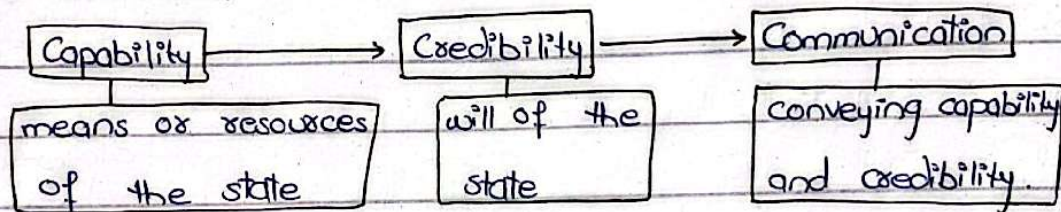


Q No 1:

What role has nuclear deterrence played in establishing strategic stability in South Asia? Would South Asia be more stable with or without nuclear weapons?

As Kenneth Waltz (1990) argues, "the presence of nuclear weapons makes war less likely because their costs are incalculably high." Nuclear deterrence refers to the strategic use of nuclear weapons by threatening unacceptable retaliation. In the South Asian context, nuclear deterrence emerged after 1998's overt tests of India and Pakistan.

Deterrence comprises 3'C (Capability, Credibility and Communication).

