshold amid crises. Conventional asymmetry, offensive doctrines and the changing character of war impact South Asia's strategic stability. India's existing doctrinal thinking, technological developments in the military domain and its temptation for a pre-emptive military strike demands a corresponding review of Pakistan's doctrinal thinking. In this regard, Pakistan's shift towards integrating nuclear and conventional forces, effective diplomacy, and a quest for strong economy are integral for eradicating the probability of limited war in the region. The future of South Asian strategic stability lies in the practical implementation and adaptation of integrated deterrence by Pakistan into its doctrinal thinking and force posture, as this policy shift will help Pakistan develop a more cohesive, robust, and effective conventional response against offensive Indian military posturing.

Key Words: Cold Start, Limited War, Integrated Deterrence, Credible Minimum Deterrence, Full Spectrum Deterrence, India, Pakistan.

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Introduction

South Asia is considered one of the most volatile³ regions of the world because of the two nuclear arch-rivals, India and Pakistan. This region witnessed wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 and many crises including 1999 Kargil and recent 2019 Pulwama crisis. The nuclearisation of South Asia changed the entire spectrum of security when India conducted second round of nuclear tests in 1998 and declared itself nuclear weapon state. Pakistan responded to the challenge and restored the strategic balance by conducting its round of nuclear tests. Both Pakistan and India adopted the policy of credible minimum deterrence; however Indian conventional military modernization and offensive doctrinal response encouraged India to develop Cold Start Doctrine to fight limited war under nuclear overhang. Considering the conventional asymmetry in the land, air, and sea domain between India and Pakistan, it has been observed that this asymmetry seeks a doctrinal shift in South Asia.

The 2019 Indian offensive aerial strikes into the settled territory of Pakistan (Balakot) raised question marks on deterrence stability in South Asia. The event can be traced back to the February 14th, 2019, Pulwama incident when a Kashmiri youth, whom Indian authorities associated with Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), attacked an Indian police convoy in Pulwama. India's strike across the Line of Control (LoC) in Balakot to target an alleged JeM camp was part of Modi's New Normal,⁴ giving an impression that Pakistan's nuclear weapons do not deter India and it will respond with punitive military strikes against hostile non-state actors. Pakistan responded to India's provocation the next day and effectively shot down two aircrafts, one crashing within Pakistani territory, with the pilot apprehended alive. This was a clear signal by

³ Ashley J Tellis, *Stability in South Asia*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2005), p. 7.

⁴ Salma Malik, "Indian Surgical Strike: Implications and Response by Pakistan," *IPRI Journal* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2022): 13, <https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Article-4-IPRI-Journal-XX-I-Ind-Sur-Str-ED-SSA-FINAL.pdf>.

Islamabad that despite having a conventional disadvantage, it still has the capacity and capability to match up to India. Operation "SWIFT RETORT" was a calculated and effective response against Indian intrusion into Pakistan's territory.

Pakistan's former Director General Strategic Plans Division (D.G. SPD), Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai, stated at a workshop organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), that Pakistan effectively "deterred India from expanding operations beyond a single unsuccessful airstrike" at Balakot. He warned that "while it may be easy [for India] to climb the first rung on the escalation ladder, the second rung would always belong to Pakistan, and that India's choice to move to the third rung would invariably be dangerously problematic in anticipation of the fourth rung response by Pakistan." Finally, he cautioned that the Indian air strike "was playing with fire at the lower end of the nuclear spectrum and Armageddon at the upper end."⁵

As mentioned above, General Kidwai's speech highlights the rationality behind maintenance of deterrence stability in South Asia. The Indian government's decision to provoke a limited war under the nuclear overhang is based on irrationality, recklessness, and irresponsibility, negatively impacting regional strategic stability.

From Kargil to the 2019 surgical strikes, the character of war under the nuclear umbrella is gradually changing, and therefore there is a need to develop viable policy options to deter such emerging threats in future. This paper will look into the changing nature of deterrence and prospects of integrated deterrence for Pakistan, illustrating how integrated deterrence is a feasible option for a weak economy to counter conventional threats from India. Integrated, cross-domain and full-

⁵"Keynote Address and Discussion Session with Lieutenant General (Retd) Khalid Kidwai," International Institute for Strategic Studies, last modified February 6, 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/events/2020/02/7th-iiss-and-ciss-south-asian-strategic-stability-workshop>

spectrum deterrence will be discussed to provide a comparative analysis of each under the prevailing conventional asymmetry between Pakistan and India. This discussion will further explain the efficacy of integrated deterrence to plug the existing gap and maintain deterrence stability in South Asia.

