Strategic Stability in South Asia

With

Brig (R) Feroz Hassan Khan
CPGS is an independent, non-partisan and not-for-profit think tank with a vision to innovate future prospects for peace and security through intellectual discourse, and contribute to sustainable social, political and economic development.

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Introduction

The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS) is a non-partisan think tank established with a vision to innovate future prospects for peace and security in the region and beyond through intellectual discourse and contribute to sustainable social, political and economic development. CPGS has organized a roundtable discussion on ‘Strategic Stability in South Asia’ with Brig (R) Feroz Hassan Khan, with an aim to understand the uniqueness of South Asian Model vis-a-vis Cold War Model and overall strategic environment of this region. This roundtable was held at CPGS office on March 27, 2014. The purpose of the roundtable was to have comprehensive insightful and recommendations from the key note speaker and other pertinent scholars and academics regarding strategic stability of South Asia, specifically, Pakistan’s Indian-centric nuclear deterrence. The Indian defense forces’ modernization and accusation of other provocative technologies like the deployment of Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) system. The continuous discriminatory approaches against Pakistan by the global non-proliferation regime are somehow disturbing the power equation. Furthermore, the power balance and positive character for peace in Afghanistan post-2014 was also under discussion. The academics, scholars and practitioners from universities, think tanks and institutions participated and presented their views on the strategic convergence of interests, mutually shared strategic perceptions, first, regionally and then globally.
**Background**

Before discussing Strategic Stability in South Asia, it needs to be cleared that there is no universally accepted definition of ‘stability’. Consequently, there are certain gaps in understanding around the world about how nuclear armed states view and define the requirements of stability. In its classic sense, one way of defining the term strategic stability may be; ‘a state or condition between two nuclear armed countries, where neither side has an incentive to strike a blow on the other because, in any such thing happens, the cost would exceed the benefits.’

The historical approaches to define the concept of strategic stability, especially during the Cold War, neither offer much insight and understanding of the dynamics of debate in the contemporary environment, nor do they offer a comprehensive grasp in this new age of weak uni-polarity or multi-polarity.

Therefore, it is necessary to look into the concept in the backdrop of changed and changing international and regional dynamics. However, a historical review would definitely suggest how our predecessors thought about and dealt with nuclear revolution in the Cold War, and later, what approaches they adopted, and managed to strengthen the mutually perceived structure of stability in order to develop insights for future; and how we absorb that insight here in South Asia.

To understand this complex concept, it is important to note that this concept grew out of what Micheal S. Gerson called “the logical progression in thinking about the consequences of nuclear revolution,” the challenges of surprise attack, and requirements of credible nuclear deterrence.

However, in South Asian context, over time, along with above-mentioned inherited logical progression, there are certain new courses our comprehension has gone along with to meet the novel challenges that strategic stability faces in a different environment in this part of the world. The interpretation of ‘stability’ in contemporary environment of South Asia differs from that of the Cold War era, because the dynamics of international politics and environment and the factors which shape or may influence the environment have evolved and changed, so has the concept.
There is no doubt that both Pakistan and India are rational actor models and several international accounts endorse this assertion. Both have gone through a positive trajectory of nuclear learning and are heading towards more maturity. Several crisis episodes such as 1998, 2001-2002 and 2008 suggest that both behaved rationally and did not allow things to get out of control.

However, quite interestingly, in South Asia, the presence of Non-State-Actors (NSA) or Violent Extremist Organization (VEOs) and their ability and capacity to get these rational actors (Pakistan and India) into a crisis situation in a very short span of time remains large and alarming. This phenomenon, though a single factor which challenges the structure of stability, was prominent during the last two crises between Pakistan and India; Indian Parliament attack in December 2001 and subsequent military stand-off, and the Mumbai crisis of 2008. The classical notion of strategic stability thus cannot be applied to the South Asian region to define the dynamics of stability.

Besides this, the stability-instability paradox, doctrinal innovations to fight a limited war under nuclear hangover, vertical proliferation and resulting arms race instability, issue of nuclear safety and security have given rise to inadvertence escalation or conflict, which may go well beyond the control of what little or nominal crisis management or conflict resolution mechanisms we have.
Participants

The discussion was attended by renowned scholars, practitioners and members of the CPGS Team.

