



NUCLEAR DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL SECURITY





SPEECH BY

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The changing security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region have been a subject of significant interest and concern in recent years. Various factors, including China's rise as a global power, the intensification of rivalries between major powers like the United States, China, and Russia, and the emergence of non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism, environmental degradation, transnational crime, and cybersecurity, have contributed to the evolving security landscape in the region.

In this context, Pakistan's perspective on the changing security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region is influenced by various factors, including its geographical location, historical security concerns, relationships with major powers like the United States and China, and internal security challenges.

As a South Asian country, Pakistan has a vested interest in the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific. In the South Asian context, the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), Gen. Sahir Shamshad Mirza, shared a comprehensive perspective on regional and global security while speaking at the 20th Asia Security Summit Shangri-La Dialogue on June 2, 2023. He said that it “presents unique and complex security challenges due to the peculiar character of the China-India-Pakistan equation.

It is the only region where three contiguous nuclear powers share physical borders with alarmingly low warning times between them.” This requires a very high level of efficiency and reliability in mutual communication along with robust command-and-control structures, especially during times of heightened tension.

FOUR MAJOR TRANSITIONS



Shift from uni-polarity to multi-polarity



Geo-economics primacy under stress



Great power contestation emphasizing issue-based partnerships



Collision of Globalisation vs Populism

Rising competition among major powers strains global strategic environment, reducing significance of multilateralism

One of the central drivers of changing security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region is the ascent of several great powers. The growing influence of states such as China and India have altered the regional power balance. Their military modernization efforts, including the acquisition of advanced armaments, have significantly enhanced their maritime and airborne warfighting capabilities. As also mentioned by CJCSC that the Asia-Pacific region resides at the intersection of the interests of superpowers but the nature of strategic anxieties is different in the Asia-Pacific.

The strategic competition between US-China is likely to get intensified in the Asia-Pacific region. This will implicate areas beyond defence and security also including trade, investments and technologies between both states. Amid the changing security dynamics, regional cooperation and alliances have also gained prominence. On this subject, CJCSC said that the nature of strategic anxieties is different since Asia-Pacific lies at the intersection of the interests of great powers.

Indeed, in Asia-Pacific, the increasing tension between China and the US along with its allies, is changing the security metrics of the region. The US is forming several military alliances such as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and AUKUS which are evidently for China. By strengthening its military alliances and increasing their military presence, US will exacerbate tensions in the region.

Implications for the strategic stability of the broader Asia-Pacific region defined by CJCSC



Strategic Stability is the product of fine balance between deterrence and arms control. It is wearing out, especially in the broader Asia-Pacific Region



Regional and extra-regional arrangements like Quad and AUKUS will take years to pay dividends for the Asia-Pacific balance of power



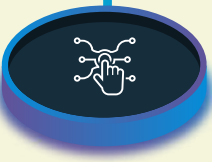
Rearmament is now the norm, challenging the preservation of existing arms control mechanisms. Hence, reducing nuclear risks requires sincere efforts, with arms control being the primary solution



The application of NPR as a tool to secure foreign policy objectives. Selective application of rules of law will only drift us away from maintaining a rules-based order



Ignoring hotbeds of conflict; conflict management rather than resolution



Growing pressure from technological competition combined with "decoupling in emerging technology sectors" poses increasing security risks

Effect on the South Asian Region

The strategic stability of the South Asian region has been affected by developments made by India in accumulating arms and evolving offensive doctrines. Also, the core issue of Kashmir stays between both states since independence. So, the strategic program of Pakistan is undeniably need-driven which is required for its security and has successfully deterred war or escalation of an unintended conflagration. Consequently, all the futile efforts of managing the conflict through external and internal coercion and military means will seriously undermine regional stability.

The persistent tense relations between Pakistan and India demand that there should be continued statesmanship at the policy level. This requires a degree of responsibility in political rhetoric, a robust bilateral warning and communication mechanism, and also shared understanding of the ravages of a nuclear exchange between both states. In the same way, the proliferation of emerging and disruptive technologies can not only increase the nuclear risk but, also has the potential to substantially alter the entire strategic landscape. With no agreed rules of the game in this domain, their impact on the strategic environment is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the region and beyond, unless a comprehensive legal regulatory regime is developed.

Way Forward

In the current global landscape, bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral arms control architectures face unprecedented strain.

As the winds of great power strategic competition intensify, the prospects of establishing a new rules-based order, reforming multilateralism, and fostering peaceful globalization are at risk of becoming elusive aspiration. The creation of military alliances like AUKUS and Quadrilateral Dialogues (QUAD) that contain economic initiatives is somewhat peculiar and unprecedented for the littoral states of the Pacific Ocean. Resultantly, it will lead to restyling of Asia-Pacific as Indo-Pacific, increasing insecurities and pushing the region into an action-reaction cycle and arms racing.

Likewise, the existing differences and disputes in Asia require Asian solutions based on Asian values and interests. Through strict adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and the Bandung Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, this zone should become an area of expanding cooperation and prosperity. From a nuclear perspective, lesser would be better for the Asia-Pacific. The farther distance the region draws from re-armament elsewhere, the better.

If the big power competition intensifies in Asia-Pacific region, reciprocally the arms race and crisis instability will increase. Important stakeholders should find ways to extend both formal and informal rule-making. At times, the informal agreements, have been important for maintaining regional stability. It is important to maintain the dialogue approach at every official level, as should semi-official and non-governmental dialogues, too.

If there is governmental patronage and the agenda is consensual then the track-II dialogues become effective. Being a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan considers it vital to avoid great power rivalry and tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. It has always stood up for and played a very active role on issues of Arms Control, Disarmament and Non- Proliferation. The principles of equal and undiminished security for all states with non-discriminatory behaviour will bring strategic stability, complement arms control, and reduce nuclear risk.

Pakistan is still waiting for a mature response from India on the Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia. Despite technological advancements, one thing that can override the escalation ladder is leadership's resolve, behaviour and approach towards conflict as demonstrated by Pakistani leadership in 2019 following the Pulwama incident and errant fire of the Indian Brahmos Missile last year. Drawing from South Asia's parable, it is important that both Pakistan and India should reduce nuclear risk and promote strategic stability. Instead of supporting the notions of regional Net Security Provider and highlighting each other's security issues, both states must act responsibly, resolve disputes, and meaningfully engage in arms control to acquire the strategic stability in the region.

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The Center for International Strategic Studies Islamabad conducts original policy research, analyses, and outreach to highlight the evolving regional and global strategic issues to promote peace and stability.

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