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PAKISTAN-INDIA STANDOFF

LESSONS AND WAY FORWARD

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Pakistan-India Standoff: Lessons and Way Forward

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Executive Summary

In the anarchic international system, states adopt multiple strategies to ensure their sovereignty and security including conventional and strategic force modernization, establishing alliances and economic development. In the strategic calculus of South Asia, nuclear deterrence plays a dominant role and serves as an assurance for peace and stability in the region.

India and Pakistan share hostile relations since independence. The pattern of rivalry between India and Pakistan can be divided in two phases - first, Pre-Nuclearization phase (1947-1999) in which both states fought three major wars and experienced various crisis and conflicts; whereas the second phase can be titled as Post-Nuclearization phase (1999-2019), in which the construct of nuclear deterrence equilibrium limited the option of use of force despite the prevailing conventional-military asymmetry between the two rivals.

India has played the card of cross-border terrorism during the incidents of attack on Indian Parliament (2001), Mumbai (2008), Pathankot (2016), and Uri (2016) to divert the attention from core issue of Kashmir. However, at the same time India's response to such events has been evolving. After Uri it made a false claim of surgical strikes. Meanwhile, during the crisis that followed Pulwama attack, India used air force for carry out strikes within Pakistan after intruding into its space. The post-Pulwama stand-off underscores that India sought to redraw redlines of conflict, but was prevented from doing so by a robust response by Pakistani armed forces.

However, at the same time it is important to note the change in international community's approach towards an imminent crisis between the two nuclear armed neighbors having a record of hostility towards each other. The tense stand-off was ended through international intervention, much like in the past because India and Pakistan do not have mechanisms to contain crisis in their relationship that happen quite regularly, but importantly the world stepped in very late only after realizing that the situation could get out of control.

This laid-back attitude towards a very serious crisis was because the world now looks at the Indo-Pak conflict through the prism of their strategic interests with India, which in turn blinds it to the root cause of the recurring security crisis between the two countries and Indian belligerence and hegemonic designs.

Growing India-US strategic partnership, ongoing military modernization and quantitative conventional forces superiority, and rising economy were other factors that enabled the Indian military to escalate to achieve multiple objectives in the wake of Pulwama crisis. It is, nevertheless, important to note that domestic political compulsions and the war frenzy created by media contributed to Indian government's decision to escalate. India tried to achieve several short-term and long-term objectives through its aggression.

India-Pakistan standoff has debunked the narratives and assumptions built over time by Indian academics and their western friends regarding non-existent nuclear threat (from India), and Pakistan's response strategy planning with nuclear weapon in conventional conflict with India. Most significant was the contrast between India's provocations, which had activated all fronts, conventional, missile and nuclear, and the sober appeals of restraint from Pakistan's leadership. Pakistan's response as responsible nuclear weapon state has defied all stereotypes depicting Pakistan as unstable nuclear state.

Pakistani response to post-Pulwama standoff has sent a loud and clear message to India as well as International community that it will respond to any aggression to ensure invincibility of its sovereignty. India's aggressive action is, nevertheless, alarming and demands a viable strategy for dissuading India from conducting such acts in future. Pakistan's foreign minister in a press conference on April 7, 2019 stated that there was "reliable intelligence that India is devising a new plan" and that "preparations are being made, and there are chances of another attack against Pakistan." Citing intelligence, he said, "the action could be taken between April 16-20". Therefore, a three pronged strategy needs to be worked out at strategic, military and diplomatic level.

To ensure sustainable peace in region it is inevitable to initiate a comprehensive dialogue for seeking peaceful resolution of all disputes including Kashmir and establish a crisis Management Mechanism to prevent crisis from spiralling out of control.

1. Background: Pre-Crisis Scenario

The rivalry between South Asian nuclear neighbors' remains a persistent threat to peace and stability of the region. Since partition of the sub-continent in 1947 both neighbors have maintained hostile relations.

The history of tense Pakistan – India relations can be divided into two phases: Pre-Nuclearization (1947-1998); and Post-Nuclearization (1998-Present). During the first phase both states fought three major wars and experienced several crises.¹ During that part the two countries actively pursued development of nuclear armament. In post-nuclearization phase multiple crises occurred, but limited scale hostilities occurred only once in Kargil. However, the crises have at the same time become much-more dangerous as both sides developed array of capabilities to deliver nuclear warheads. Moreover, India has adopted new military postures: *advancement of limited war concept comprising offensive strategy and pre-emptive nuclear strike*².

India has played the card of cross-border terrorism after Indian Parliament (2001), Mumbai (2008), Pathankot (2016) and Uri (2016) attacks, and successfully diverted the attention from the key issue of its occupation of Kashmir and the human rights abuses being committed there. In September 2016, India's false rhetoric of surgical strike for domestic political gains underscored the irresponsible strategic behavior of India against the nuclear-armed neighbor.³

Pakistan's restrained response to the false claims of surgical strike was misread by Indian political elite and public. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government capitalized on the situation for political gains. Since then no tangible progress towards normalization of bilateral relations could be made because India did not see any domestic or political incentive in doing so. Meanwhile, indigenous resistance movement of Kashmiris against repression by Indian security forces, which entered a new phase with the killing of Burhan Wani by occupation troops in July

¹ IPRI Paper 18 by Dr. Noor ulHaq, Management of Pakistan-India Relations: Resolution of Disputes (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy research Institute, 2017) pp.29-42.

² Max Fisher, "India, Long at Odds With Pakistan, May Be Rethinking Nuclear First Strikes," *New York Time*, March 21, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/31/world/asia/india-long-at-odds-with-pakistan-may-be-rethinking-nuclear-first-strikes.html>.

³ Arka Biswas, "Surgical Strikes and Deterrence-Stability in South Asia," *ORF Occasional Paper* 115 (2017).

2016, intensified. The situation was ripe for a major crisis to erupt as younger generation of Kashmiris sought to defend themselves against brutal repression by Indian forces. It was in this backdrop that recent military stand-off between Islamabad and New Delhi unfolded and will be accordingly analyzed.

The latest episode of Pak-India military confrontation that started with an attack on Indian security forces in Occupied Kashmir was different than previous crises as it short circuited the escalation ladder and made a nuclear showdown look more imminent. Threats to launch missile strikes⁴ and India's deployment of nuclear armed submarines⁵ introduced further complexities in the deterrence equation of the region. India's orthodox act of war has not only forced Pakistan to match it on the escalation ladder, but also blinded Delhi from the wisdom of dialogue and restraint.