Changing Nature of Deterrence

Carl Von Clausewitz, the 19th-century philosopher of war studies, stated, "War can be defined in two different ways one is its absolute form, and the other is its present character."⁶ War has both facets, an ever-changing character and a constant (permanent) nature.⁷ Taking this as a baseline from the Clausewitz school and its application to the concept of deterrence, it can be stated that similar to war, deterrence also has a constant nature and ever-changing character, under which it can take as many forms as per the demand of events and strategic environment. After applying the concept of deterrence in Clausewitz's school of thought, the question arises: if the nature of deterrence is unchanging, then what would be the character of 21st-century deterrence?

In response to this question, deterrence has several kinds, not one constant character. First, it is imperative to interpret and identify where and how deterrence is needed. Secondly, states should ensure that their deterrence needs are adequately identified and turned into capability. Thirdly, there is a challenge to the integration of these deterrent capabilities into one coherent variable. It demands a great rationale against the given commitments if they are to be operationalised within a specified time.

The cornerstone to deciphering this intricate maze of deterrence is to give a prologue before explaining the concept of integrated

⁶ Carl V. Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Micheal Howard and P. Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 62.

⁷ Carl V. Clausewitz, *On War*, trans.

deterrence, which in simple terms, can be explained as the optimal response to hybridised, cross-spectrum strategic challenges.⁸ Furthermore, integrated deterrence can be defined as a posturing strategy and employment of conventional and nuclear forces to acquire the military objectives at the lowest level of escalation, eradicating the chances of inadvertent or accidental war. There is a huge distinction between inadvertent or accidental war and pre-planned attacks (pre-emption) and attacks launched under the mistaken expectation of the other side. Usually, accidental or inadvertent war occurs when military operations lead toward an undesired increase in the intensity of conflict or toward its dangerous form.⁹

This leads to another question concerning the role of conventional and nuclear weapons in management and the escalation of limited conflict. How can a conventional weapon be used as a deterrent factor in response to the adversary's limited war option under the nuclear overhang? How are conventional forces still relevant and can operate in the nuclear environment? The concept of integrated deterrence justifies deterring and countering the challenge of limited conventional conflict/war against the nuclear-armed adversary. To attain this end, conventionally weak states such as Pakistan, confronted with the challenge of a limited war under the nuclear umbrella from its adversary, need to adopt an integrated deterrence approach.

Conventional-Nuclear Integration

Conventional and nuclear integration demands that contemplating conventional deterrence independently and detached from the nuclear force is not viable to counter hybrid conventional-nuclear strategies and

⁸ Paul Cornish, *Integrated Deterrence: NATO's 'First Reset' Strategy* (Slovak Republic: Globsec Policy Institute, 2017), 44.

⁹ Stephen J. Cimbala, "Accidental/Inadvertent Nuclear War and Information Warfare," *Armed Forces & Society Sage Publications* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 654., <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45346333>.

threats. The contemporary threats demand better integration between nuclear deterrent operations and conventional defence policy and strategy. During the Cold War, the US nuclear deterrence played a significant role in the US deterrence strategies. However, after the demise of the USSR, nuclear deterrence took a backseat in the US national security policy and defence strategy. In the 1990s and 2000s, the US nuclear weapons observed a declining role in its national security policy. The nuclear deterrent and its associated platforms were marginalised in the post-Cold War era. Nuclear capabilities were considered the last resort and were used for extreme emergencies. Such a posture made sense immediately after the Cold War.¹⁰ There is also an assertion that the entanglement of conventional and nuclear deterrence could risk strategic stability. If the adversary misperceives this integrated and dual-capable conventional and nuclear platform as a nuclear signal, or if the dual command and control system tries to gain an advantage in a conventional conflict, it will inadvertently affect the nuclear weapon system. The adversary's strike on the dual-capable command and control could escalate the conflict.¹¹ Henceforth, in such types of conflict situations, the active role of communication between adversaries is one of the most important factors in reducing the chances of inadvertent/ accidental war.

