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PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

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-Junyali Gusain

INTRODUCTION

Post the development of nuclear weapons, the concept of nuclear strategy grew as a parallel concept. Most scholars agree that the term 'nuclear strategy' comprises a nation's doctrines, practices, and strategies for advancing bigger political goals. Nuclear strategy includes types of weapons, posturing, plans for retaliation, and deterrence. It differs from country to country in different aspects.

Pakistan conducted its first nuclear demonstration shortly after India, in May 1998 (Chagai Test). They argued that they did so to seek strategic parity with India and as a defensive measure. They "argued that India's explosions had created a zero-sum situation for Pakistan."

Currently, Pakistan has approximately 170 warheads, with the potential to cross 200 in this decade. Pakistan is a non-signatory to both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, as India has not signed them and remains an illegitimate nuclear power.

NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Pakistan has been assumed to have commenced its nuclear weapons programme after its defeat in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and further developed it after India's Pokhran Test in 1974. Pakistan's nuclear strategy has been criticised for being India-centric. It has often cited its 'existential threat' from India to justify its massive arms acquisitions and tactics. The nuclear strategy has also been designed to counter its 'strategic asymmetries' against India. These asymmetries include geophysical constraints, tactical backwardness, and limited resources. Thus, the nuclear option presented itself as "the best and most effective equaliser".

The basic aspects of the Pakistani Nuclear Strategy are –

1) MINIMUM CREDIBLE DETERRENCE

Pakistan being inferior to India in conventional military strength has been a strong reason for its development of nuclear weapons. The nuclear arsenal ensures that "deterrence play a significant role in its security policy and so it is projected as an alternative to conventional weapon security". Credible deterrence is a strategic decision because factoring Pakistan's financial and resource constraints compared to India ensures "that minimum deterrence is the most cost-effective and pragmatic option for Pakistan". Pakistan also justifies minimum deterrence as a means to circumvent an arms race with India. However, Pakistan transitioned to a Full Spectrum Defense (FSD) in 2013. FSD "is not only about developing capabilities that could close the capability gap of a state vis-à-vis its adversaries but also checking for its operational readiness". Essentially, it means that nuclear weapons are tested regularly, much like the conventional military is trained for battle at all times. Thus, their weapons are always ready to be tactically deployed for battle in their deterrent positions.

2) TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS

^[1]

As a response to India's 'Cold Start Doctrine', Pakistan developed Tactical Nuclear Weapons (confirmed in 2017). TNWs are considered dangerous^{viii} due to their small size, quicker deployment and easier usability than strategic weapons. The Nasr Missile System also called the 'Hantf' (doom in Arabic) has been developed as the TNW of choice- nuclear ballistic missiles with shorter ranges and lower yields.^{ix} Particularly, the Hant-9 Nasr Missile, with a range of 60-80 km, is the shortest. Tactical Nuclear Weapons counter the Cold Start doctrine by lowering Pakistan's nuclear threshold, even if India launches a limited assault against Pakistan. The possession of TNWs – considered a risky strategy, rests on the fact that Pakistan is confident that India will not launch a full-scale assault. The situation becomes a Game of Chicken- both sides have perceived threats that lead them to adopt offensive strategies, yet both count on the other to not escalate conflicts. However, if neither swerves, it is a situation of mutually assured destruction.

3) NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

Pakistan has no officially stated Nuclear Doctrine; therefore, it is relatively vague/ambiguous. This seems to be a deliberative tactic that allows Pakistan to keep their enemy unaware and have "flexibility" in shaping/ changing their doctrine anytime. Notably, unlike India, Pakistan has not adopted a "no first use policy". It is also not different from its military doctrine of sub-conventional warfare.^x It is used in an "offensive-defensive instrument"- the vague doctrine enables them to counter Indian response after their offensive due to the threat of nuclear destruction.

4) POSTURING

Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai, founder of the Strategic Planning Division, upheld their minimum deterrence policy and revealed the crossing of 4 thresholds as crossing the nuclear threshold of Pakistan:

- 1) SPATIAL- India attacks and captures large parts of Pakistani territory.
- 2) MILITARY- India attacks and destroys a significant portion of its Army or Air force.
- 3) ECONOMIC- India economically threatens and harms Pakistan.
- 4) DOMESTIC- India creates a situation where Pakistan gets domestically politically destabilised.

^{xiii}

These are referred to as the "red lines" of Pakistan. They were laid down after India mobilised its troops towards Pakistan as part of Operation Parakram.^[3] Thus, "Pakistan views its nuclear arsenal as the ultimate guarantor of its sovereignty and national survival against India".^{xiv}

[1]The 'COLD START DOCTRINE' is a strategy of the Indian Army that allows rapid deployment of troops against Pakistan within 48 hours. It consists of smaller Integrated Battle Groups that can launch a full-scale assault. The Indian army has officially denied having a Cold Start Doctrine.

[2]The Hantf Missiles are numbered from 1-9. Each missile has its own name.

[3]Operation Parakram is the codename for the mass mobilization of Indian Army troops along the Indo-Pak border in Kashmir as a response to the 2001 LeT and JeM attacks on the Indian Parliament. The situation resulted in a tense standoff, with the potential to escalate to a full-fledged war that ended because of a retreating of troops from the Indian side. The nuclear option was emphasized by Pakistan as a response to Indian mobilization which later influenced formulation of the nuclear threshold redlines.

CONCLUSION

The nuclearisation of India and Pakistan has elevated the intensity of all future conflicts by a considerable factor. The vague nuclear doctrine combined with the development of nuclear weapons, the significant lowering of the nuclear threshold, and the high degree of involvement of the Pakistan Army in the political affairs of the State all complicate the nuclear matter. At the same time, some analysts worldwide have also been optimistic, seeing how, despite the full-scale war of Kargil and numerous military skirmishes, neither nation has pushed on the nuclear option.

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