2. Pulwama Crisis and India-Pakistan Standoff

The recent crisis between India and Pakistan was instigated by an attack by a local Kashmiri young man on an Indian paramilitary convoy in Pulwama, a district of India-Occupied Kashmir (IOK) on 14 February 2019. As per various media accounts, brutalities suffered by the attacker Adil Dar at the hands of occupation forces compelled him to execute the attack.⁶

New Delhi, much like on the past, instantly and without any investigations alleged that the attack was sponsored by a Pakistan-based militant group, Jaesh-e-Muhammad (JeM). The Indian allegation was based on a JeM claim, which the militant group made soon after the incident. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was facing a stiff challenge from the opposition parties in the upcoming general elections in April/May 2019, because of policy failures of his government in its five year tenure, pledged a "crushing response".⁷ Pakistan rejected the Indian claims and asked Delhi to share any "actionable evidence" regarding the

⁴Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Crisis eases as envoys return to Islamabad, Delhi." Dawn. March 10, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1468691/crisis-eases-as-envoys-return-to-islamabad-delhi>.

⁵"Balakot air strikes: When key naval assets were put on alert," The Hindu, March 17, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/as-india-pakistan-tensions-mounted-navy-deployed-aircraft-carrier-and-nuclear-submarines/article26560583.ece>.

⁶"How Pulwama bomber Adil Ahmad Dar's father made different claims about son joining Jaish," India Today, February, 16, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/pulwama-terror-attack-adil-ahmad-dar-father-different-claims-reuters-india-today-jaish-e-mohammed-1457506-2019-02-16>.

⁷"India blames Pakistan for Kashmir attack, PM Narendra Modi vows crushing response," CBS News, February 15, 2019.

involvement of any Pakistani national in the attack. Ignoring Pakistan government's caution and call for restraint, Indian Air Force (IAF) violated Pakistan's airspace on 26 February 2019 and claimed to have carried out an air strike against the alleged camp of the JeM militants in Pakistan's mainland, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁸ Various reports in national as well as international media disproved Indian claims.⁹

However, the very perception of India's aerial intrusion in Pakistan's mainland made Pakistan's retaliation necessary, not only to ensure the credibility of its conventional deterrence but also to maintain the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence. The Indian attempt at redefining the long established redlines of the conflict in Kashmir was thus foiled. Later, on March 23, 2019, President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi stated that Pakistan respects sovereignty of all countries and wishes peace" but made it clear that the "desire for peace should not be misconstrued as a sign of weakness".¹⁰

Pakistan despite possessing the right of self-defense made a measured response by targeting an open space in IoK from a Pakistan Air Force fighter jet from a stand-off range well inside Pakistani side of the Line of Control. Pakistan's response demonstrated its will and capability to retaliate against any external aggression.¹¹ Two of the Indian Air Force jets immediately after the retaliatory strike made another attempt at intruding into Pakistani airspace were shot down by PAF's JF-17 aircraft.¹² An IAF pilot of the downed MiG-21 Bison, which fell on Pakistani side of LoC, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman was taken captive.¹³

⁸ "Statement by Foreign Secretary on 26 February 2019 on the Strike on JeM training camp at Balakot," Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, February 26, 2019.

⁹ Lara Seligman, "Did India Shoot Down a Pakistani Jet? U.S. Count Says No.," Foreign Policy, April 04, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/04/did-india-shoot-down-a-pakistani-jet-u-s-count-says-no/>.

¹⁰ "Pakistan Day celebrations: Civil-military leaders, foreign dignitaries attend military parade in Islamabad," Dawn, March 23, 2019.

¹¹ "Pakistan will retaliate if India attacks: Imran Khan," Khaleej Times, February 19, 2019.

¹² "Reference repeated Indian claims about shooting down of Pakistani F-16 by India and use of F16 in air battle on 27 February," ISPR, April 01, 2019, <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=5237>.

¹³ "Abhinandan: Who is the Indian pilot captured by Pakistan?" British Broadcasting Corporation, March 01, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47397409>.

Timely response by Pakistani armed forces thwarted Indian attempt to find space for limited military action. Aerial skirmish and subsequent exchange of heavy firing along the Line of Control (LOC) quickly escalated the crisis between Pakistan and India.¹⁴

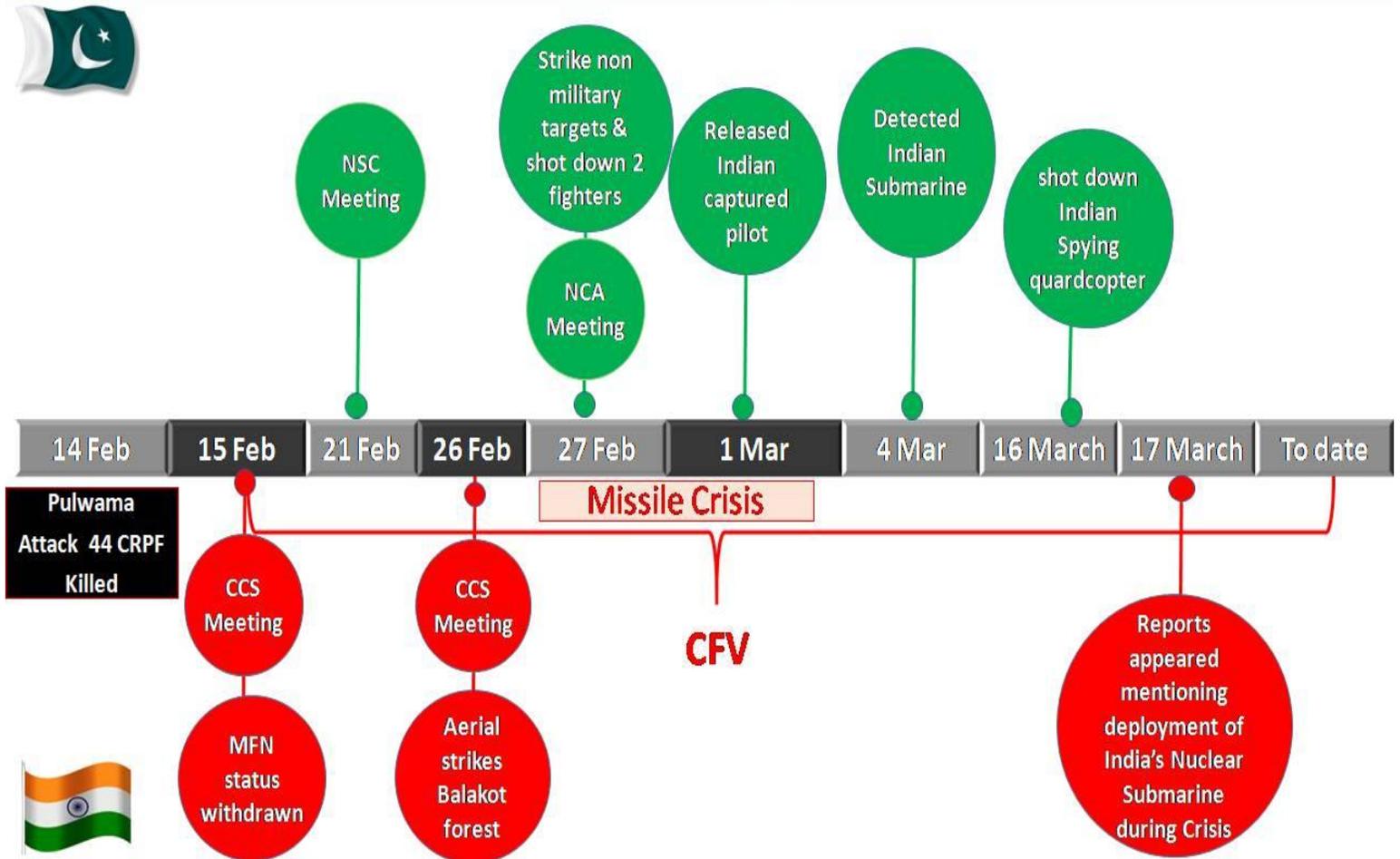
Fig 1: Recent Flash Point in Divided Kashmir¹⁵