Conventional and nuclear integration should be understood as an objective, with command and control working to maximise the potential of deterrence through effective communication. Conventional nuclear integration could reduce the adversary's destabilising practices; it will increase the effectiveness and readiness of conventional forces and reduce the risk of nuclear escalation, turning the conflict into a nuclear

¹⁰ Robert Peters, Justin Anderson, and Harrison Menke, "Deterrence in the 21st Century: Integrating Nuclear and Conventional Force," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26533613>.

¹¹ James M. Acton, "Inadvertent Escalation and the Entanglement of Nuclear Command-and Control Capabilities," Belfer Center For Science and International Affairs, October 29, 2018, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/James%20Acton_Policy%20Brief_October%202018_0.pdf.

war. The effectiveness of conventional and nuclear integration and the existing military doctrines must reflect the ambitions for planning nuclear activities at the regional level, which is a necessary pre-requisite for conventional nuclear integration at the operational level.¹² The conceptual assumptions identified and explained in the conventional nuclear integration will be applied to the case study of Pakistan having conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis arch-rival India. Let us first examine the existing full-spectrum deterrence being followed by Pakistan.

Full Spectrum Deterrence

Full spectrum deterrence describes that nuclear weapons will deter both conventional and nuclear war at multiple levels. Pakistan combined its conventional and nuclear deterrence to attain strategic equivalence to overcome the widening asymmetries vis-à-vis India in the conventional domain.¹³ The Pakistan Army Doctrine: Comprehensive Response: 2011 clearly illustrates that strategic equivalence has diminished the total conventional war and concentrated on the sub-conventional domain.¹⁴

Full spectrum deterrence as a concept remains fluid, and it has been kept deliberately vague, and technological goals are left open-ended. Regarding its doctrinal practice, Pakistan follows the policy of ambiguity in a well-thought manner to manage the existing conventional asymmetry with India. The concept of full spectrum in response to India involves five key assumptions: (i) An India-centric policy and posture, (ii) Attaining strategic equivalence against India at the strategic and sub-conventional level, (iii) Pakistan will always remain reactive to India, (iv) Pakistan will

¹² Adam Mount and Pranay Vade, *An Integrated Approach to Deterrent Posture*, Federation of American Scientists, 2021), last modified April 1, 2021, <https://fas.org/pub-reports/an-integrated-approach-to-deterrence-posture/>.

¹³ Strategic Equivalence is applicable between players having asymmetric power balances, which is possible in the case of Pakistan and India.

¹⁴ Pakistan Army New War Fighting Concept, Pakistan Army Doctrine Comprehensive Response 2011: p.2

opt for First Use of nuclear weapons (v) All forms of aggression will be deterred by combining strategic and conventional forces.¹⁵

Though full spectrum deterrence is a viable option to match India's conventional superiority, there are some loopholes within the full spectrum deterrence. As mentioned earlier, the character of war in South Asia has changed with India's conventional superiority and offensive doctrinal posture. Full Spectrum Deterrence of Pakistan has the potential to deter a limited war; however, with the presence of new warfighting concepts such as surgical strikes, this notion is not effective in the longer run. The lexicon of full spectrum deterrence now must be shifted towards integrated deterrence, considering the potential threats of military modernisation and offensive doctrines from adversaries.¹⁶

Integrated Deterrence

The concept of integrated deterrence was introduced by the Chinese military strategist in 2013; according to them, the central military deterrence includes; nuclear, conventional, space, network space, and integrated conventional and nuclear deterrence. The Chinese understanding of integrated deterrence rests upon transforming comprehensive national power into useful and effective capabilities; further enhancement will lead towards a robust deterrence. Integrated deterrence will help China to defend against a strong enemy.¹⁷ Later on, this concept was further explained and expanded in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

¹⁵ Sania Abdullah, "Pakistan's Evolving Doctrine and Emerging Force Posture: Conceptual Nuances and Implied Ramifications," *Pakistan Horizon* 21, no. 1-2 (August 2018): 84-85.

