QNo1:

What role has nuclear deterrance 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 deterrance refers to the strategic use of nuclear weapons by threatening unacceptable retaliation.

In the South Asian context, nuclear deterrance emerged after 1998's overt tests of India and Pakistan.

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

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┌────────────┐      ┌────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ Capability │─────▶│ Credibility│─────▶│ Communication│
└────────────┘      └────────────┘      └──────────────┘
┌────────────────┐  ┌────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│ means or resources│ will of the │      │ conveying capability│
│  of the state  │  │ state      │      │ and credibility. │
└────────────────┘  └────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
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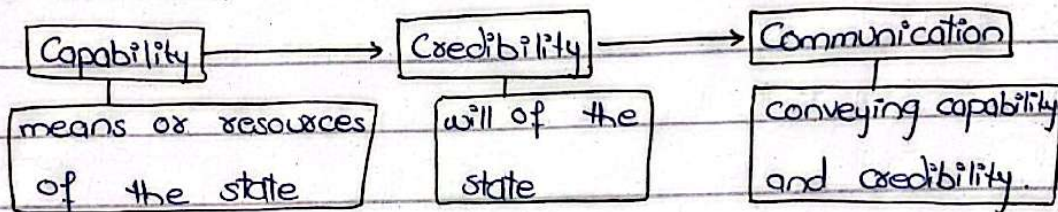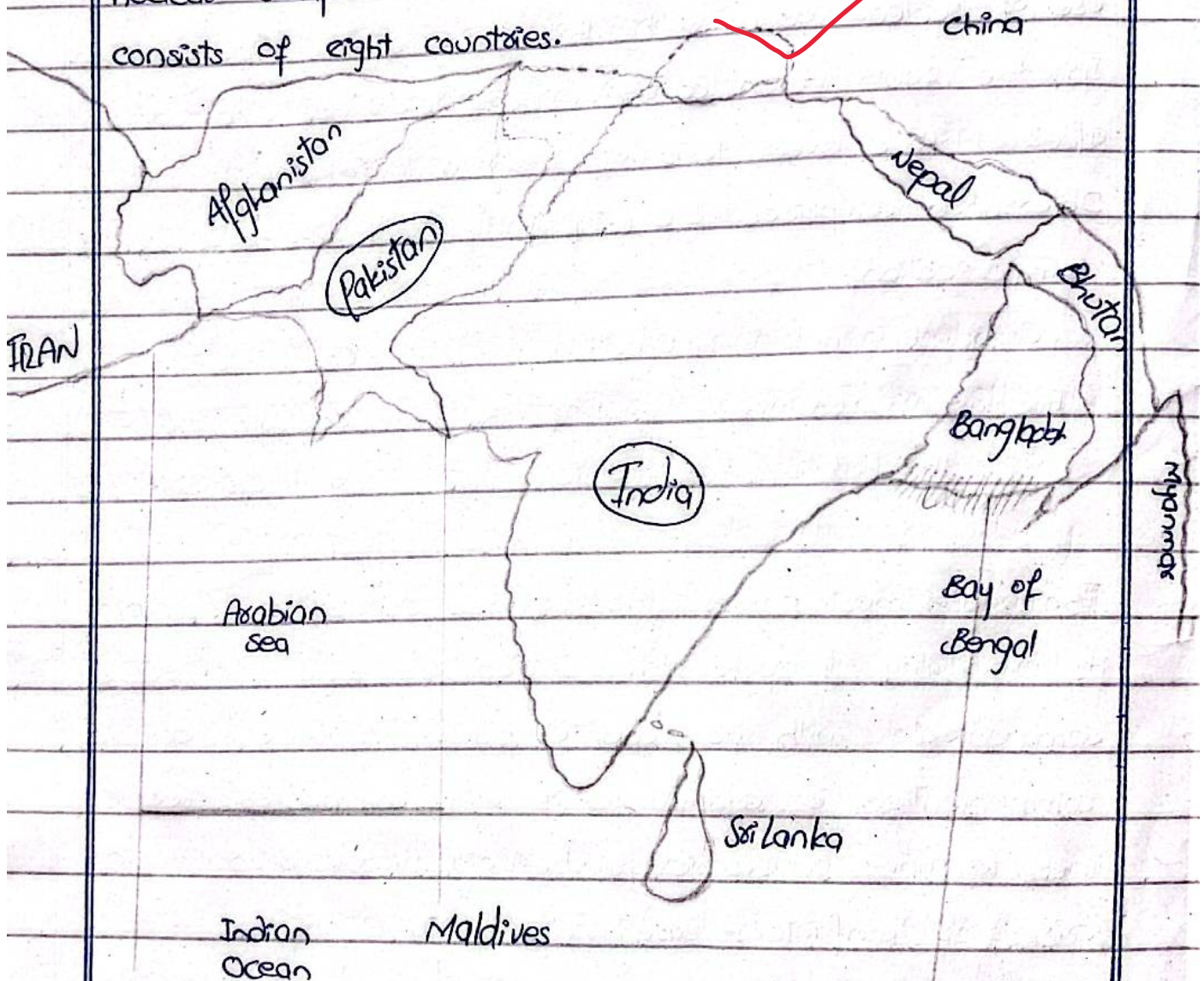
The state must possess the required capabilities, maintain its credibility through demonstrated resolve, and effectively communicate with its counter-parts. In nuclear domain, communication is crucial as it will communicate red lines to your adversaries and avoid miscalculations during crises or conflicts. A case in point: on March 9, 2022, India accidently 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.