¹⁴ “Due to prevailing environment Pakistan Army troops are at high alert along Line of control with all required safeguards along Eastern Border in place to thwart any Indian aggression,” ISPR, February 28, 2019, <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=5208>.

¹⁵ Congress Research Service, “India, Pakistan, and the Pulwama Crisis,” February 26, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IN11057.pdf>

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India's act of aggression based on its own false allegations was choreographed in a manner that it could exercise escalation dominance over Pakistan while undertaking so-called counter-terrorist strikes. However, successful retaliation by PAF and capture of IAF pilot raised the cost of continuation of hostilities for India.

Dynamics of recent crisis makes it imperative to explore the Indian motives of latest provocation against Pakistan, after which the strategies for crisis management and control will be explored. This will be followed by a section that plays out great power politics in the weeks leading up to escalation and then afterwards as the two countries embarked on de-escalatory path. Study will conclude with analyzing policy-options to deal with a future crisis and explore the strategies to discourage India from making similar attempts in future.

3. Indian Motives for the latest Provocation

Pulwama terror attack exposed Indian frustration at the failure of its political and military strategy for Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). Furthermore, it epitomized lapses on part of Indian intelligence networks. Two factors, meanwhile, complicated the response options for Indian government: Firstly; internal pressure to resort to kinetic option against Pakistan and secondly Pakistan's credible deterrence to counter conventional attack in the presence of low yield battlefield nuclear weapons (Nasr).

Emboldened by the growing India-US strategic partnership, military modernization, qualitative and quantitative conventional forces superiority, and rising economy, India decided to undertake military adventure that fueled escalation to pursue multiple objectives. India's act of aggression was aimed at attainment of following immediate and long term goals:

3.1. Escalation Dominance

The Indo-Pak military balance stood dramatically changed with India's offensive action in Pakistan's sovereign territory. Through air strikes, India tried to demonstrate its ability to attain escalation dominance and deter Pakistan from responding militarily. India through its claimed surgical strikes (2016) and the post-Pulwama aerial strikes (2019) tried to set the norm that conventional military capabilities allow India to pursue pro-active strategies and Pakistan is not capable to prevail in the escalation race. However, India's attempt to operationalize the proactive strategy was countered through timely and calculated response of Pakistan Air Force. In effect deterrence was restored in a very short time.

3.2. Economic Coercion

FATF Plenary that was being held in Paris from 17 to 22 February 2019 was to review the progress made by Pakistan since June 2018, when the (Pakistan) government submitted a 27 point action plan for addressing the weaknesses in its counter-terror financing and anti-money laundering regime and getting out of the illicit financing

watchdog's grey list.¹⁶ Islamabad had undertaken significant measures to fortify and strengthen anti money laundering/combating financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) regime in collaboration with FATF and APG. Just few days before the FATF meeting, India used Pulwama attack as a pretext to muddy the waters, complicate Pakistan's case and push for further downgrading it to the blacklist. While presence on grey list is itself problematic because it increases the cost of economic transactions between the country and the external world, it is all the more important for Pakistan because of its case for IMF bailout package for stabilizing its economy.

3.3. Regional Hegemony

India is perusing the policy of establishing hegemony and trying to maintain an impression of dominating power in the region while weakening Pakistan. Interplay of Pakistan's conventional and nuclear capabilities has, however, so far impeded realization of Indian design of establishing hegemony in the region. Pakistan being the only hindrance to Indian hegemony has, therefore, always remained Delhi's prime target both diplomatically as well as militarily. The deliberate effort to escalate crisis through claimed surgical strikes or recent most action of aerial intrusions are manifestations of India's policy of establishing regional hegemony by presenting Pakistan as a weaker state.

3.4. Indian Politics and 2019 General elections

During Pulwama crisis, the security calculations were overwhelmed by the political dynamics of the upcoming general elections in India. PM Modi's reaction to Pulwama attack was purely driven by domestic political objectives.¹⁷ According to commentators in India, economic dissatisfaction was considered as a key potential factor that could have hurt BJP's re-election prospects in upcoming elections. Therefore, BJP government's consideration was that a military response against the attack on security forces might resuscitate its electoral prospects because Indian voters, who were traditionally anti-Pakistan, could give more weightage to national security as compared to the economic

¹⁶ "Improving Global AML/CFT Compliance: On-going Process - 22 February 2019," Financial Action Task Force, March 15, 2019, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/countries/a-c/bahamas/documents/fatf-compliance-february-2019.html>.

¹⁷ Soutik Biswas, "War" and India PM Modi's muscular strongman image," BBC News, March 06, 2019.

problems of their country. One cannot escape the reality that anti-Pakistan rhetoric and credentials have been important factor in recent Indian election campaigns. This aptly explains why Prime Minister Narendra Modi ramped up aggressive rhetoric against Pakistan during crisis and rejected Pakistan's proposals for restraint and dialogue to maintain peace only for bolstering his political capital with the right wing voters. It is believed that military and political tensions will be kept high by India till the elections because it serves the political interests of current Indian leadership.¹⁸ That scheme was also evident from the fact that despite the apparent de-escalatory moves, which got underway through the intervention of the international community on 28 Feb 2019 with Prime Minister Imran Khan unilaterally announcing the release of captured Abhinandan; the resumption of working of diplomatic missions in each other's capitals with the return of the high commissioners; and initiation of talks on the framework agreement on Kartarpur Corridor, India had even by the end of March 2019 not lowered the operational deployment status of its Air Force and Army.

