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India's Bunker Buster Ploy: Implications for South Asian Strategic Dynamics

Fakhar Alam

According to reports from Indian media, India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is modifying its Agni-V missile, capable of delivering nuclear and conventional warheads, into a bunker buster missile. According to the same reports, this bunker buster missile development is aimed at destroying underground enemy targets, including their command-and-control structures, missile silos, storage depots, and critical military infrastructure. The following article examines the implications of the bunker buster bomb on the fragile strategic environment of South Asia.

The under development modified Agni-V would carry a payload between 7500-8000 Kilograms to 2500-3500 kilometers with a speed of 8-20 Mach and could penetrate 80-100 meters deep inside concrete infrastructure. It may be noted that the standard Agni-V could carry a payload of 1650 Kilograms to 5000-8000 kilometers and lacked a penetration feature. Due to increased payload capacity for deep penetrating strikes, the modified version would cover less distance. Right now, DRDO is developing two types of warheads. The first would be an "airburst warhead" aimed at destroying the above-ground targets or the entry point of the underground facility. The second is the "deep penetrator warhead", designed to penetrate deep inside an underground facility and destroy it.

The rationale for the development of this bunker buster came after a recent American attack on the Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan, with a bunker buster bomb delivered by a B-2 Spirit bomber. In contrast, the Indian Air Force (IAF), constrained by the absence of advanced operational proficiency for conducting deep penetration missions, as proved during the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, has prompted Indian defence planners to pursue an alternative delivery method i.e. a modified Agni-V.

The concerning part of this ongoing development is that during the May 2025 crisis, Indian media established a narrative that India had attacked Pakistan's underground nuclear facility at Kirana Hills, situated near Sargodha. Later, an Indian Air Force officer, Air Marshal A K Bharti, categorically denied any Indian attack on Pakistan's nuclear facility at Kirana Hills. However, Indian mainstream media, retired military officials, and government-funded think tanks are still adhering to the narrative of an attack on an underground nuclear installation.

India's modus operandi involves first constructing a fictional narrative, using its media, about an event that never occurred. Then, years later, its military executes a military action that fits the contours of that pre-established fiction. For instance, in 2016, India claimed that its military had conducted surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LOC) on so-called terrorist camps. In contrast, there were no surgical strikes, except for cross-border firing. Similarly, in 2019, India established a narrative that it conducted airstrikes against terrorist hideouts inside Pakistan while Indian fighter jets remained only a few seconds in Pakistan's airspace, dropped the payloads harmlessly in the forest and bolted back. In May 2025, the Indian Air Force conducted air strikes while remaining in its airspace on madrasas situated adjacent to mosques

inside Pakistan, falsely labelling them as militant training centers. Since 2016, the Indian media has sustained this fictional storyline, while its partial manifestation was eventually witnessed in May 2025.

The question therefore arises that if India attacks some underground nuclear facility of Pakistan in the next crisis with a bunker-buster bomb under development, as this narrative has already been established by its media during the post-Pahalgam crisis? Particularly, when the Indian media repeatedly draws analogies between the American attack on Iranian underground nuclear facilities and India attacking Pakistan's and China's underground nuclear facilities.

India's pursuit of a bunker buster missile signifies its counterforce preemptive aspirations. This development would be perceived as a direct threat to the survivability of its deterrent forces by Pakistan, thereby increasing the risk of inadvertent escalation. If India thinks it could attack an underground Pakistani military purpose nuclear facility with a conventional hypersonic missile and it will not cross the nuclear threshold, such thinking by a nuclear weapon state is fundamentally flawed. From Pakistan's perspective, such an act might be a nuclear threshold already and compel Pakistan to opt for its nuclear option, particularly when Pakistan is not adhering to the No First Use (NFU) nuclear posture. This development could even compel Pakistan to explore its preemptive option due to the fear of decapitation.

India's bunker buster quest does not just introduce destabilising elements into the already fragile crisis stability equation of South Asia but also has the potential to initiate a new arms race. This development also undermines the foundational rationale behind the India-Pakistan Non-Attack Agreement of 1988, though it only covers declared civilian nuclear facilities, not military facilities. However, the core intent of this agreement was to reduce nuclear-conventional entanglement during a crisis due to its escalatory nature.

Pakistan is not the first nuclear weapon state that is compelled by its adversary nuclear weapon state into a lose-it or use-it dilemma with the development of non-nuclear strategic weapons aimed at decapitating it. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union both faced the same dilemma. However, after certain deliberation, both states came up with three key ideas. First and foremost, hardening the nuclear facilities and assets with layered defence systems to an extent that enemy forces cannot take them out in a conventional strike. Second, developing sea-based survivable nuclear assets, nuclear-powered and nuclear-tipped ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs).

Due to their inherent survivability, submarines significantly disincentivise the enemy from taking risky actions against nuclear assets and installations with conventional forces. Third, arms control as a confidence-building measure (CBM). CBMs not just reduce the trust deficit among adversaries but also develop understanding and predictability in the relationship. However, in the India-Pakistan case, arms control has usually remained elusive due to India's consistent rejection of CBMs proposed by Pakistan.

In South Asia, Pakistan has consistently adopted a balanced and responsible approach to nuclear deterrence, emphasizing survivability, prioritizing stability and practicing restraint. While India is pursuing bunker buster development with counterforce preemption and

decapitation capabilities, Pakistan remains firmly committed to its Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) Posture. This strategic force posture ensures that any form of aggression, whether sub-conventional, conventional or nuclear, from the adversary will be met with a timely, proportionate, measured and assured response aimed at restoring deterrence across all spectrums of the conflict. Pakistan's response to Indian aggression after the Pahalgam incident reflects this commitment. Though Indian actions continuously inject instability into the already fragile strategic environment of the region, Pakistan's actions and its strategic force posture have been aimed at preserving strategic stability in South Asia. However, Pakistan's restraint must not be mistaken for weakness. If India continues on the path of provocations by undermining the crisis stability of the region, maintaining a meaningful strategic stability in South Asia will become increasingly difficult.