The complete list of participants is as follows:

**Chair**
Senator Sehar Kamran (T.I.)

**Speaker**
Brig (R) Feroz Hassan Khan

**Participants**
Lt. Gen (R) Asad Durrani, HI(M)
Dr. Adil Sultan
Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain
Mr. Ronnie Hennie
Dr. Noman Sattar
Air Commodore (R) Khalid Iqbal
Prof. Kenneth Holland
Ms. Kara de Castro
Ms. Emily Burke
Mr. Fawad Haider
Ms. Asma Sana
Mr. Nasir Hafeez
Mr. Majid Mehmood
Mr. Mobeen Tariq
Mr. Mati Ullah Tareen
Mr. Atta Muhammad
Maj (R) Farrukh James
Mr Ghani Jafar
Mr. Saqib Mehmood
Ms Sara Batool
Ms Adeela Bahar Khan
Mr Ikram Ullah Khan
Mr M. Suleman Shahid
Mr M. Rizwan

*Various Research Scholars, HEC Scholars, M.Phil and PhD Students also attended the event.*
Discussion points

i. How geopolitical and commercial interests of the major powers, in one way or the other, would be affecting the power balance in South Asia?

ii. What are the potential implications for post-2014 NATO drawdown from Afghanistan in terms of regional stability?

iii. Why South Asia remains an area of concern and the causes and condition which create instability?

iv. Do both states need to think over the roles of non-state actors?

v. Do the non-state actors have the ability to wage a war and cause strategic destabilization between the nuclear armed countries?

vi. What options Pakistan has to address the question of regional stability?

Points Raised

After 67 years of independence, Pakistan is still facing different problems which are misunderstood by Western countries. Pakistan and India are rational actors, but the two have failed to resolve their lingering problems and can stand eye-to-eye on any event having the involvement by Non-State Actors (NSA). The global community wrongly perceives that goodwill has not been achieved in the region despite the two countries being nuclear powers for 15 years. There has been much debate as to why peace and security do not hold, “Strategic Restraint 2.0”. Four general issues where Pakistan and South Asia come into focus are:

- Vertical proliferation,
- Global arms race,
- Issue of nuclear security,
- Issue of nuclear safety.

1. Western observers say that India is building its military might to counter China, but if we look at history, the origin of Indian nuclear programme was prior to the emergence of any Chinese threat. India started its pursuit of nuclear weapons in that era when the rhetoric of
‘Hindi-Cheeni Bhai- Bhai’ (the Indians and Chinese are like brothers to each other) was at its peak.

2. It was observed during the discussion that credible nuclear deterrence is a hard reality. All past bilateral crises were contained due the presence of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Pakistan, with a small conventional and strategic force, wants to maintain strategic stability in the region, but Indian Cold Start Doctrine, a doctrinal innovation, woven around with the desire to fight a limited war under nuclear overhang to achieve limited political objectives, has created a situation where inadvertence may become imminent.

3. The other ambitious and destabilising factors are Indian focus on developing its assured second strike capability and the aim to deploy ABM. This could trigger an unwanted arms race in the region.

4. The triangular nature of relations between India, Pakistan and China is important to understand the dynamics of arms race instability in this part of the world. India is in the middle; it has to balance between the two (Pakistan and China). There is a two-level problem, Indian and Chinese rivalry is part of a larger context and is systematic in nature, whereas rivalry between India and Pakistan comes at the second level and has a regional context and implications.

5. It is important to note that Beijing does not want an India-Pakistan crisis. Nonetheless, India’s and Pakistan’s learning trajectory is positive. Structural peace between India and Pakistan will most probably shift the ideological battle if paradigm is changed.

6. One problem that lies at the heart of strategic stability debate in South Asia and is associated with Pakistan’s eastern front, what many academics have termed ‘the joker in the pack’, i.e., non-state actors or VEO’s (Violent extremist organization), a term used by General Dunfard.

7. Ideological divide (extremism) and polarization within the domestic realms of both the countries is threatening. We should not bring up the role of non-state actors when we are talking about relations between these states.

8. Non-state actors have handlers. Technologies they use during their operations and their planning have become refined. States have non-state actors some of whose role has now
diminished. External factors are also using these handlers. However, their power to influence the behavior of these states during crisis and conflicts is a question worth discussing.

9. Neither country, Pakistan or India, has targeted non-combatants, even in times of war. However, stability, of course, can be upset by the acts of these non-state-actors.

10. The idea of fighting a conventional war under the nuclear threshold nuclear is a recipe for disaster, as far as the strategic stability between both the states is concerned.

11. While talking about the conventional imbalances between India and Pakistan and the decisive factor in shaping the outcome of a future war, it is not the navy and land forces but only the air force is the one which would remain the most effective for about the next five years.

12. Pakistan’s nuclear programme is safe and that is acknowledged by international institutions such as the IAEA. All these institutions have acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts in promoting the nuclear safety and security culture.