India's military actions and the act of withdrawal of Most Favorite Nation (MFN) status¹⁹ were undoubtedly driven by its regional strategic goals and domestic political objectives. Therefore, it's obvious why BJP government resorted to employing national security as a tool to achieve political leverage. In the light of this, India's act of aggression requires realistic de-escalation model and crisis prevention strategies.

4. Crisis Management and control between India and Pakistan

The crisis that flowed from Pulwama is not yet over and could potentially return to the escalatory trajectory because Indian political and military leadership will at some stage in near future attempt to repair the sullied image of 'rising and shining' India, whom some in the West were also projecting as the future regional strategic partner. The other objective of a possible military action in future could be to restore the credibility of its forces. In this context, a functional escalation management mechanism is essential between the two rival nuclear weapon states. It

¹⁸ Tanvi Kulkarni, "The Pulwama Aftermath: Making Sense Of India's Response," *South Asian Voices*, March 05, 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/the-pulwama-aftermath-making-sense-of-indias-response-%EF%BB%BF/>.

¹⁹ "India withdraws Most Favorite Nation status for Pakistan," *Dawn*, February 19, 2019.

was in this context that Pakistan's Foreign Office while announcing de-escalatory steps called for resumption of the hotline contact between the Directors General Military Operations' of the two armies that remained dysfunctional throughout the crisis. According to Ambassador Zamir Akram (Pakistan's former Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and to the Conference on Disarmament) crisis requires both sides to ensure that deterrence does not fail.²⁰ Therefore, it is inevitable to identify the possible escalation management and control measures.

Crisis management is a process through which potential escalation can be managed and controlled during a military confrontation. It is not necessary that the process of crisis management resolves the underlying triggers of the conflict. An American military strategist, Bernard Brodie stated that "escalation management requires curtailing objectives of outright victory and lowering military cost and penalties from going beyond the levels of the tolerable".²¹ Historically, South Asia's nuclear states have followed the same pattern in most of the crises that they underwent on their bilateral front: India and Pakistan have failed to address crisis triggers and could not agree on a path for the resolution of the outstanding disputes. The two factors which play a central role in India-Pakistan tensions are Kashmir dispute and domestic politics.²² The attainment of nuclear weapons capabilities by the two countries has, however, so far prevented them from going to a major war despite facing multiple crises over the past two decades.

Credible nuclear deterrence plays a central role in maintaining sustainable peace in region. According to military strategist Bernard Brodie, "nuclear weapons are not for fighting wars but preventing them".²³ In strategic landscape, nuclear deterrence will remain an effective mechanism for maintaining stability. During the crisis, both adversaries were required to act rationally to manage the conflict, as irrational human behavior of the actors in a crisis could lead to deterrence failure. Ambassador Zamir Akram stated in an interview that "for de-escalation, nuclear deterrence must be credible and there has to be a shared interest in escalation

²⁰Zamir Akram, "Casus belli." *The Express Tribune*, March 7, 2019.

²¹Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1959), 311.

²²Zafar Khan, "Crisis Management In Nuclear South Asia A Pakistani Perspective." In *Investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories*, by Stimson Center, 268. Washington, D.C: 2011.

²³ Brodie. Op.Cit. P.11.

management and control. Both sides need to share the objective of de-escalation as de-escalation cannot be one sided.”²⁴

Scholars have argued that presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia mean that a crisis can potentially escalate to a nuclear conflict. In recent crisis, Indian use of force and nuclear signaling posed threat to strategic stability. New Delhi upped the ante without realizing that it is easy to climb the escalation ladder but the reverse was difficult. Therefore, question arises that how can escalation management be exercised?

Alastair Iain Johnston has identified eight principles of crisis management. These eight principles can be used as a framework for crisis management. These principles include:²⁵

- i. Communicate with the adversary clearly and constantly and be specific about what is being demanded.
- ii. Articulate limited goals; be prepared to drop unlimited ones.
- iii. Maintain military flexibility, respond symmetrically in your options; don't excessively pressure the other side, and don't take the use of force lightly.
- iv. Avoid excessively ideological positions; don't threaten the other side's basic values, and don't moralize conflicts of interest.
- v. Exercise self-restraint, including in response to provocative actions by the other side.
- vi. Do not issue ultimatums; ensure that the adversary can back down in a face-saving manner.
- vii. Divide large issues into smaller, manageable parts.
- viii. Anticipate unintended consequences of particular moves

In the context of recent India-Pakistan crisis absence of above-mentioned factors negatively affected peace and stability. Additionally, aggressive behavior of India, lack of direct communication with Pakistan and emphasis on escalation, to put pressure on Pakistan, undermined regional peace and stability.

²⁴Zamir Akram, Interviewed during inhouse seminar in Islamabad Policy Institute, 01 March, 2019.

²⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, "The evolution of interstate security crisis-management theory and practice in China," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 1 (2016): 28-71.

5. Role of Media

Media has a primary role in managing and containing the crisis through correct and responsible reporting of the conflict. Under no circumstances media can become a cheerleader for war particularly in the South Asian context where lives of over one billion people are at stake and both primary actors are armed with nuclear weapons.

While analyzing media's role, one needs to realize that states are increasingly relying on media (print, electronic and social) to peddle their propaganda, undertake messaging with the other side and communicate with both domestic and international audiences. Moreover, media has an inherent interest and bias in favor of amplifying the messaging, which can lead to unintended misunderstanding among the domestic audiences, international community and adversary.

As the post-Pulwama escalation episode is deconstructed, one cannot miss the fact that Indian media went too far in promoting war hysteria through misreporting of the developments and propagating state propaganda. The Indian media failed in its role by not asking the political and military leadership the right questions as Indian leaders immediately after Pulwama incident started whipping up war frenzy without investigating the matter and taking facts into account. Once it became clear that Delhi had decided to take coercive military actions against Pakistan, Indian media houses and journalists assumed the role of unquestionably promoting the state propaganda. Several fake news and misinformation were spread without verifying the facts. In one instance no one bothered to confirm or cross check the casualty figure of 300 claimed by Indian Air Force in the alleged hit on the so-called 'terror sanctuary' in Balakot. Similarly, fake pictures were spread around to substantiate a rumor that a Pakistani F-16 had been shot down in an eagerness to be seen as having settled scores with PAF that had downed an IAF MiG-21.²⁶ Fake recordings of a conversation between militants were aired on television channels.²⁷

²⁶"Indian claims of shooting down Pakistan's F-16 debunked," Express Tribune, March 03, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1922282/1-renowned-expert-debunks-indian-claims-shooting-pakistans-f-16/>.

²⁷"Indian media's fake audio notes to prove Balakot air strikes ridiculed on social media," ARY News, March 12, 2019, <https://arynews.tv/en/indian-media-fake-audio-notes/>.

Analysis of Indian media's reporting of the conflict revealed that their news often contained contradictory and uncorroborated news, which were often sourced to anonymous officials, intelligence sources, and background briefings.