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Information Warfare and Narrative Control: India's Failed Narrative and Pakistan's Response in May 2025

Syed Ali Abbas

In international politics, wars are not only fought with weapons but with words. Narratives determine legitimacy, mobilize public opinion, and frame outcomes long after the last shot is fired. The May 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan, in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, showed this clearly. What was meant to be India's projection of strength through "Operation Sindhoor" soon became a story of faltering credibility, challenged in parliament and dismissed by foreign observers.

Modi's Struggling Narrative

The government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has tried to write the initial draft of history in past crises from an Indian perspective. It was fast, repetitive, and emotionally framed. This time, the strategy failed. Knowing the failures India had suffered against Pakistan, Modi chose to remain in the background, leaving it to the military chiefs and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to project a message of resolve and strength, one that sought to mask operational shortcomings through political narrative. This, however, did not convince the global and local audience of their claims of success. Opposition lawmakers, in a heated session of parliament, pressed the government to explain exaggerated figures and asked uncomfortable questions about whether the operation had achieved anything tangible.

Externally, India's image also took a hit. The U.S. President openly emphasized Washington's role in bringing ceasefire during the May 2025 conflict, repeating several times that without American intervention, the crisis might have spiraled. That public framing ran directly against New Delhi's effort to project unilateral control of the conflict. Later, when Washington imposed new tariffs on Indian exports, the limits of Modi's foreign policy claims became evident. Despite repeatedly highlighting his personal rapport with U.S. leaders, even campaigning under the slogan 'Ab ki baar, Trump sarkar' the imposition of trade tariffs underscored the gap between his rhetoric of privileged ties and the realities of India's international standing.

Much of this difficulty stems from how the BJP's communication machine operates. Research by the Oxford Internet Institute has described India as home to one of the largest organized disinformation networks, built around the BJP's IT Cell and a vast volunteer base. In 2019, after the Balakot strikes, this system succeeded in pushing "national security" to the top of voter concerns, as documented in Hindu-CSDS Lokniti surveys.

Moreover, "India's use of disinformation is not conjecture; it is well documented by EU DisinfoLab's 'Indian Chronicles' investigation. The report lays bare a 15-year covert operation involving over 750 fake outlets and hundreds of inactive NGOs globally, all aimed at tarnishing Pakistan's image in influential institutions across the EU and UN. By 2025, however, the same techniques looked less effective. Recycled footage, inflated claims, and contradictory statements left the government on the defensive rather than in control.

The Media's Overreach

India's mainstream media played a central role in magnifying these problems. Outlets closely aligned with the ruling party, often dismissed as "Godi media" broadcast stories of Pakistan's supposed devastation. Claims of a coup in Pakistan to alleged attacks on Islamabad and the Indian INS Vikrant destroying the Karachi port, and the collapse of Pakistani air defenses all turned out to be fake, as later confirmed by fact-checkers.

The consequence was predictable. Though the claims were false, they shaped public opinion in the crucial early hours, hardening anger against Pakistan. Nevertheless, once the corrections surfaced, credibility had already eroded. The deeper issue is structural, where 54 percent of the Indian public relies on social media for news. For instance, India is the world's largest WhatsApp market, with more than 480 million users, and according to Reuters Institute surveys, almost 54% Indians use YouTube for weekly news. Such platforms privilege speed and spectacle, not verification. In May 2025, the very channels that made India's propaganda powerful also exposed it to rapid debunking.

Diplomatically, the cost was visible. No major power formally endorsed India's claims. Delegations dispatched to Western capitals after the conflict failed to secure clear support, receiving instead generic calls for restraint. For a government that had banked on global recognition of its narrative, this was a striking failure.

Pakistan's More Disciplined Response

By contrast, Pakistan's communication was more cautious but also more credible. Officials consistently stressed the principle of defending sovereignty and territorial integrity, grounding their case in international law. The armed forces organized joint briefings, presenting timelines and evidence. The Pakistan Air Force's actions downing six Indian fighter jets, a drone, and the destruction of the S-400 system added battlefield weight to this narrative.

Pakistan also managed to keep pace diplomatically. Within days, lawmakers and envoys were already in London, Washington, and other capitals, offering background briefings and giving their version of events to foreign reporters, creating the counterargument to blunt New Delhi's claims.

Moreover, Pakistan has begun to think in more sustained terms about how it communicates abroad. The recent launch of Asia One English is a step in the right direction, engaging international audience.

The May conflict highlighted that controlling the narrative is an uphill task. India tried to portray Operation Sindhoor as a success, but its story began to fray once evidence, fact-checkers, foreign leaders, and even opposition voices in parliament challenged the details. Pakistan, by contrast, leaned on press briefings to foreign and local journalists and evidence that could be shown publicly. This gave Islamabad more credibility at a critical moment during and after the crisis. Going forward, challenge is to turn this into an institutionalized framework for continued impact. Regular press briefings on matters related to national security, stronger English-language media, and deeper links with think tanks and correspondents abroad should

be established. What helped Pakistan in the May conflict with India was a measured, and factually correct narrative. Keeping this balance in narrative-building grounded in facts will be essential for Pakistan to continue building a strong, factual and verifiable Pakistani narrative.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/information-warfare-and-narrative-control-indias-failed-narrative-and-pakistans-response-in-may-2025/>

Trump-Putin Alaska Summit: What could be the Future Scenario of US-Russia Arms Control?

Fakhar Alam

After three years of continuing heightened tensions, the United States (US) and Russia have formally initiated negotiations aimed at ending the war in Ukraine. In this context, President Trump and President Putin recently met in Alaska, pledging to resolve the issue through a comprehensive agreement, rather than a temporary ceasefire. The protracted Ukraine war has not only threatened the global security landscape but also strained US-Russia relations to an unprecedented extent. As it is the only intact bilateral arms control treaty between the US and Russia, New START, has been deferred. Moreover, the New START is set to expire in February 2026, raising further concerns for the future of US-Russia arms control. However, the reopening of formal communication channels and the initiation of peace talks mark a notable improvement in bilateral ties. This emerging thaw could create conditions for the revival of arms control efforts between the two Cold War rivals. The following article examines prospective scenarios for future US-Russia arms control, considering ongoing peace talks and the forthcoming expiration of the New START.