13. It was also pointed out that while evaluating India’s foreign policy, especially with regards to Pakistan and China, the increasing clout of the Indian army in the decision-making process needs to be factored in. Two examples that were mentioned in this connection were the verbal agreement for both Pakistan and India for a phased withdrawal of troops of both sides from Siachen, and mutually agreed demarcation of the Sir Creek border.

**Recommendations**

- There is a need for regional consensus centered on Afghanistan’s six immediately neighbouring states. The first tier should include China, Central Asian States, Pakistan and Iran. The second tier should be the countries of the region, and the third should be of global powers.

- The dialogue/negotiations strategy should be adopted, and the immediate neighbours of Afghanistan should come on one page to achieve peace and stability. Without this, peace cannot be achieved, and even the reduced American presence cannot help Afghanistan.
• Joint mechanisms for crisis management are one of the things that Pakistan and India need to do.

• Internal cohesion, unity and stability are the utmost priorities for Pakistan’s prosperity and regional peace. Ideological polarization must be countered with a consensual response at national level.

• Grants/funds should be provided to Afghan students to increase the literacy rate and improve the poor education system in Afghanistan.

• As far as the proposed ‘Strategic Restrain Regime’, by Pakistan is concerned, India should respond with responsibility to strengthen the structure of the stability in the region.

• Conflict between human beings is an eternal issue. There is a need to mitigate or resolve it by respect for each other. Human dignity can provide us a human identity and through that we can resolve this issue.

• The development of second strike capability by India is destabilizing. Pakistan should respond with appropriate measures by adopting some changes in strategic development and force postures.

• The idea of fighting a limited war under the nuclear overhang must be discouraged at all levels through proactive diplomacy and appropriate defensive mechanisms. Both the states should devise and develop some mutually acceptable mechanisms for resolution of the crises at an early stage. CBMs and Nuclear Risk Reduction Centres may help in this regard.
Conclusion

Strategic stability in South Asia depends on the capacity and capability of both Pakistan and India to control the domestic polarization processes and their approaches to tackling the phenomenon of ‘Joker in the Pack’. Confidence Building Measures and political will is required to understand and resolve the existing bilateral issues, and conflict resolution mechanisms with mutual consensus should be established to enhance the security and trust level on both sides. Strategic stability in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan and India, is under the impact of global arms race. Both the states must understand that maintaining the balance at conventional and strategic levels will result in durable peace.
**CPGS Vision**

*Innovate future prospects for peace and security in the region and beyond through intellectual discourse and contribute in sustainable social, political and economic development.*

**About the Centre**

The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS) is a non-partisan platform established to undertake studies in policy research, advocacy and consultancy to enhance understanding and relations in diverse fields between Pakistan and the Gulf countries. We regularly conduct seminars, workshops, roundtables and conferences with dignitaries, academics and experts from every walk of life, in order to actively promote regional harmony, global peace, security and stability by making substantive intellectual, academic and diplomatic contributions. The Centre aims to harness the immense potential for increasing cooperation in the region to attain peace, security and economic development and to assess emerging trends in regional policies and devise strategies for possible future challenges.

**Operational Framework & Objectives**

- Promote regional peace and harmony through integrated and comprehensive understanding of issues between peoples, governments and other entities;

- Strengthen strategic, political, economic and social cooperation among countries of the region and beyond;

- Present viewpoint of Pakistan and the Gulf countries to the rest of the world through academic engagements, discussion and dialogue among all stakeholders for sustainable development;

- Identify opportunities and areas of common interest for potential cooperation between Pakistan and the countries of the Gulf region at all levels including both public and private sector;
• Contribute towards development of ideological and social ideas to promote tolerance and co-existence for building multicultural human society based on shared ideas and common goals;

• Conduct Research and compile reports for the governments and private entities to explore alternative options for efficient management and resolution of regional and international issues;

• Organize workshops and events to develop strong working relationship between academia and practitioners;

• Collaborate with the other research institutions and Think Tanks for achieving the core objectives.

Activities and Services

• Organize periodic seminars, workshops, lectures and other events which would bring together leaders, academics, practitioners and other stakeholders, to study and discuss issues of importance for the overall good of the society;

• Map out future policy options by analyzing existing trends and emerging scenarios;

• Compile, edit and publish (print and electronic) relevant information, data, commentaries and analysis regularly;

• Offer training and academic services for Skill Development and Strategic analysis;

• Provide dedicated Consultancy and help create conducive environment for development of our society;

• All such other activities which help in achieving core objectives of the Centre and its programs, projects and initiatives;

• Prepare annual report of all activities for interested parties and stakeholders.
CURRENT PROJECTS