These are just few instances of how irresponsibly Indian media acted in such a precarious situation. The Pakistani media, on the other hand, was very mature in its reporting. The alarmist reporting by Indian media raised a very pertinent question: For whose interest did the Indian media shed its objectivity and responsibility, if one were not to expect them to be neutral in the conflict?

As we look beyond the crisis, it is expected of journalist bodies in both countries to analyze the role played by media outlets and emphasize ethics and responsibility while reporting conflict.

6. India-Pakistan standoff and Great Power Politics

The world often views the Indo-Pak conflict through the prism of their strategic interests in India. This in turn shifts focus of international conversation away from the Kashmir issue, which is the root cause of the conflict. As India-Pakistan confrontation in the latest episode threatened to spiral out of control, the international community, as third-party actors, stepped in and played a significant role in de-escalation.

Crisis management and de-escalation role of third party actors is only viable if the third party (or parties) is acceptable to both sides, and they have necessary credibility and influence. This has gained all the more importance due to evolving strategic and economic interests of great powers in South Asia.²⁸ A crucial question, therefore, is - how does great power politics play out in the Indo-Pak rivalry?

During the recent crisis no major country condemned India's violation of the Pakistan's airspace and initiation of conventional and nuclear escalation.²⁹ The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo dubbed it a counter-terrorism strike. Meanwhile, on February 27, Indian external affairs

²⁸ Ashley J Tellis, "The evolution of US-Indian ties: Missile defense in an emerging strategic relationship." *International Security* 30, no. 4 (2006): 113-151.

²⁹ Mehmal Sarfraz, "Abhinandan was not released under any pressure: Pakistan," *The Hindu*, March 4, 2019. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/abhinandan-was-not-released-under-any-pressure-pakistan/article26421586.ece?homepage=true>.

minister Sushma Swaraj was in China for the trilateral RIC (Russia-India-China) meeting. China issued a statement asking both the countries to exercise restraint and avoid escalation.³⁰

In December, 2017, Washington declared that ‘great-power competition’ is the foremost threat to its national security. China and Russia are the primary strategic competitors to the dominance of U.S. Terrorism, predominant threat since 2002, was downgraded to second place in the American threat perception. Consequently, U.S. has sought withdrawal of its troops from Syria and Afghanistan to move military and economic resources towards meeting the challenges of great-power competition.

As U.S. sought to check rising China, they deepened their defense relationship with India. U.S. also designated India as a key partner of its Indo-Pacific Rebalancing Strategy to balance rising China. This is a manifestation of the offshore balancing strategy advocated by the offensive realist scholar John J. Mearsheimer. Under this strategy, a great power balances a potentially- adversarial great power through reliance on regional powers. In the Asia-Pacific region, U.S. is banking on India, Japan and Australia to balance the economic and military footprint of China. It is natural that if India is occupied by a military situation in Kashmir it becomes a strategic challenge for the U.S., as New Delhi’s attention and resources are consumed by India-Pakistan tensions.

China, Pakistan’s most trusted ally maintained a balance stance during the course of military stand-off. Beijing has on multiple occasions, much like many other important capitals, claimed credit for defusing tensions and de-escalating the crisis. It is, however, evident that Beijing refused to pick a side till very late in the crisis. Chinese Foreign Minister Wany Yi indirectly criticized India, when he emphasized on the need to respect sovereignty of all countries after aerial clash between India and Pakistan.³¹ It has to be further acknowledged that China is here dealing with a complex situation. It has to weigh in multiple interests at various levels while responding to India-Pakistan tensions.

³⁰“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on February 28, 2019,” Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 03, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1641847.shtml.

³¹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on March 7, 2019,” Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 03, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1643710.shtml.

For one, China has a clear interest in peace and stability in South Asia, as its investments and presence (thousands of Chinese citizens visited and staying in Pakistan)³² in Pakistan and other South Asian countries have increased manifold during past the five years. Second, China is attempting to build strategic trust with India to address irritants in its ties with India. Third, Beijing isn't in a position to be a crisis manager like the U.S has been over decades. China knows its limitations, as being a close partner of Islamabad; it will not be viewed as a neutral arbiter by New Delhi.

As far as Arab countries are concerned, there are two explanations of why they pursue neutrality in the Pakistan-India tensions and do not push either side for addressing other's concerns. Pakistan is an important strategic partner for the Arab countries as it provides military training and supports them in counter-terrorism operations.³³ Pakistan's former military chief Gen (R) Raheel Sharif is heading the Islamic Military Alliance based in Saudi Arabia.

India, for Arab countries is a huge market. More importantly, Arab nations, particularly UAE and Saudi Arabia are interested in deepening their strategic and economic engagement with India in a bid to counter Iran's expanding ties with India.³⁴ Other than strategic and economic interests, Indian and Pakistani workers constitute the bulk of workforce of UAE and Saudi economies. Peace and stability in South Asia, thus, becomes a critical interest for Arab countries.

It is striking that despite Pakistan's rebuttal of its involvement in the terrorist attacks and pledges to prosecute the alleged entities, if provided with evidence, some of the pro-Indian states still do not subscribe to Pakistan's viewpoint.³⁵ Islamabad must address the root cause of this divergence between the international narrative and Pakistan's position, because it undermines the Kashmir cause and deflects world's attention from India's human rights violations in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, as also reported by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2018.³⁶

³² "Over 92,000 foreigners visit Pakistan since launch of CPEC," *The News*, March 5, 2019.

³³ Naveed Ahmad, "Pakistan and the Saudi-led anti-terror coalition: Regional implications for the appointment of Gen. Raheel," *Al Jazeera*. May 17, 2017.

³⁴ Frank Kane, "Why Saudi Arabia is tilting East." *Arab News*. February 24, 2019.
<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1457126>.

³⁵ "Kashmir conflict: Pakistan foreign minister says war would be 'suicidal' - BBC News," British Broadcasting Corporation, March 01, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lxaffJLrql>.

³⁶ Annie Gowen, "U.N. says India's 'excessive force' caused unlawful killings in its first report on abuses in Kashmir," *The Washington Post*. June 14, 2018.

At the same time it is essential that instead of demonstrating unfair stereotypes and associating them with Pakistan, it is inevitable for regional and global actors to investigate existing as well as past crises and reflect on the missed opportunities of co-operation and draw lessons to avoid escalation in future crisis.