The first possible scenario could be that both states continue to comply with the treaty limits of New START, as they are currently doing, but unilaterally and through a mutual understanding. However, for the verification of the limits, both states are obliged by the treaty to rely on and assist the other party on data exchanges, on-site inspections, and the use of National Technical Means (NTM). At present, neither side is currently allowing verification as required by the treaty. Once the treaty expires, there will be no treaty-bound obligation on the parties to assist each other in the verification process. In that case, if both parties continue only to comply with the treaty limits without any formal verification arrangement, it would be difficult for any side to believe that the other side is following the limits on its strategic arms stockpile.

Even after the instigation of the Ukraine war, when Russia announced that it was suspending its participation in the treaty, it promised that it would adhere to limits capped in the treaty. However, the US alleged that Moscow was neither adhering to the treaty's promised limits nor allowing American inspectors for the on-site verification. It is the verification that either side can be certain about the other's capabilities. And if the verification process does not exist, then merely declaring that a party is complying with the treaty limits of New START or any other treaty will not serve the primary purpose of the arms control arrangement. Thus, this scenario will be an impediment to improving US-Russia relations.

The second scenario could be another extension of the New START. In 2021, just two days before the expiry of the New START, the US and Russia decided to extend the treaty under Article XIV, which provides only a one-time five years extension to the treaty. However, Article XV of the treaty simultaneously allows amendments. If both parties want an extension beyond February 2026, they can amend Article XIV under Article XV to permit further extensions for

the number of years that both can agree upon. However, any amendment under Article XV requires a formal agreement between both countries. This arrangement would be a valuable addition and would strengthen US-Russia bilateral relations.

However, both sides have certain reservations regarding the other side's capabilities, which were developed or inducted after New START was negotiated. For instance, the US has reservations regarding the Russian Avangard Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HSGV), Poseidon nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed autonomous torpedo, and Burevestnik nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed cruise missile. Simultaneously, Russia has concerns about the American Aegis missile defence system, space-based sensors, missile defence interceptors, and potential anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons. Since the Ukraine conflict, these reservations have gained prominence and could adversely impact the treaty's extension.

There are a few recent geopolitical realities and developments that might also impact the second scenario, as the statement of French President Macron about giving a nuclear umbrella to the European Union (EU), Poland's desire to host American nuclear weapons on Polish soil, possible Ukraine's membership of NATO, the deployment of Russia's Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) also known as Battlefield Nuclear Weapons (BNW) in Belarus, and the recent revision of Russian Nuclear Doctrine.

Therefore, a new treaty, as a third scenario, would be a better option. The new treaty will supersede the New START, the way it superseded the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT). The new arrangement could even address evolving security anxieties, including non-nuclear strategic weapons (NNSW), new offensive cyber capabilities, space weaponization, and perhaps conventional military imbalance in Europe, along with the bilateral concerns on the recent geopolitical shifts. Simultaneously, this new treaty could also have enhanced transparency, a stringent verification regime and a clause for the continuance of verification measures even if a crisis erupts between the parties. Such a comprehensive arrangement would not just strengthen the US-Russia strategic stability, but rather, by having a holistic and updated arrangement, lead to a new era of arms control. Thus, the Trump-Putin Alaska summit has opened a window for reviving arms control between Washington and Moscow. However, as the expiration of New START in 2026 approaches, the choices before both capitals remain stark: either allow the collapse of the last pillar of bilateral arms control and eventually risk a renewed arms race or take bold steps toward a more comprehensive and future-oriented arms control framework. Moreover, the future of US-Russia arms control will depend on how both parties address the issue of verification, transparency, emerging technologies and shifting geopolitical anxieties. The path forward will not be easy, but if both Cold War rivals can seize this moment, they may still avert a dangerous and uncontrolled arms race.

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Link:[*https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/09/11/what-could-be-the-future-scenario-of-us-russia-arms-control/*](https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/09/11/what-could-be-the-future-scenario-of-us-russia-arms-control/)

Pakistan Terrorism Dilemma: Indo-Israel Cooperation and Balochistan Province

Syed Ali Abbas

Following the May 2025 confrontation between India and Pakistan, a worrying shift in Pakistan's security environment is evident. During the four days of conflict, Pakistan's conventional deterrence remained intact by defeating the Indian military adventure; but there was a concurrent upsurge in terrorist activities in Pakistan. From May to July, independent assessments counted more than 240 militant attacks, leaving over 300 people dead and nearly 500 injured. The concentration of violence in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) suggests that Pakistan's adversaries, unable to impose dominance through military confrontation, have shifted their efforts toward covert and irregular warfare.

Escalating Violence along the Western border

A review of trends before and after the May conflict highlights a marked shift in terrorists' violence. Between January and April 2025, militant activity escalated but was progressively contained through intelligence-led operations. January witnessed 74 attacks nationwide, resulting in 91 deaths, with KP and Balochistan being worst affected. In February, incidents rose to 79, with civilian fatalities increasing by 175 percent; however, security forces responded forcefully, eliminating 156 militants. March proved the most violent month in over a decade, with 105 attacks and 335 deaths, including six suicide bombings and the BLA's hijacking of Jaffar Express. Yet April brought a reversal: attacks fell by 22 percent to 82, and militants accounted for over 70 percent of all fatalities. Furthermore, a major two-phase operation near the Pakistan–Afghan border killed 71 TTP fighters, delivering the group its heaviest single loss. Civilian and security casualties declined significantly, making April the least costly month for security forces since mid-2024.