¹⁶ Feroze Hassan Khan, In Person Interview, Islamabad September 20, 2022.

¹⁷ China Aerospace Studies Institute, *In Their Own Words: Foreign Military Thought Science of Military Strategy (2013)* (USA: China's Aerospace Studies Institute, 2013), 213.

integrating conventional and nuclear forces.¹⁸ In 2022, the US adopted integrated deterrence as the cornerstone strategy of its national security policy. Conventional and nuclear integration can keep the nuclear threshold high because it caters for a balanced interplay of conventional and nuclear forces. Thus, it allows the US forces to counter the threat of Russian conventional military forces by keeping its nuclear forces intact.

According to the US, integrated deterrence means integrating all tools of national power, including the network of allies and partners through which the US credibly deters aggression.¹⁹ However, the concept of integrated deterrence, in the words of General Austin, is defined as “the right mix of technology, operational concepts and capabilities. These all are knitted together and networked in a credible, flexible and formidable way that it will stop the adversary from taking any action further.”²⁰

Integrated deterrence comprises four key elements: vertical, horizontal, functional, and temporal integration. Vertical integration is the amalgamation of all three military tiers for deterrence, including the nuclear to conventional, at the operational, strategic, and tactical levels of war. It also corroborates the ability of the commander and his troops. This vertically integrated deterrence posture requires credibility, capability, and communication at all levels of war and not at the strategic level alone. In this regard, a pertinent example is that of Russia, which has worked on its vertical integration of deterrence and nuclear threshold. They are

¹⁸ Nuclear Posture Review 2018, U.S. Department of Defense, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

¹⁹ Anna Pederson and Michael Akopian, "Sharper: Integrated Deterrence," *Centre for a New American Security*, January 11, 2023, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/sharper-integrated-deterrence#:~:text=The%202022%20National%20Defense%20Strategy%20explicitly%20states%3A%20%22Integrated%20deterrence%20means,of%20aggression.%22%20Following%20the%20release.>

²⁰ Charlie Dunlap, "Dr. Frank Hoffman on “Conceptualizing Integrated Deterrence,” *Lawfire*, January 8, 2022, <https://sites.duke.edu/lawfire/2022/01/08/guest-post-dr-frank-hoffman-on-conceptualizing-integrated-deterrence/>.

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modernising their command-and-control system along with the induction of conventional capabilities.²¹ Russia has modernised its nuclear weapons by deploying the SSC-8 cruise missiles after the US, during the Trump Administration, scrapped the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty (INF) with Russia.²²

Horizontal integration explains the integration of deterrence to ensure that all governmental entities, including foreign offices, diplomacy, and the state's economy are included in the maintenance of deterrent posture. Functional integration adopts and employs horizontal integration's broad principles and rules but restricts them to activities and functions instead of departments and other non-governmental organizations. Whereas temporal integration is more concerned with the time variable, it can be maintained and changed over time and as per the changes in the circumstances and strategic environment. National security and defence strategy is one of the most important dimensions closely associated with temporal integration.²³

Prospects of Integrated Deterrence for Pakistan

Integrated deterrence is the convergence of conventional and nuclear deterrence; however, there are certain prospects of having integrated deterrence in the policy posture of Pakistan. It is agreed that there is conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan and an economic gap in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between India and

²¹ Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War," In *Moscow's Shadows*, last modified February 27, 2013, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

²² Micheal R. Gordon, "Russia Deploys Missile, Violating Treaty and Challenging Trump," *New York Times*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/14/world/europe/russia-cruise-missile-arms-control-treaty.html>.

²³ Paul Cornish, *Integrated Deterrence: NATO's 'First Reset' Strategy*, (Slovak Republic: Globsec Policy Institute, 2017), 12 <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/gnai-integrated-deterrence.pdf>.