7. Way Forward: Possible Options

Pakistan and India need to explore solutions for their security challenges. Despite dealing with several crises in a nuclear environment, region is lacking in crisis prevention strategies and a conflict resolution framework.³⁷ Both adversaries have, after every crisis, qualitatively upgraded their conventional and nuclear capabilities without taking any step towards conflict resolution or crisis management. This increases the risk of escalation between the nuclear-armed rivals during the subsequent crisis. This is a powerful reminder of the need to formulate strategies that could prevent outbreak of crises and/or contribute to containing the crisis once it sets off. Such a mechanism, it is expected, would eventually lead to conflict resolution. In this regard following five options can potentially deliver the required results and maintain peace and stability in region: Adoption of more confidence building measures and resumption of bilateral talks, Strategic Restraint Regime, Existence of Credible Deterrence strategies, Bilateral Arms Control Regime, Crisis Management Mechanism and resolution of Kashmir Conflict.³⁸

7.1. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

Over the years, India and Pakistan have instituted number of non-military, military and nuclear CBMs. Most of the CBMs were meant to address a specific issue or sought to deal with the triggers of a crisis. But it is a dilemma that most of the CBMs fail when escalation occurs and normal diplomatic engagement is suspended. Political leaderships of both countries should come to an understanding for pursuing a bilateral dialogue to address all outstanding issues. A format, in the shape of composite dialogue exists. It needs to be made

³⁷Iram Khalid, "Management of Pakistan India Conflicts: An Application of Crisis Decision-Making," Punjab University (2012).

³⁸Adeel Mukhtar Mirza, "Crisis management in nuclear S Asia," (2018).

operational. Pakistan has already shown its willingness to discuss the issue of terrorism, from which it also suffers, alongside other contentious subjects.

In the absence of a political dialogue, both countries should work to maintain strategic stability in the region. Presently, few CBMs are in place to build bilateral trust in the realm of nuclear issues. For instance, as part of existing CBMs, Islamabad and New Delhi regularly exchange list of nuclear installations as they have signed an agreement prohibiting attack against nuclear facilities.³⁹ Similarly, both sides have signed an agreement to notify the other side before conducting ballistic missile tests.⁴⁰ This agreement, however, doesn't cover tests involving cruise missiles. To further build strategic trust and augment strategic stability, there is a need to engage in CBMs for dealing with new technological advances, particularly, deployment of nuclear weapons at sea.

CBMs can also be a framework for crisis management when used effectively. It is imperative to develop a framework of CBMs that remains viable during the crisis. On the basis of lessons learnt in Pulwama crisis following CBMs may play an effective role in future to prevent or manage crisis:

- *Political commitment:* Political leaders and diplomats of both sides shall commit to jointly investigating incidents of terrorism and insulate the dialogue process from the acts of terrorists.
- *Operationalize hotlines:* Pakistan and Indian government should establish hotlines to counter challenges and manage the rivalries. During the crisis instead of taking military action both states should commit to eschew escalation and instead pursue the political and diplomatic communication by operationalizing the existing hotlines. Additionally, higher levels of communication channels should be explored.
- *No War Pact:* Neutral third party can play a central role to facilitate a "No war pact" between nuclear adversaries.

- *Identify the root cause:* The confidence building measures will not diffuse the tension immediately, but flow of information will help both states to identify the real triggers of

³⁹Salik, Naeem Ahmad. "Confidence Building Measures Between India and Pakistan." *NDU Journal*, 2010: 47-84.

⁴⁰Creegan, Erin. "India, Pakistan Sign Missile Notification Pact." *Arms Control Today* 35, no. 9 (2005): 42

the crisis, which will thereby allow them to identify the root cause of the conflict and manage crisis in order to maintain strategic stability.⁴¹

- *Public Diplomacy:* People to people contact and cultural communication will enhance goodwill spirit and facilitate co-operation among the peoples of both states. Such diplomatic practices may develop better understanding of each between the peoples of the two countries, reduce the likelihood of hostilities and generate pressures on the governments to exercise restraints instead of engaging in conflict for political gains.
- *Composite dialogue:* Composite dialogue should be initiated on all outstanding and strategic issues. Moreover, Strategic Restraint Regime should be established to avoid arms race, offensive doctrinal developments and miscalculations for peace in the region.
- *Establishing Economic Stakes:* Building Indian economic stakes through trade agreements and economic cooperation under CPEC could be one of the new initiatives to reduce the bilateral tension.
- *Crisis Management Mechanism:* Conflict can quickly escalate in the absence of any bilateral conflict management mechanism. Both sides need to develop such mechanisms especially after the role of 3rd party mediators has come under question.

7.2. Presence of Credible deterrence strategies

India and Pakistan are entangled in a complex security dilemma, modifying their force postures with the introduction of proactive military strategies and sophisticated missile technologies. The Indian posture is increasingly aggressive and aims to test Pakistan's threshold, which puts the onus of deterrence stability more on Pakistan than India. Before the acquisition of nuclear arms both states fought three major wars. However, with the introduction of nuclear weapons in South Asia, they have been forced to exercise restraint and limit escalation. India has repeatedly sought

⁴¹"Pakistan and India resume conventional CBM talks." *Dawn*. December 27, 2011.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/683557>.

to break-out of the constraints of deterrence at different points in history but has not been successful.

In post-nuclearization era both states have experienced various stand-offs, crisis and conflicts. The current incident has demonstrated that region will continue to face such incidents leading to escalation because of unresolved disputes especially Kashmir. These trends in South Asian strategic landscape have the ability to undermine the deterrence stability in the region.

India's pursuit of modernization of nuclear and conventional systems such as development of wide range of nuclear delivery systems; expansion in fissile material stocks; acquisition of new systems for army, navy and air force; and operationalization of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) are destabilizing strategic developments in the region.⁴² Indian acquisition of sophisticated technologies and arms makes it necessary for Pakistan to introduce changes in its conventional and strategic doctrines and increase the preparedness level by developing missiles technology and conventional arms. Therefore in response to Indian military modernization plan, a shift in Pakistan's defence strategy is also visible. Pakistan has adopted full-spectrum deterrence doctrine to meet new challenges. It has pursued the development and deployment of short-range battle field nuclear weapons by testing NASR missile at 60kms range. This has forced India to re-think the utility of CSD and pursue surgical strike as alternative option.⁴³ These conventional and nuclear strategies are developed to maintain deterrence equilibrium in the region, and play key role in crisis management and de-escalation. However, emerging trends show that establishment of bilateral arms control and Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) in the region is inevitable to prevent arms race and achieve the objective of strategic stability.⁴⁴

⁴²Cyril Almeida, "Kiyani spells out threat posed by Indian Doctrine", The Dawn, Thursday, 4th February, 2010.

⁴³ MansoorAhmed, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Their Impact on stability," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 June 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/pakistan-s-tactical-nuclear-weapons-and-their-impact-on-stability-pub-63911> .