When India attacked Pakistan on 7th May 2025 and escalated the India-Pakistan conflict in response to a terrorist attack in Indian Occupied Kashmir, there was a surge of terrorist attacks in Pakistan simultaneously. Violence surged again to levels comparable to March, reversing the gains of April. In May alone, 85 attacks killed 113 people and injured 182, with Balochistan absorbing 35 incidents that left 51 dead and 100 wounded. June saw 27 further attacks, six of them in Balochistan, while July recorded another 82 nationwide, 28 in Balochistan, bringing the three-month toll to more than 320 dead and over 500 injured. In short, while early 2025 showed that militant activity could be contained, the post-May rebound underscored a deliberate effort to impose pressure on Pakistan's western frontier.

The attacks became broader in scope: girls' schools, polio vaccination teams, peace committee volunteers, energy projects, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-linked infrastructure were all hit. Counterterrorism operations inflicted losses, including 106 militants killed in July. Moreover, the persistence and diversity of attacks point to an external effort to sustain pressure on Pakistan, once India's conventional attack had failed.

India's Sub-Conventional Strategy

The timing of this surge lends weight to long-standing Pakistani claims that India provides support to anti-state groups across the Western border. The 2016 arrest of Indian intelligence operative Kulbhushan Jadhav, and his admission of links to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA), created a precedent for such concerns. Both groups, alongside the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have regained operational space in 2025. With KP and Balochistan accounting for nearly 80 percent of recent attacks, the impression of coordination and external facilitation seems undeniable.

Indian support is not confined to the separatist outfits. Islamabad has repeatedly charged New Delhi with channeling resources to the banned TTP. The resurgence of violence in KP illustrates the scale of the challenge. In July 2025, 53 of 82 recorded nationwide attacks took place in the province, showing how persistent pressure in the tribal belt complements separatist activity in Balochistan. This twin focus compels Pakistan to stretch its security resources across multiple fronts, creating vulnerabilities and testing social cohesion. These assessments are not limited to Islamabad. The United Nations Secretary General's 2025 counterterrorism report warned that militants from the former Syrian conflict could relocate to Afghanistan, while Islamic State- Khorasan (ISIL-K) with an estimated 2,000 fighters, continues to pose one of the most significant threats in South and Central Asia. Addressing the Security Council, Pakistan's representative argued that the external sponsorship of groups such as the banned TTP and BLA are compounding this threat. The overlap between local militancy and outside facilitation highlights how sub-conventional tactics are being used to maintain instability along Pakistan's western frontier.

The Indo-Israeli Nexus

A related dimension is India's expanding security relationship with Israel. Over the past decade, bilateral defense and intelligence cooperation has grown steadily, with Israeli drones, surveillance platforms, and cyber tools incorporated into Indian military operations. In parallel, Israeli research institutions have begun to influence discourse around Pakistan. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), for instance, recently launched a Balochistan Studies Project and appointed Mir Yar Baloch -reported to have ties with the BLA- as a Special Advisor. These efforts, disguised as scholarly, have the effect of attempting to misrepresent Balochistan as a geopolitical fault line within a broader region.

Some of these activities blur the distinction between independent analysis and strategic advocacy. They are also consistent with broader hybrid strategies where militant actions are augmented by disinformation, lobbying, and digital campaigning.

Why Pakistan and Iran Must Cooperate

In this context, a cooperative strategy is also needed between Pakistan and Iran. The two countries need to develop and deepen security cooperation. Both face cross-border threats from militant groups exploiting weak frontier controls. Similar insurgent networks have targeted the Iran's Sistan-Balochistan. If left unchecked, these groups would perpetuate terrorism with impunity across the borders.

Practical cooperation could involve tighter border surveillance, joint intelligence mechanisms, and coordinated counterterrorism actions. At the political level, Islamabad and Tehran could adopt a united position against external interference, resisting attempts to internationalize the Balochistan issue. With China already heavily invested in CPEC and building closer ties with both Pakistan and Iran, trilateral coordination could provide additional deterrence against sub-conventional threats.

The pattern since May 2025 shows a clear shift. Having failed to impose costs through conventional military means, India appears to be relying more on covert and sub-conventional measures. The concentration of violence in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, combined with Indo-Israeli cooperation and external narrative-building, reflects a hybrid strategy designed to weaken Pakistan internally. For Islamabad, the response must operate on two fronts. Domestically, counterterrorism structures require further refinement, and community-level resilience must be strengthened. Regionally, sustained cooperation with Iran and constructive engagement with China and other partners will be necessary to address the cross-border terrorism. Just as Pakistan's conventional deterrence held firm in May 2025, a comprehensive approach to sub-conventional threats will be critical to ensuring that adversaries cannot achieve through proxies what they failed to secure through confrontation.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/pakistans-terrorism-dilemma-indo-israel-cooperation-and-balochistan-province/>

US–India Relations Under Strain: Tariffs and Strategic Autonomy

Shahwana Binte Sohail

The diplomatic relations of Washington and New Delhi have recently hit a new low. Relations were once driven by democratic alignment, shared values and convergence of strategic goals, and now are shaped more by strategic pragmatism. Already, frictional bilateral relations between the US and India are gradually clouded by inflated tariffs, transactional friction and the long-standing principle of strategic autonomy of India. After the US-mediated ceasefire between India and Pakistan, heated arguments against the US, which are subtle yet not-so-subtle, are made by the Indian officials. This current rift between the US and India has some roots in India's aversion to democratic values.

In early 2025, US President Donald Trump significantly raised tariffs on imports from India. The tariffs started with a 25% in July and escalated to a broad 50% in early August, citing that India continued to purchase Russian military equipment and Russian energy as a justification. This can incur severe economic consequences for India. According to the global credit rating agency Fitch, the successful US tariff rate on the goods of Indian has surged to 20.7% in 2025, an evident rise from 2.4% in 2024.

The instant fallout moved through markets and affected the source of investor sentiment. The Indian equity indexes recorded five weeks of losses, and the capital shifted towards safer assets such as silver and gold. While the Indian rupee weakened, energy and base metal prices met with volatility.

