

How has the development of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan impacted the South Asian geopolitical landscape? What measures both states have taken to ensure stability in the region?

1) Introduction:-

The development of nuclear weapons has drastically changed the dynamics of geopolitics in South Asia. It has not only made South Asia a volatile region but also attracted major powers for engaging India and Pakistan in strategic alliances. Nuclear race between both countries has added to regional instability. In such an environment risks of miscalculations are high and chances of conventional conflict resolution are low. To ensure stability and reduce chances of any escalation both countries have entered into a couple bilateral agreements and used CBMs to build trust on this issue.

2) Development of Nuclear Weapons by India and Pakistan:-

The nuclear test by India in 1974 were a clear threat to

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Pakistan's sovereignty and the statements of Pakistani leadership following this event, clearly showed that Pakistan ~~is~~ was scrambling to counter the threat. Statements of top command clearly showed that. In 1998, Pakistan did its nuclear test. The imminent threat was dealt with but then a series of other challenges followed leading to increased volatility of the region. In the words of Tim Marshall (Book: Prisoners of Geography)

"India and Pakistan can agree on one thing: neither wants the other one around."

3) Impacts on South Asian Geopolitical Landscape:-

This is how development of nuclear weapons has affected geopolitical landscape of South Asia

a) Increased Instability

The presence of nuclear weapons in a region that already has complex bilateral conflicts like Kashmir is a big sign of instability. In a region like this where conflict resolution mechanisms are poor, minor clashes

can quickly escalate into nuclear flashpoints.

b) Rapidly Changing Nuclear Doctrines:

A part of changing geopolitical environment is the evolution of nuclear doctrines of Pakistan and India. While Pakistan still sticks to maintaining Credible Minimum Deterrence, it has also added Full-spectrum deterrent under the ambit of CMD. India also stated CMD as its initial doctrine but it has added Cold Start Doctrine in its policy document of 2003.

.... Dismembering a state not so friendly in the shortest time possible

— Sanghe Shakti Joint Exercise (2006)

c) Never-ending Arms Race:-

South Asia has also seen rapid increase in nuclear stockpiles. Both countries are constantly trying to outnumber the each others inventories of warheads.

Pakistan has 170 warheads in its inventory, while India has 175. India has also increased its enriched uranium and modernized its inventory since 2023 (SIPRI Yearbook, 2025).

d) Increased Chances of Miscalculations and Accidents

Incidents like Pulwama (2019) and false flag operations in Balakot by India highlight how conventional warfare can escalate and provide incentives for nuclear force use. Presence of canisterized nuclear weapons and events of theft in India also add to the volatile condition of South Asia.

e) Alliances and Great Power Moves in South Asia

Nuclear capabilities of Pakistan and India have attracted great powers to South Asia. This has culminated in alliances like QUAD and treaties like US-India treaty. USA is allowing NSG to provide nuclear armed submarine to India despite NPT controls/restrictions. To counter the impact of Indian hegemony in Indian Ocean, Pakistan is collaborating with China on this issue.

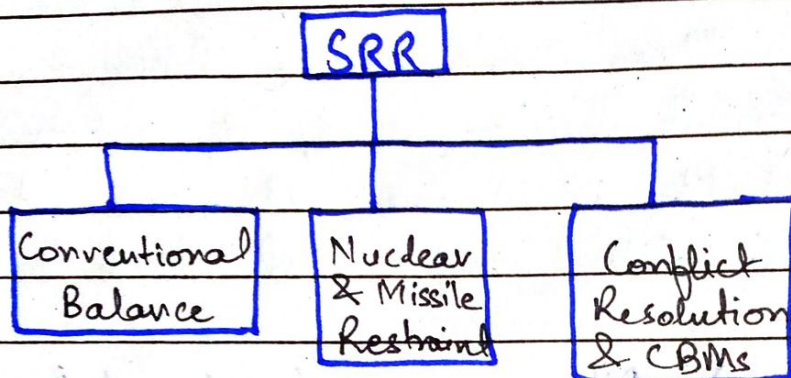
4) Measures to Ensure Stability in the Region :-

Although the situation remains highly charged, both countries have taken some steps to avoid conflicts.

a) Pakistan's Strategic Restraint

Regime:-

To ease nuclear tension in South Asia, Pakistan proposed SRR and is willing to work on it with India



b) Pakistan's Unilateral Moratorium on Nuclear Testing

Pakistan has so far upheld this moratorium and is willing to convert it to a bilateral agreement if India agrees to it. However, India has not responded positively so far.

c) Non-Nuclear Aggression Agreement (1988) and Lahore Declaration (1999)

This is the primary agreement between both parties where they decided not to attack each others nuclear installations. In 1999, the same was affirmed to avoid nuclear conflict.

d) Establishment of Hotline 2004:-

In 2004, a DDMOS hotline was established to notify each other on missile tests.

5) Theoretical Analysis:-

Realist assumption: that more nuclear weapons will add more stability and lower risk of use has not worked for India-Pakistan equation. Increase in tensions with intensifying nuclear race has proved Liberal philosophy to be true—at least in South-Asian context.

6) Conclusion :-

India and Pakistan have been engaged in ^{nuclear} arms race for decades. This had increased nuclear tensions in South Asian region. Despite the presence of mechanism for easing the tensions, South Asia remains one of the hotspots for nuclear conflicts. Strengthening of bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements is required to lower this tension between the two adversaries.