China

Afghanistan

Pakistan

IRAN

Nepal

Bhutan

India

Bangladesh

Myanmar

Arabian Sea

Bay of Bengal

Sri Lanka

Indian Ocean

Maldives

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 deterrance equilibrium. Deterrance in south Asia is neither robust nor monotonic. Doctrinal disparities make crises inherently unstable. This stability-instability paradox make wars less likely but they can also encourage smaller conflicts, proxy wars, limited strikes, and cross-border wars. This believe of leaders that nuclear deterrance 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 deterrance allows dangerous clashes below the nuclear threshold.

2. **<u>Nuclear Deterrance established strategic stability</u>**

The notion of deterrance 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 deterrance strategies helped to adapt the current global security landscape. The strategies are given below:

* Deterrance by Punishment
* Deterrance by Denial
* Minimum Credible deterrance
* Credible Second-strike Capability
* Flexible Deterrance
  Full-Spectrum Deterrance

Deterrance by Punishment

The first strategy is deterrance by punishment where massive retaliation threat prevents agression. 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.

Deterrance by denial

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

India's Cold start doctrine.

"The supreme of art of war is to subdue
the enemy without fighting."
— Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Minimum Credible Deterrance (MCD)

Minimum Credible Deterrance 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 Deterrance (FSD)

Pakistan has embraced the doctrine of Full-Spectrum
Deterrance. 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 delievery system.
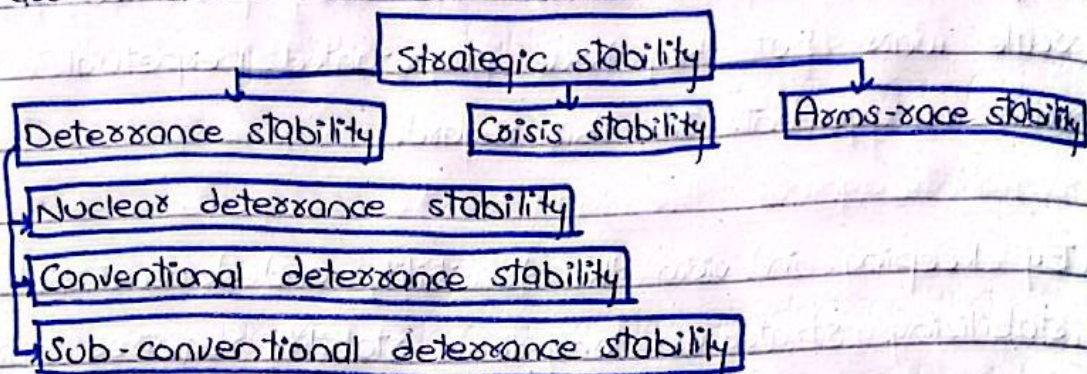
Flexible Deterrance

Pakistan's integration of tactical, strategic, and conventional responses reflects a form of Flexible Deterrance. 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 prescence of nuclear weapons is 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:

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Strategic stability │
                    └─────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────────────┐
│Deterrance stability│ │Crisis stability│ │Arms-race stability│
└──────────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────────────┘
 ┌───────────────────────────────┐
 │Nuclear deterrance stability   │
 └───────────────────────────────┘
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 │Conventional deterrance stability│
 └───────────────────────────────┘
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 │Sub-conventional deterrance stability│
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Source: IISS

Stability-instability paradox:

The stability-instability paradox is a concept in strategic stability. It implies that stability at strategic level will induce 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 Deterrance 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 prescence of nuclear weapons curbs both states. Some post-nuclear era conflicts are Operation Brasstacks, Compound Crisis the kargil Conflict, the Balakot Crisis and military standoffs.

So, denuclearization would not automatically stable 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.