This worsening situation is the breakdown of the earlier cordial personal relationship between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Modi. At one time marked by the enthusiastic “Howdy Modi” rallies, these friendly ties provide a limited shield against growing protectionist pressure. On one side, where Trump felt sidelined by India for the role of brokering a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Pakistan because of his constructive third-party role in de-escalating the conflict between. As Trump distances himself from the partnership of India, India opted push back with criticism rather than compliance. The Defence Minister of India, Rajnath Singh, highlighted that particular actors may maintain reservations regarding India's rapid progress, undermining the nation's resilience and prominence by asserting “Sab Ky boss to hum hain.” Modi has himself announced his desire to “pay a very heavy price” to safeguard the trade and strategic interests of India, specifically in critical sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture. The prominent critics like MP Tewari have gone further, formulating the tariffs as a tribute to India's “strategic exceptionalism.” This suggests that India perceives the US as endeavoring to impose coercive pressure on it.

In July 2025, the US imposed 50% tariffs on Indian exports, which were linked to New Delhi's defence and energy ties with Russia, raising concerns over the strategic partnership. The reports revealed that India paused a major US arm acquisition, worth billions, which includes the Javelin missiles and Stryker Vehicles. India responds in defiance in turn, refusing the sale of

the F-35 fighter jet. Despite earlier US overtures during the visit of Modi in Washington in 2025, a mark that the Indian strategic culture might be giving way to nationalist calculus.

India's pursuit of the "Mission 500", an ambitious goal to raise bilateral trade with the US to \$500 billion by 2030, remains active but uncertain. Agreements, such as Transforming the Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology (TRUST) and the Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), are intended to underpin deeper collaboration in AI, Space, defence and the semiconductors. However, with tariffs now overshadowing this cooperation framework, the expected strategic convergence can diminish.

To counter the US economic rift, India targets the Global South platforms in West Asia, Africa. For example, India deepened engagement with the Global South by advancing the India-Africa summit and building partnerships with West Asia, such as Chabahar Port. It also expands BRICS and the New Development Bank to counter the US-led institutions. India aims to provide exports at more competitive prices and access a wider market as compared to what the US does. The promotion of India's supply chain resilience is supported by schemes like Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat. Japan and Australia have signed agreements with India because of alignment with the US policy under QUAD. The tilt of the US away from India could provoke similar reversals from the other US allied states, too. Will the geopolitical realignment and the trade competition prevail? Yes, the recent US tariffs on India highlight a growing friction in the US-India relationship. This implies that India is no longer considered a reliable strategic partner in the Asia Pacific. These tariffs also impact on the sectors related to defence.

The US tariffs on India not only strain Delhi's defence acquisition with Washington but also highlight emerging vulnerabilities in the defence supply chain of India that could alter regional power dynamics. India countered the US tariffs by increasing its trade with the Global South. However, its most important strategic partners, like Japan and Australia, will follow suit as per US policies. Hence, changing US policies in this current geopolitical landscape, India's ambition of global and regional hegemony has a grim future as they are no longer backed by US support.

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Link: <https://thediomaticinsight.com/us-india-relations-under-strain/>

China's Multidimensional Strategy to Reshape the Global Order

Muhammad Kumail Mehdi

After the end of World War 2, the US, aided by its Western allies, crafted a global order based on normative rules, military supremacy, and economic globalization. Washington's influence established the rule of international engagement, comprising the United Nations and agreements establishing Bretton Woods to NATO. However, the system started to experience shocks in the 21st century, most notably the rise of China. Beijing held a military parade on Wednesday to mark the conclusion of World War II. This military parade has both declaratory and commemorative elements. A new era in world politics is heralded by the golden numerals 1945 and 2025, which commemorate 80 years since the end of World War 2. The five interconnected components enumerated by the Chinese strategy-moral, physical, geometrical, geographical, and strategic sustainability- are the foundation of China's challenge to the US-led international order.

The US-led world order is crumbling due to the changing internal and external realities. Domestically, the rise of populist and isolationist tendencies is reinforcing this decline. The retreat from international engagements, the JCPOA, and the Paris Agreement, and the mantra of "America First" have questioned Washington's global leadership. Externally, the decline of Washington's global GDP share, from 40% in 1960 to 24% in 2019, has reduced its capacity to support global public goods and leadership, as it once did. At the same time, the rise of China and its promotion of alternative institutions, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and values seems an attractive choice to the global South that views this system as hypocritical, unequal, and serving Western interests, while ignoring the rest of the states.

The moral aspect of Chinese strategy blends Confucian moralism and a centralised mode of governance. While Western scholars portray Beijing as a realist actor, coercive, covert, and power-maximizer, the Chinese experts emphasize values like benevolence (ren), righteousness (yi), and virtue (de) as guiding norms. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, a renewed sense of national pride and unity has emerged, with Beijing positioning itself as a moral force working to address historical injustice.

At the Tiananmen parade, President Xi gave a symbolic toast, urging the world to "never return to the law of the jungle", calling for peace and common prosperity for all mankind. Beijing seeks to dismantle the Washington-led world order by positioning itself as a virtuous civilizational alternative, which champions harmony, sovereignty, and non-interference over Western universalism. China's aggression and restraint are a part of the moral aspect of its strategy that sanctifies power and redefines global engagement.

Clausewitz describes physical elements, the mass, organization, and disposition of forces, as an integral part of strategy, which is visible in China's forces and alliance network. At the Tiananmen parade, China displayed the DF-5C, a silo-launched ICBM with global strike range and MIRV technology.

Besides, the JL-3 submarine-launched missile and the DF-31BJ mobile ICBM signaled a formal debut of its nuclear triad based on air, land, and sea. Simultaneously, China's growing political, military, and economic partnership with Iran, Russia, the SCO members, and North Korea is creating a counterweight to Western military coalitions. These partnerships bolster Beijing's strategic depth and political insulation. The growing military might and alliance network are a part of the physical element of Chinese strategy to challenge the US-led world.

Another element of strategy is geometrical, which encompasses concentric and eccentric outreach. China's concentric focus primarily lies on Taiwan and its surrounding grey areas, which comprise islands. Beijing's expanding naval footprint, artificial islands, and missile deployments form a tightening arc around Taiwan. The recent parade and new military technologies challenge the US' National Defense Strategic guidelines, which prioritize security for Taiwan. In the same way, the eccentric outreach to Latin America and Africa, through infrastructure, diplomatic recognition, and trade, undermines Washington's influence in its backyard. This dual geometrical aspect presents Chinese global power projection, which challenges the US-led world order.