7.3. Bilateral Arms Control Regime

Dynamics of conventional, missile and nuclear weapons arms race between India and Pakistan are depiction of Action-Reaction syndrome. Arms race in the region instigates security dilemma and poses threats to regional security. The induction of sophisticated weapons in conventional and strategic forces and security dynamics of South Asia demands a pragmatic approach to establish bilateral arms control regime.⁴⁵

Under the arms control framework, numbers of measures can be taken to reduce the risk of war and burden of military preparations during peace time. Arms control regime between India and Pakistan demand following measures:

- Limit, reduce or control certain conventional and nuclear weapons. It will add stability in India-Pakistan's strategic relations and will also address security dilemma to a certain extent.
- Pre-Testing notification for both ballistic and cruise missile tests to avoid the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation.
- Notification of military exercises and trainings.

Most importantly, arms control measures have the ability to act as communication channel. Thereby, they can potentially reduce the risk of misunderstanding and contribute to strategic stability. However, the prospects of an arms control mechanism taking roots in South Asia are not very bright due to the following factors: First, India's increased defence spending and budget to pursue the goal of modernization of its conventional and strategic forces; second, existence of territorial disputes, historic rivalries and mutual mistrust; third, powerful domestic opposition in India; Fourth, India's hegemonic model and existence of tri-lateral dilemma between China-Pakistan-India.⁴⁶ It can also be demonstrated in the case of strategic arms control regime.

⁴⁵Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, "Arms control: risk reduction measures between India and Pakistan." *SAS SU Research Paper* no. 1 (June 2005).

⁴⁶Mario E Carranza, "US involvement is critical for South Asian arms control," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, September 15, 2016, https://thebulletin.org/roundtable_entry/us-involvement-is-critical-for-south-asian-arms-control/.

Strategic Restraint Regime is viable strategy to maintain military force balance by avoiding nuclear arms race, establishing deterrence stability and prevent conflicts. Unfortunately, Pakistan's proposal for SRR has always been rejected by Indian government⁴⁷ due to above cited factors.

Proactive diplomatic measures and third party mediation can, however, play important role in exerting pressure on nuclear neighbours to execute arms control mechanism to resolve the conundrum. Consequently, establishment of arms control regime and SRR between India and Pakistan would play an important role to address the security dilemma. Freezing, limiting, and controlling the development of certain de-stabilizing conventional and strategic weapons and strategies are vital to maintain peace in region.

7.4.Kashmir Resolution: Key to achieve Peace and Stability

Kashmir is at the core of Pakistan-India rivalry. With worsening situation in Indian-Occupied Kashmir (IOK) bilateral tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi were bound to escalate. India's state-sponsored suppression in Kashmir was highlighted in a report commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which was published June 2018. According to the report, Indian armed forces deployed in Kashmir resorted to "excessive use of force" which resulted in the "unlawful killings and a very high number of injuries". Indian security forces killed as many as 147 Kashmiris between 2016 and 2018.⁴⁸ The brutal use of the pellet firing guns resulted in the killing of 17 persons and thousands of others were injured and blinded partially/completely.

The OHCHR Report condemned the Indian legal code enforced in Kashmir. One of the legal codes was the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990. Under this Act, Indian security forces are immune from prosecution for carrying out any form of persecution against Kashmiris. The other punitive legal code is the Jammu and Kashmir Public

⁴⁷Naeem Salik, " *Strategic Stability in South Asia Challenges and Prospects,*" Nuclear Paper Series 3, 201, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

⁴⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan,* United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf>.

Safety Act, 1978. This Act provides Indian security forces deployed in Occupied Kashmir with the impunity against prosecution for crimes such as abductions, involuntary disappearances and sexual violence against women. Due to the enforcement of these legal codes, no personnel of the armed forces deployed in Kashmir have been prosecuted in the last twenty-eight years. It demonstrates the impunity given to the Indian Occupation forces in Kashmir.

Adil Ahmad Dar, who is reported to have carried out the attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy in Pulwama district in Kashmir on 14 February 2019, was one of many Kashmiris, who had been humiliated by the Indian security forces on multiple occasions. According to international media reports, he resorted to violence because of the brutalities of Indian security forces and their maltreatment of Kashmiris.⁴⁹In recent weeks, there have been massive protests in IOK against Indian oppression. These demonstrations erupted after imposition of Governor's rule in the Occupied Valley in December 2018.⁵⁰ It was in this context that the former Indian foreign minister and BJP leader Yashwant Sinha criticized BJP government's policy of relying on excessive use of force to subdue the Kashmiris.⁵¹ In his judgment, Kashmir cannot be subdued by the continuation of brutal tactics, as these actions have only infused hatred among Kashmir's Muslim populace.

The emerging scenario shows that India is using the rhetoric of terrorism in Kashmir to secure the support of international community for strategic gains and cover up its crimes against Kashmiris. India as well as the international community must realize that the current crisis originated from an attack that is linked to indigenous uprising of the people of Occupied Kashmir against Indian forces. Unless, the Kashmir issue is resolved, the world may unfortunately continue to witness such dangerous crisis situation between nuclear neighbors

⁴⁹"Kashmir bomber radicalised after beating by troops, parents say," *Dawn*. February 16, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1464147>.

⁵⁰"After Governor's rule, President's rule comes into force in Jammu and Kashmir," *The Economic Times*, December 20, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/after-governors-rule-presidents-rule-comes-into-force-in-jammu-and-kashmir/articleshow/67168758.cms>.

⁵¹"India has lost Kashmir valley emotionally, says Yashwant Sinha," *Economic Times*, October 01, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-has-lost-kashmir-valley-emotionally-says-yashwant-sinha/articleshow/60902616.cms?from=mdr>.

because of Indian's failed Kashmir policy and avoidance of dialogue with Pakistan over the Kashmir dispute.

8. Conclusion

Indian plan to achieve escalation dominance over Pakistan and redefine the red lines of conflict was successfully thwarted by timely, measured and calculated response of Pakistan's armed forces. Contrary to the calculations of India, Pakistan responded befittingly and unequivocally demonstrated its capability and will to respond to external aggression. Moreover, the belligerent and aggressive approach of Indian government, military and political leaders was appropriately answered by rational call for restraint, bilateral dialogue and military caution by their Pakistani counterparts, who astutely avoided getting stuck in the escalation trap.

India-Pakistan standoff has debunked the narratives and assumptions built over time by Indian academics and their western friends regarding non-existent nuclear threat (from India), and Pakistan's response strategy planning with nuclear weapon in conventional conflict with India. Most significant was the contrast between India's provocations, which had activated all fronts, conventional, missile and nuclear, and the sober appeals of restraint from Pakistan's leadership. Pakistan's response as responsible nuclear weapon state has defied all stereotypes depicting Pakistan as unstable nuclear state.