Pakistan (The current Indian GDP is \$3173.40 billion²⁴ and Pakistan's GDP is \$346.34 billion²⁵). For economically weak states such as Pakistan, integrated deterrence has more potential than cross-domain or full-spectrum deterrence. Cross-domain deterrence is ensured by having capabilities in different domains (land, air, naval and cyber), which are quite costly. Apart from the economic factor, integrated deterrence also supports and substantiates Pakistan's policy of credible minimum deterrence which means that (i) Pakistan would not conduct more nuclear tests, (ii) it would retain a minimum number of deterrence forces, (iii) avoid an arms race in the region, (iv) it would have a minimum number of forces in terms of quantity, enough for deterrence. Pakistan's conceptualization of credible minimum deterrence is based on the notion that the minimum is affordable and ensures deterrence at a lower economic cost.²⁶

Pakistan acquired and operationalized its nuclear weapons to avoid war with India. Realizing conventional inferiority, Pakistan operationalizes its nuclear strategy to deter conventional and nuclear war. This posture relies on the state being unambiguous about its capabilities to get maximum deterrence effect.²⁷ Pakistan is employing this policy, considering the conventional asymmetry mentioned above. However, recent developments such as the Balakot Airstrikes 2019 and the threat of inadvertent escalation requires a synergistic approach to alleviate this

²⁴ "India GDP - 2022 Data - 2023 Forecast - 1960-2021 Historical - Chart - News," Trading Economics, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/india/gdp>.

²⁵ "Pakistan GDP - 2022 Data - 2023 Forecast - 1960-2021 Historical - Chart - News," Trading Economics, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/gdp>.

²⁶ Zafar Khan, "The Changing Contours of Minimum Deterrence in South Asia," *Pluto Journals* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/polipers.13.1.0077>.

²⁷ Goferey Brown, "India's Deterrence Goldilocks Dilemma in South Asia," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 77-78, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2331224/indias-deterrence-goldilocks-dilemma-in-south-asia/>

threat from India. In this sense, Pakistan needs to adopt the strategy of integrated deterrence to dilute the threat of unintentional warfare.

In Balakot Airstrikes 2019, the strikes were declared "non-military pre-emptive strikes."²⁸ by the civil and military officials of India. The next day, February 27th, 2019, Pakistan responded to the Indian air strikes and targeted the uninhabited land close to the Indian military installations to demonstrate the three important caveats of deterrence. (i) political will to attack and retaliate against Indian conventional strike-through conventional means, (ii) capability to conduct the military strikes, Pakistan successfully conducted the military strikes through active use of air power, (iii) communicating with the adversary about the potentialities of Pakistan's Air Force.²⁹

Integrated deterrence strengthens the notion that credible minimum deterrence is more viable than cross-domain deterrence. However, cross-domain deterrence in contemporary times cannot be ignored and can be strengthened through the integration of conventional and nuclear weapons. A sophisticated conventional response is required to counter conventional threats from India.³⁰ India acquired Ballistic Missile Defence System (BMD)³¹ to intercept the adversary's missile, and Rafael Aircrafts from France.³² This Indian conventional military build-up is creating space for limited war and challenging the strategic stability

²⁸ "India's 'Non-Military Pre-Emptive' Strike on Pakistan: What We Know, What We Don't Know," *The Wire*, February 26, 2019, <https://thewire.in/security/iaf-airstrikes-in-pakistan-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know>.

²⁹ Maheen Shafeeq, "Operation Swift Retort: The U.S. and Chinese Response and Analysis," *Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS)*, last modified February 27, 2021, <https://casstt.com/post/operation-swift-retort-the-us-and-chinese-response-and-analysis/319>.

³⁰ Feroze Hassan Khan, In Person Interview with author, September 20, 2022.

³¹ Balraj Nagal, "India and Ballistic Missile Defense: Furthering a Defensive Deterrent," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, last modified June 30, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/india-and-ballistic-missile-defense-furthering-defensive-deterrent-pub-63966>.

³² "India has received 26 Rafale aircraft till date: Govt," *The Hindu*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-has-received-26-rafale-aircraft-till-date-govt/article35585665.ece>.

in South Asia.³³ However, this threat can be averted by Pakistan if it adopts conventional and nuclear integration into its policy posture under the pretext of integrated deterrence.