The geographical component of the strategy outlines China's intention to control key maritime chokepoints. As said by President Xi in 2017, "We often say that to get rich we must first build roads; but in coastal areas, to get rich we must also first build ports". Beijing has invested around US\$11 billion in 129 ports, where around 27% of global containers pass. The South China Sea, through which one-third of global trade flows, is increasingly militarised by Beijing's naval presence. Likewise, Gwadar port, located at the Persian Gulf, offers China a strategic foothold near important energy routes. This expanding presence and control of important routes threatens Western dominance in these vital areas.

The fifth component relates to all supply channels that support both economic resilience and military operations. AI, rare earth minerals, semiconductors, and supply chain resilience are all integral to China's techno-economic infrastructure, which is changing the basis of world dominance. China used to supply the US with roughly 96% of its rare earth materials, and in 2024, its rare earth reserves were the largest in the world. Beijing's defense and technology sectors depend heavily on this framework. China has started imposing export controls on rare earth minerals that are essential to the US automotive and defense industries in response to US tariffs. It is noteworthy that China is maintaining its access to minerals by extending its infrastructure in resource-rich areas through the Belt and Road Initiative.

The US's technological dominance is being challenged by Beijing's integration of AI and chip manufacturing skills. To conclude, a deliberate reconfiguration based on strategic totality is the reason for China's challenge to the US-led international system. Beijing is undergoing a multifaceted change in global power projection, from the geometric outreach to the control of global chokepoints and supply lines, and from the moral legitimacy based on Confucian revivalism to improving its conventional and nuclear forces.

With Beijing's rise, Clausewitz's five essential components of strategy are once again relevant. The Tiananmen parade, containing golden numerals 1945 and 2025, shows the intent that Beijing foresees a greater role in international politics.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/chinas-multidimensional-strategy-to-reshape-the-global-order/>

India's Nuclear Submarines (SSBNs): A Lurking Threat Beneath the Waves

Areesha Manzoor

The evolution of Indian naval doctrine can be studied by the Holmes and Yoshihara model. India declared its first naval doctrine in 2004, following the free-rider model, where India recognizes the Indian Ocean Region as a key maritime trade route. The Indian doctrine evolved into the constable model of Holmes and Yoshihara, where India broadened its primary interests and emphasised military capabilities to fulfil these interests. In the third stage, India's naval doctrine followed the strongman model, where it sought to achieve security and dominance in the IOR. This phase is exaggerated by India's role as a "Net Security Provider." The primary objective of the maritime doctrine was to achieve an assured second-strike capability. India's naval developments in sea-based nuclear capabilities represent a major leap forward. New Delhi completed its nuclear triad in August 2016, by deploying nuclear-powered submarines (SSBNs) INS Arihant to the Indian Ocean.

Indian Naval Modernisation: Offensive or Defensive?

The Indian Ocean Region is strategically important because it is the route for 80% of maritime transportation. Indian naval expansion and intensified nuclearisation in this region are reinforced by Indian Naval Modernisation 2030. It includes various advancements, such as the development of flagship aircraft carriers (INS Vikrant, INS Vishal), naval warships, UAVs and submarine fleet. Indian naval modernisation is aimed at strengthening the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad that is considered to be the most survivable, and manifested through the Arihant-class SSBN program. India is aiming to establish a fleet of at least 6 SSBNs, including INS Aridhaman. These submarines can carry nuclear-tipped Submarines-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). The K series of missiles includes K-15 Sagarika, K-4, K-5 and K-6, ranging from 700-6000+ kilometres, which have an intercontinental range.

India justifies the nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean by giving Cold War-era logic: assured second strike capability ensures deterrence. The Indian maritime security strategy 2015 declared SSBNs as instruments of "assured punitive retaliation" as they are less vulnerable and have stealth and mobility. However, it is a dangerous illusion, especially when one adversary has the capability and the other does not. The Cuban Missile Crisis is a reminder that the world almost came to the verge of nuclear fallout despite of Second-Strike capabilities of both adversaries. Moreover, the South Asian security matrix is even more complex. Geographical proximity, history of conflicts, unresolved disputes and lack of functional diplomatic channels complicate the situation. In a trust-deficient environment where India is not ready to talk to Pakistan, India's second-strike capability is not the guarantor of peace but an impetus for a nuclear arms race under the sea.

Indian Nuclear Sea Leg and Crises Instability

In the aftermath of the recent Pahalgam incident, India launched its false-flag Operation Sindoor against Pakistan and deployed its Navy's Carrier Battle Group, including the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (R11), Visakhapatnam-class destroyers, Talwar-class frigates, submarines,

and naval aviation assets. The Indian Sea leg of the nuclear triad is a factor of instability during crises, opposite to the deterrence claim. The operation of a credible SSBN faces an always/never dilemma: nuclear weapons must always be ready to launch but never be launched without authorisation. In India, SSBNs operate with mated warheads (missiles with pre-installed warheads). The threat looming around Indian nuclear submarines is the hypocrisy in the Nuclear Command and Control (NC2) system of Indian SSBNs. They claim to have a central civilian NC2; however, in a crisis, there is a probability of shifting to a delegatory NC2. In both cases, there is a lot of stress on the effective communication system that may fail or be disrupted. Furthermore, the contemporary Indian government is far-right extremist, driven by Hindutva ideology. Modi equating internal terrorist activities with a war on a sovereign state cannot be trusted to take a rational decision for launching sea-based nuclear weapons. Even the delegatory system puts the decision in the hands of an officer, which is no less risky. In both cases, ideology-driven government and security forces enhance the probability of nuclear crises in South Asia.