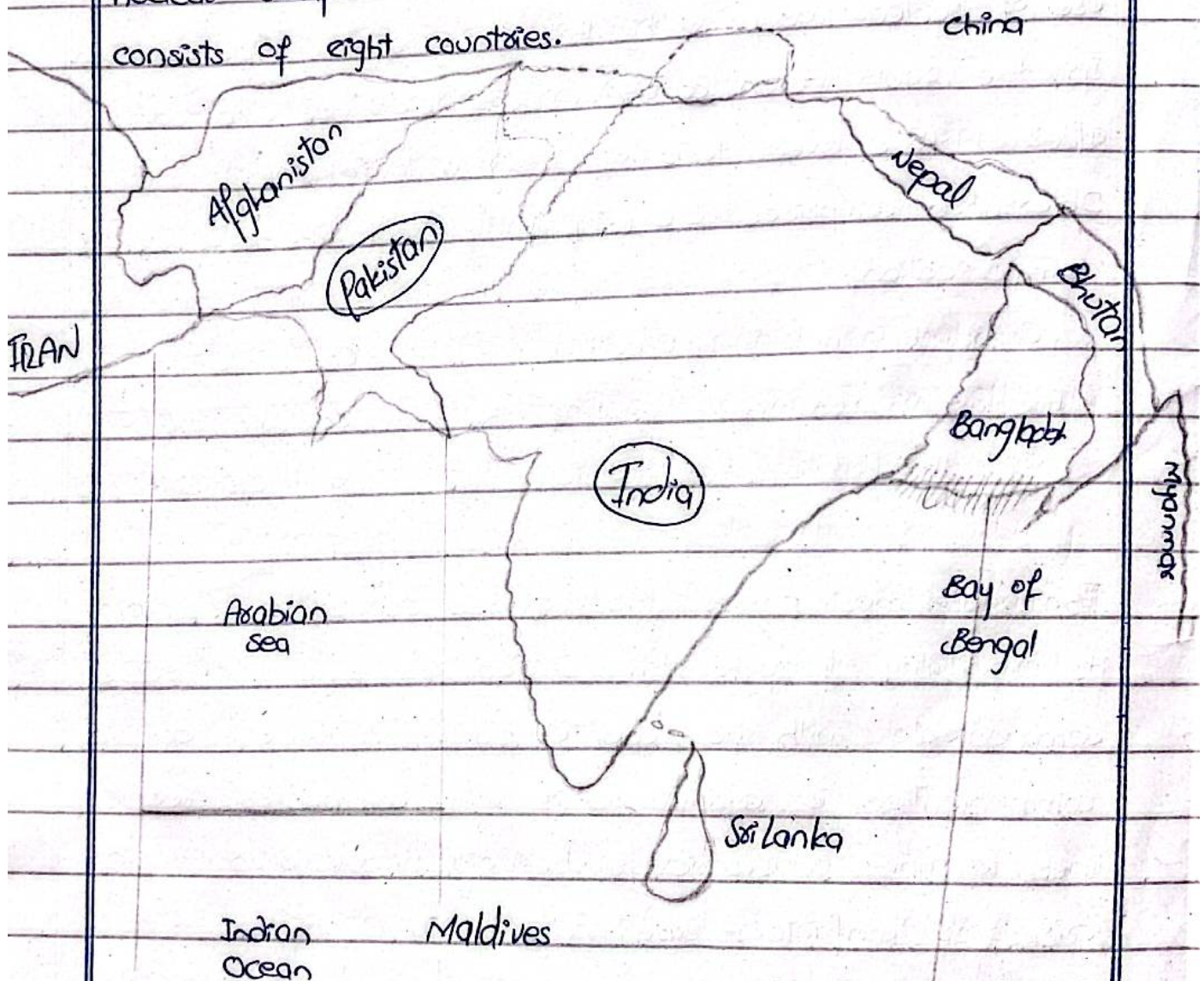


The state must possess the required capabilities, maintain its credibility through demonstrated resolve, and effectively communicate with its counter-parts. In nuclear domain, communication is crucial as it will communicate red lines to your adversaries and avoid miscalculations during crises or conflicts. A case in point: on March 9, 2022, India accidentally fired an unarmed Brahmos missile that crashed 124km inside Pakistan at a place Mian Channu.

The Indian Ministry of Defence said, a technical malfunction led to accidental firing of a missile and government had ordered a high level court of Inquiry.

1. Two Nuclear Powers in the region

South Asia has been a region of geo-strategic importance due to its location and resources. The presence of nuclear weapons has added to its complexity. South Asia consists of eight countries.



The nuclear armed race in South Asia started in

1974 when India conducted its first nuclear test. Later on, Pakistan weaponized nuclear technology in May, 1998 to mitigate the existential threat from India. Since both states acquired nuclear capabilities (1998 onwards), strategic dynamic from conventional wars shifted towards fragile deterrence equilibrium. Deterrence in South Asia is neither robust nor monotonic. Doctrinal disparities make crises inherently unstable. This stability-instability paradox makes wars less likely but they can also encourage smaller conflicts, proxy wars, limited strikes, and cross-border wars. This belief of leaders that nuclear deterrence will stop these territorial disputes turning into full wars is the principal stabilizing contribution of nuclear weapons in sub-continent.

Past events like Kargil conflict (1999), the Balakot-Pulwama crises (2019), and recent 2025 standoff show that nuclear deterrence allows dangerous clashes below the nuclear threshold.

2. Nuclear Deterrence established strategic stability

The notion of deterrence emerges during the cold war due to ideological differences between USA and Soviet Union. Due to massive production of nuclear weapons, states embark on strategic reduction mechanisms through normative frameworks such as NPT (Nuclear

Non-Proliferation Treaty). Later on, the nuclear partial ban treaty redefines a new security era which optimize the rationality of state against the usage. In South Asia, nuclear deterrence strategies helped to adapt the current global security landscape. The strategies are given below:

- * Deterrence by Punishment
- * Deterrence by Denial
- * Minimum Credible deterrence
- * Credible second-strike Capability
- * Flexible Deterrence

Full-Spectrum Deterrence

Deterrence by Punishment

The first strategy is deterrence by punishment where massive retaliation threat prevents aggression. India officially follows this logic through its No first use policy, but Pakistan rejects NFU, keeping its options open to ensure credibility. India's nuclear doctrine (officially announced in 2003) says if Pakistan ever uses nuclear weapons against India, India will respond with massive retaliation.

Deterrence by denial

The second is deterrence by denial, that Pakistan practices through the deployment of short-range tactical nuclear missiles, such as Nasr missiles. Such deterrence deny success to limit the conventional offensives like blocking of

India's Cold start doctrine.

"The supreme effort of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

~ Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Minimum Credible Deterrence (MCD)

Minimum Credible Deterrence is a strategic doctrine that emphasizes maintaining a nuclear arsenal sufficient to deter an adversary from launching a first strike.