One of the essential elements of integrated deterrence is building collaboration and cooperation with allies. As discussed earlier, Pakistan needs a robust conventional deterrence to counter the conventional Indian offensive threat. However, considering Pakistan's economic condition, Pakistan must develop military cooperation with like-minded countries. The current strategic environment has witnessed the close military cooperation between China and Pakistan. Since the end of the Cold War, it has become Pakistan's leading supplier of conventional weapons and offensive strike capabilities. The recent geopolitical shifts due to the intense China-US strategic competition and strained China- India relations after a series of border skirmishes and US withdrawal from Afghanistan strengthened the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan.³⁴ According to the statistics given by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the estimated arms transfer from China to Pakistan in the past 15 years is \$8,469 million, which is equal to the arms transferred to Pakistan by China in the last 50 years \$8,794 million. Since 2015, around 75% of imported arms to Pakistan have been transferred by China.³⁵ Both China and Pakistan are not formally engaged in a military alliance, however, their diplomatic posturing signals the formation of a military partnership in the future. In August 2022, the then

³³ "Pakistan has cost-effective solution to India's latest ballistic missile defence system: Report," *The Economic Times*, November 7, 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-has-cost-effective-solution-to-indias-latest-ballistic-missile-defence-system-report/articleshow/66535188.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

³⁴ Sameer P. Lalwani, "A Threshold Alliance: The China-Pakistan Military Relationship," United States Institute of Peace, last modified March 22, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship>.

³⁵ Nan Tian et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure 2022," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, accessed June 4, 2023, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/202304/2304_fs_milex_2022.pdf.

Army Chief of Pakistan, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, described China and Pakistan militaries as "brothers in arms" for securing collective interests.³⁶ China and Pakistan's diplomatic engagements and military exercises signal the growing military relationship. The China-Pakistan joint 'SHAHEEN' Air Force exercises highlight the growing complexity, interoperability, and trust for building future military cooperation.

Apart from the 'SHAHEEN' exercises, the Navies of China and Pakistan conducted bilateral exercises in 2014 and five iterations through 2017, emphasizing interoperability and interchangeability.³⁷ In 2020 this exercise was named "Sea Guardians."³⁸ The recent July 2022 iteration at the Shanghai coast included live fire attacks against maritime targets, tactical manoeuvring, replenishment, air and anti-missile defence and anti-submarine warfare, and joint support on damaged vessels.³⁹ The military engagement between China and Pakistan at all the tiers (land, air, and sea) and the changing geopolitical order in South Asia indicates the formation of a military alliance between China and Pakistan, which may assist in implementing integrated deterrence against conventional Indian threats.

Conclusion

Deterrence is creating fear in an adversary's mind without fighting a war. South Asia is a volatile region with two hostile nuclear rivals in close geographic proximity. India enjoys relative advantage over Pakistan due to its size and growth of GDP growth, technological development,

³⁶ APP, "Pakistan, Chinese armies 'brothers in arms': COAS," *DAWN*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1702790>.

³⁷ "Pakistan, China Hold Joint Navy Exercise," *The Nation*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Dec-2017/pakistan-china-hold-joint-navy-exercise>

³⁸ Chen Zhuo, "China, Pakistan kick off joint naval exercise "Sea Guardians - 2" in Shanghai, Ministry of National Defense, Shanghai, accessed June 8, 2023, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/4915287.html.

³⁹ Liu Xuanzun, "China-Pakistan Joint Naval Drill Enters Live-Fire Phase with Participation of Both Countries' Type 054A Frigates for 1st Time," *Global Times*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202207/1270355.shtml>

and military modernization. It is observed that military modernization in India, both quality and quantity, compels India to adopt an offensive doctrinal posture against Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan, cognizant of acute conventional asymmetry with India, tries to maintain deterrence and balance of power by operationalizing the policy of full spectrum deterrence. This policy posture is central to Pakistan's strategic thinking and a suitable option for containing India's Cold Start Doctrine. However, after the Balakot Airstrikes in 2019, the character of war in South Asia has changed. With its strong conventional military forces acquired with the support of the US, Russia, France, and Israel, India is challenging Pakistan's strategic calculus and seeking a limited war under a nuclear overhang.

This conventional imbalance in South Asia can potentially escalate the conflict from the sub-conventional to the strategic level. The most viable option for Pakistan with limited resources is to adopt an integrated deterrence policy in line with the policy of credible minimum deterrence policy. Integrated deterrence will enhance the credibility of Pakistan's conventional and nuclear forces; it will increase the probability of deterrence stability in the nuclear and conventional domains.