A Global Threat Beneath the Waves

The Indian Ocean Region is one of the busiest maritime corridors, so Indian nuclear deployment beneath the waves is a lurking global threat. IOR hosts international navies like the U.S., China, Russia and others, and the increasing presence of nuclear vessels augments the probability of inadvertent escalation, confrontation and misidentification. Moreover, in the case of a strategic crisis in the IOR, two-thirds of the global trade will be halted. Economic insecurity in the IOR region has increased because of India's rationale of sea-based deterrence.

India was at a threshold alliance with the U.S in the maritime strategic domain, by which the US declared India as "A net security provider" in the IOR. However, this status does not guarantee that India will be there to help the US when the need arises. This strategic posture has encouraged India to pursue naval modernisation in recent decades. Indian naval modernisation is not only being evaded from scrutiny but is also being systematically promoted by the West despite its clear risks, which undermines global arms control norms.

Indian nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean has implications for Pakistan. In the past, Pakistan also advocated for a peaceful and nuclear-weapons-free Indian Ocean. Pakistan also proposed a bilateral ban on SSBNs after the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan. Due to growing Indian naval modernisation and nuclearisation, Pakistan established the Naval Strategic Forces Command (NSFC) as a custodian of Pakistan's sea-based deterrence. In 2017, Pakistan tested Babur III, a Submarine-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) with a 450 km range.

To secure its seas and keep India in check and ensure the survivability of its nuclear weapons, Pakistan maintains limited but credible minimum deterrence in the Indian Ocean. South Asian security and stability cannot be achieved if some states are treated with nuclear exceptionalism. This special treatment of India compels Pakistan to ensure second strike capability by developing SSBNs. In a nutshell, the Indian Sea leg of the nuclear triad may be silent beneath the waves, but its implications are loud and clear at the regional and global levels.

Indian naval modernisation is cloaked in strategic terminologies like deterrence; however, it is altering the Indian Ocean Region into a nuclear theatre. Instead of assuring stability and deterrence, these developments fuel instability and an arms race. The Indian Hindutva-driven government and security forces strain the command-and-control system that prevents a nuclear catastrophe. Indian naval modernisation is a threat to the economic, strategic, and environmental security of the region. Pakistan's national security is at risk because of the IOR nuclearisation. Although Pakistan stands for making the Indian Ocean Region a Nuclear Free Zone (NFZ), it has established credible minimum deterrence. Pakistan strongly urges its stance but continues to establish credible deterrence to ensure stability in this region.

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Link: <https://strafasia.com/indias-sea-based-nuclear-submarines-ssbns-a-lurking-threat-beneath-the-waves/>

Pakistan's Space Renaissance: Orbits for Sustainable Development

Areeshah Manzoor

Pakistan launched the Pakistan Remote Sensing Satellite EO (SAR) on July 31, 2025, using a Chinese Kuaizhou-1A carrier rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre (XSLC). This event marked another milestone in Pakistan's space renaissance. EO (SAR) became operational in Low Earth Orbit (LEO), where it will provide high-resolution satellite imagery. This launch continues the legacy of the Space and Upper Atmospheric Research Commission (SUPARCO), which began Pakistan's space program in the early 1960s. It is a significant milestone in achieving the objectives of the National Space Policy of Pakistan and Space Vision 2047. The fourth launch of the Earth Observing Satellite under the space project URAAN depicts Pakistan's commitment to using orbits for sustainable development.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Pakistan, the development and launch of EO (SAR) is the result of collaboration between SUPARCO, MICROSAT China, and China Electronics Technology Group Cooperation. Beijing assists Pakistan with critical technology and infrastructure that help Pakistan achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, expressed his gratitude to Chinese partners and mentioned Pakistan-China friendship as "beyond borders and into outer space, driven by a shared vision to harness space technology for the betterment of humanity". Moreover, Pakistan's Minister of Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal hailed the satellite launch as "beyond the skies", the epitome of Sino-Pakistan friendship. The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad extended its warm congratulations to Pakistan on the successful joint venture.

EO (SAR) broadens the scope of technological cooperation, particularly in space between the two countries. The training program for sending the first Pakistani astronaut is underway in China, and the astronaut will board China's Tiangong space station. China-Pakistan space cooperation has multifold implications, which are symbolic, technological, economic, and strategic.

This new launch is a step towards the operationalisation of the National Space Policy of Pakistan. Our Peaceful Space Program is a ground-breaking event and a trend setter in the world of rapid weaponisation of outer space. Pakistan reaffirms the principle of the Outer Space Treaty that space is a global common where states shall cooperate, not compete. Pakistan's space program fortifies norms of global governance in space. This enhances Pakistan's position in forums like the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), where Pakistan supports the peaceful uses of space. This launch is a soft power projection of Pakistan. It enhances Pakistan's image as a responsible space-faring nation and gives it a chance to represent the needs of the Global South that the Global North often overlooks. Pakistan can use space diplomacy as a tool of constructive engagement rather than confrontation. Its space program has higher moral ground in contrast to its regional competitor, India, which has tested anti-satellite weapons. India's militaristic space capabilities pose a security threat to Pakistan, as they affect the strategic stability of South Asia. However, Pakistan continues its commitment

to peaceful space uses and seeks international cooperation for the socio-economic development of its people.

Pakistan aims to use satellite imagery for tackling non-traditional security threats like climate change, food insecurity, and urbanization. Real-time monitoring of glacier recession and deforestation will help in early warning of floods, earthquakes, and landslides, which will enhance disaster management. Tracking crop growth, soil quality, and water usage will help in precision agriculture to reduce food insecurity. Satellite imagery will help to measure deforestation, landslides, and earthquakes, which will help in environmental protection. Accurate geospatial mapping will enable the monitoring of infrastructure growth and urban expansion, ultimately supporting urban planning.