"And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and other besides them whom you do not know but Allah knows."

~ [Quran 8:60]

Full-Spectrum Deterrence (FSD)

Pakistan has embraced the doctrine of Full-Spectrum Deterrence. It is a more expansive approach than MCD. It involves comprehensive range of nuclear capabilities to address various level of threats, from tactical to strategic. The doctrine emphasizes versatility, state should have range of nuclear arms to respond range of threats.

Credible Second-strike Capability

In nuclear strategy, a retaliatory strike or a second-strike strategy is a country's assured ability to retaliate or to respond a nuclear strike with powerful retaliation against the attacker. Key components that enable a second-strike capability include survivable delivery system.

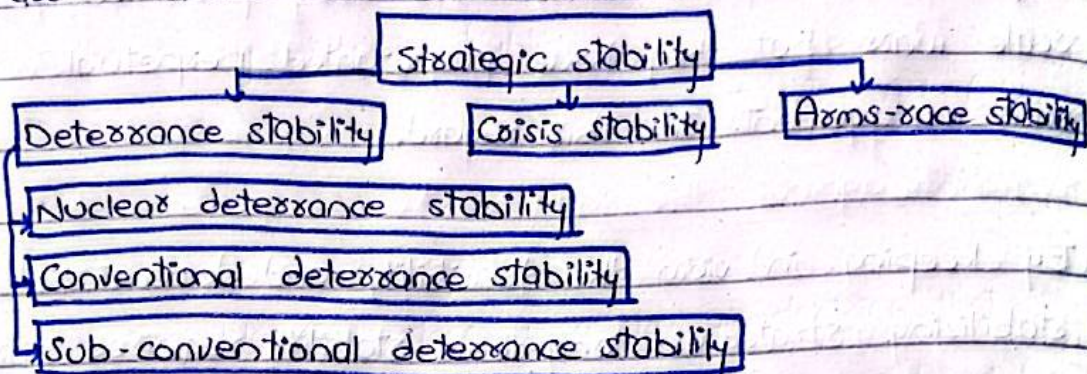
Flexible Deterrence

Pakistan's integration of tactical, strategic, and conventional responses reflects a form of Flexible Deterrence. This strategic framework reflects the view that nuclear weapons are essential for offsetting the conventional asymmetry and ensuring strategic stability in region if state opt adaptive approach not static. Ensure security without facing all-or-nothing response.

Would South Asia be more stable with or without nuclear weapon?

The presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia contributes to both stability and instability, depending on various factors. According to **IISS report**, there are grave deficiencies in India's and Pakistan's nuclear doctrines, which are compounded by mutual disbelief and prolonged absence of related dialogue mechanism.

The indicative components of strategic stability are:



Source: IISS

Stability-instability paradox:

The stability-instability paradox is a concept in strategic stability. It implies that stability at strategic level will induce instability at the sub-strategic level. This paradoxical incentive for two nuclear-armed states attained through 'Mutual Assured Destruction' policy. This concept is rooted in Deterrence Theory that says:

"The more devastating the weapons,
the more stable the peace."

The tensions between India and Pakistan has pertained since their came into being. Both have a history of skirmishes and presence of nuclear weapons curbs both states. Some post-nuclear era conflicts are Operation Brassstacks, Compound Crisis the kargil Conflict, the Balakot Crisis and military standoffs.

So, denuclearization would not automatically stabilize the region. While nuclear arms have likely prevented full-scale wars but they have perpetuated perpetual crisis management. In this regard,

Realistic Conclusion

By keeping in view the feasibility and demonstrably stabilizing strategies, long-term stability requires parallel steps:

- * Transparent Doctrines
- * Meaningful CBMs
- * Arms-Control Dialogues
- * Tackling underlying political grievances
- * Strong bilateral Crisis Management.

South Asia would only be safer if removal of nuclear weapons accompanied by verified conflict-resolution mechanisms and a credible security architecture.

Policy-makers should pursue parallel diplomatic efforts to address political drivers of conflict.