India's loss of two aircraft has also broken the myth of Indian air force's superiority. Prevailing crisis has proved that Pakistani conventional capabilities are good enough to match Indian aggression. By responding in a befitting manner, Pakistan has re-established nuclear as well as conventional deterrence. Moreover, regional strategic stability has been restored.

Pakistan can adopt following strategies to achieve its national security objectives:

- i. Increase the number of conventional and nuclear forces without indulging in arms race.

- ii. Undertake quantitative and qualitative advancement in Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4I2SR) system.
- iii. Use nimble footed diplomacy to mobilize the international community against India's act of war and expose India's irresponsible or false behavior at international fora to prevent such aggression in future.
- iv. Make India realize the incentive of engaging Pakistan in dialogue.
- v. Underscore the need for peaceful and durable solution of Kashmir dispute, which is the root cause of conflict and a threat to regional peace and stability. Pakistan should launch an aggressive campaign for seeking resolution of the Kashmir conflict, besides highlighting the Human Rights violations in Occupied Kashmir at all international forums especially at the United Nations Security Council. Immediate relief can be provided to the Kashmiris through the implementation of recommendations contained in the OHCHR report including the setting up of a commission of inquiry by UN Human Rights Council to conduct a comprehensive independent international investigation into human rights violations in Occupied Kashmir.
- vi. Pakistan should make it clear that its crackdown on militant organizations is intended under its own National Action Plan and not under any external pressure.
- vii. Last but not the least, the most critical component that drives strategic interests of states is a strong and stable economy. Pakistan should peruse a policy of economic cooperation and bilateral trade that encourages foreign investment in Pakistan, which would in turn develop world's positive stakes here. Economic developments in Pakistan will produce positive impact in high political areas e.g. national and international security and strategic concerns.

The lessons learnt from post-Pulwama stand-off are different from previous crises 2001-2002 standoff; Mumbai terror attacks of 2008 and similar other episodes. Post-Pulwama stand-off has proved that Pakistan and India lack the capacity, mechanisms and the environment for resolving their disputes bilaterally. In previous conflicts, neutral role of third party mediation or arbitration at early stages of conflict remained significant in defusing the situations. During recent crisis, third party role came into play very late and it, in a way, at the beginning of the conflict

encouraged Indian belligerence by seeing and describing Indian aggression as a “self-defence strike”. There was no clear denunciation of Indian act of violating Pakistan sovereignty on February 26, 2019. Instead everyone just called for calm and restraint. The recent crisis, therefore, underscores the need for unbiased and neutral mediator(s), who could in the first place stop the crisis from transforming into military confrontation and if it happens, the situation is de-escalated at the earliest stage. This calls for reinvigorating the diplomatic prong (diplomacy as first line of defence) of state’s policy for proactively safeguarding national interest. The recent crisis has, furthermore, proven that Kashmir is a nuclear flashpoint and it is inevitable to sensitize international community on peaceful resolution of Kashmir conflict.

It is for the world to realize that the low intensity conflict along the Line of Control and Working Boundary, whose one manifestation is the ever increasing frequency of ceasefire violations, cannot be ignored. Internally Pakistani leaders have to acknowledge that the country’s narrative is suffering from credibility crisis, which prevents even neutral countries from standing up for it in tense situations. An extra-ordinary effort is, therefore, warranted in this direction. International politics is one reason why the world does not trust Pakistan. Reshaping the global politics to suit Pakistan’s view point may not be in government’s control, but there are many other factors as well that are contributing to the situation, which the country’s leadership need to address domestically.

The crisis, to a certain extent, has roots in Uri incident after which India had claimed surgical strikes. Although on that occasion, Pakistan carried out a media campaign to counter-Indian claims and undertook a diplomatic outreach, but retrospectively looking it looks inadequate. Indian in our response in 2016 found space for testing and even attempting to redraw the redlines of conflict. Therefore, any Indian aggression should be responded firmly. The lessons learnt from the latest crisis also necessitates the need to explore options for Pakistan for discouraging India from conducting similar offensive actions - surgical strikes or air strikes - in future.

Pakistani response to post-Pulwama standoff has sent a loud and clear message to India as well as International community that it will respond to any aggression to ensure invincibility of its sovereignty. India’s aggressive action is, nevertheless, alarming and demands a viable strategy for dissuading India from conducting such acts in future. Pakistan’s foreign minister in a press conference on April 7, 2019 stated that there was “reliable intelligence that India is

devising a new plan” and that “preparations are being made, and there are chances of another attack against Pakistan.” Citing intelligence, he said, “the action could be taken between April 16-20”. Therefore, a three pronged strategy needs to be worked out:

At the strategic level Pakistan must take steps to strengthen the Comprehensive Deterrence, which is an amalgam of (DIMEFIL) Diplomatic, Intelligence, Military, Economic, Financial, Information and Lawfare elements.

At the military level Pakistan needs to develop specialized smart action forces to enhance the preparedness level of Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Navy and Army for low intensity conflicts. Such operational preparations requires sophisticated conventional and strategic forces, new doctrines and advance technologies like drones, micro drones, Artificial Intelligence, cyber attacks counter etc. Additionally Pakistan must firmly retaliate ceasefire violations or other aggressive actions by India on LoC and Working Boundary.

At the diplomatic plane there should be a persistent effort, especially at the United Nations, to make the world realize that such aggressive actions by India can spiral the conflict out of control, if not handled rationally by both sides, and any miscalculation on part of either can be catastrophic not only for the region but beyond. India is trying to legitimize its atrocities in Kashmir by wrongly presenting the freedom movement as terrorism. Pakistan must send a strong message to the world underscoring the need for an early resolution of the longstanding Kashmir dispute as per UN resolutions.

At the moment India does not see any incentive in talking to Pakistan and peacefully resolving the outstanding issues because of a variety of factors – geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic. The challenge for Pakistan’s diplomacy is to create those incentives, which compel the Indian leadership to seek a peaceful settlement of the conflicts and normalization of relations. It is a difficult task, but not completely impossible. Kartarpur Corridor is one example and increased business and trading links and people to people contacts could be other areas that can create positive stakes for both sides in pursuing peaceful neighborly relations. The relationship and its attached sensitivities are too serious to be left to the mercy of global events and powers in the hope of them providing an environment in which the problems could be addressed.

In the final analysis, factors like India's quantitative and qualitative developments in conventional and strategic forces, its offensive military doctrines, India-US strategic partnership for countering China, ignoring of India's irresponsible behavior by the world, absence of bilateral India-Pakistan crisis management regime and mutual mistrust have cumulatively posed serious challenges to Pakistan's security. The situation has also undermined regional strategic stability. It is critical for Pakistan to maintain effective and credible deterrence at all levels to ensure its security and maintain regional peace. Therefore, Pakistan's policy of Full Spectrum deterrence is a viable strategy for maintaining strategic stability in the region.

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