Pakistan's latest space endeavor is not limited to disaster mitigation but signifies its commitment to technological and economic growth. EO (SAR) is a valuable addition to the space program of Pakistan that will have a beneficial spill-over effect on various industries such as Information Technology (IT), telecommunications, material sciences, and renewable energies. Space development can foster an innovative ecosystem, presenting a significant opportunity for the youth bulge in Pakistan. It will impact four major areas of technological development. First, the space program is focused on indigenous development, by which scientists, engineers, and data scientists are being trained. It builds human capital and reduces reliance on foreign cooperation. Second, satellites will catalyze industries such as telecommunication, navigation, and agriculture. Third, Pakistan's space program encourages public-private partnerships. It will boost local production and enhance the efficiency of entrepreneurs by using data for solutions in logistics, insurance, and climate adaptation. Lastly, it can enhance digital transformation in governance and economic systems through the integration of satellite data with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data analytics. Moreover, spatial mapping will help boost the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to enhance regional trade. Space can serve as a driver of technological leaps that will bring opportunities in the critical development sector, economic growth, and daily governance.

A comprehensive roadmap is needed to build a space network on the cornerstone of EO (SAR). There is a need to invest in research centres and universities and provide them with scholarships to strengthen indigenous capacity. The government can establish the National Geospatial Data Authority, which consolidates satellite data into governance. Public-private partnership is an element of Pakistan's National Space Policy, for the government shall encourage local IT firms and tech startups. The public awareness program shall highlight the progress of SUPARCO and the significance of satellites in modern times. Pakistan may broaden its technological base by cooperating with other international partners.

Pakistan's foray into space renaissance is not just symbolic but a strategic leap towards survival and sustainable development. Pakistan has used satellites as a tool of resilience against climate disasters, food insecurity, environmental crises, and economic challenges. Pakistan embraces the peaceful applications of satellites, deepening international cooperation to achieve the goals of its National Space Policy. EO (SAR) is undoubtedly a significant milestone, and policymakers must harness its full potential for the benefit of ordinary citizens. Pakistan can

make substantial progress if it achieves its goal of sustainable development through space technologies.

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Link: <https://strafasia.com/pakistans-space-renaissance-orbits-for-sustainable-development/>

From Deterrence to Decapitation: India's Bunker Busters and Counterforce Ambitions

Nawal Nawaz

India is reportedly modifying its Agni- V intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) to carry a colossal 7,500 kg conventional warhead instead of a nuclear payload in pursuit of developing a missile-based delivery system for bunker busters. With the penetration vision of underground 80-100 metres, this massive eight- tonne warhead can destroy deeply buried targets. These bunker busters will enable India to strike adversary's critical infrastructure with enhanced operational flexibility and survivability of the launch platform. This significant strategic development in India's missile program ushers a precarious new chapter in South Asia's strategic landscape, blurring lines between conventional and nuclear strategy.

Recently, the United States used Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) bunker-buster bombs in Fordow and Natanz against Iran's underground nuclear facilities. Imitating US conventional munitions, that have ability to destroy nuclear infrastructure, India's Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) reportedly aims to develop airburst warhead for surface targets and like the US GBU-57 a true earth- penetrator (MOP) bomb, allowing India to strike at a long-range target with greater precision.

As per reports, new Agni-V variant would have the capacity to target enemy's critical infrastructure, missile silos and command centers which are buried deep underground. The development of a missile that can carry bunker buster would allow India to threaten nuclear assets of its rival states with a conventional warhead; however, such an action would most likely cross the nuclear threshold, thereby heightening the risks of escalation.

In tandem with its official nuclear doctrine of 'No First Use' (NFU) of nuclear weapons, attacking nuclear assets of adversary with its conventional Agni -V would technically allow India enough room to blur lines between its conventional and nuclear strategy. This nuclear-conventional entanglement would undermine strategic stability in South Asia as development of new bunker buster would offer counterforce options to India, therefore, would be a grave security risk for Pakistan and China.

Regardless of the warhead type, Pakistan would see firing of high-speed ballistic missile as a part of a nuclear first strike. In time of crisis chances of miscalculation would arise multifold as Pakistan would be in difficult position to gauge nature of warhead type within few minutes as potential warhead would have already detonated on desired target, providing little time to distinguish between a conventional high explosive warhead or a nuclear bomb.

With the development of such counterforce capabilities, Indian threats of pre-emptive strikes against nuclear assets of adversary will be maximized, particularly in light of Prime Minister Modi's remarks in 2019 that hinted at a possible review of India's NFU doctrine. The new Agni-V variant will allow attacks on storage sites or command-and-control bunkers, presenting strategic assets not as off-limits unless an all-out war has initiated; however, such a development disregards the existing Confidence-Building Measures such as the bilateral agreement of Non-Attack Agreement of 1988 on nuclear facilities, which already ensure the safety of civilian nuclear facilities and indicate that India had no rationale to pursue this

capability. This agreement was aimed at reducing nuclear-conventional entanglement between Pakistan and India in times of crisis.

Such ambiguity would create pressure on Pakistan to either pre-empt or respond in a similar manner to secure its deterrent. The use-it-or-lose-it dilemma incentivizes Pakistan for a pre-emption strike especially when India is moving towards counterforce targeting. Conventional attack on adversary nuclear assets would target states in a use it or lose it dilemma. Fear of such a disarming strike against target state can lead to inadvertent escalation between the two nuclear weapon states.

India's emerging counterforce capabilities necessitate Pakistan to develop extensive early warning networks to ensure stable deterrence. Chances of inadvertent escalation between Pakistan and India that could potentially lead to nuclear war could be minimized through regular communication channels. Furthermore, New Emerging and Disruptive technologies (EDTs) have also blurred line between conventional and nuclear strategies, making nuclear assets vulnerable, inviting miscalculations between nuclear armed states. For example, with little warning, nuclear command-and-control system becomes vulnerable to precision guided hypersonic weapons and at the same time advanced cyber capabilities have the capacity to disable or manipulate early warning networks. Therefore, Development of such conventional mega-missiles displays India's counterforce temptation, accelerating nuclear arms race in South Asia. While India pursues development of bunker buster with counterforce preemption and decapitation capabilities, Pakistan continues to adhere with its Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) Posture, aiming to ensure deterrence across its entire spectrum with a proportionate, measured and timely response.

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Links: <https://defensetalks.com/from-deterrence-to-decapitation-indias-bunker-busters-and-counterforce-ambitions/>

