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India's SURYASTRA Test and South Asian Strategic Stability

Shahwana Binte Sohail

India's recent successful test of the indigenous SURYASTRA Universal Rocket Launcher System marks another step in its ongoing military modernization programme. Developed by NIBE Limited (an Indian defence manufacturing company), the system reportedly demonstrated the capability to launch precision-guided rockets with ranges of 150 and 300 kilometres under the Indian Army's emergency procurement framework. Indian officials have presented the development as part of technological self-reliance and defence preparedness. However, its broader implications for South Asian security cannot be overlooked. In an already fragile regional environment, the expansion of long-range precision strike capabilities risks an arms competition and increasing escalation pressures.

South Asia remains one of the world's most sensitive nuclear regions. Historical tensions, unresolved disputes, and recurring military crises continue to shape the security calculations of both Pakistan and India. In such an environment, military modernization by one state inevitably affects the threat perceptions of the other. India's growing investment in missile systems, rocket artillery, integrated air defence, and emerging technologies reflects a broader effort to enhance its operational advantage in the region.

The significance of the SURYASTRA system lies in the increasing role of precision-guided conventional weapons in modern warfare. Unlike traditional artillery systems, long-range guided rockets can strike military and strategic targets with greater speed and accuracy. Such capabilities reduce response time during crises and place greater pressure on political and military decision-makers. They may also encourage assumptions that limited conventional operations can remain below the escalation threshold.

These concerns are not merely theoretical. Recent conflicts across the world demonstrate how precision-strike technologies can rapidly intensify military confrontations. The Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted the growing importance of long-range rocket artillery, drones, and precision-guided systems in shaping battlefield outcomes. Similarly, conflicts in the Middle East illustrate how missile and drone technologies can quickly destabilize already volatile security environments. South Asia cannot assume immunity from these broader global trends.

India's modernization efforts also reflect a larger strategic shift toward indigenous defence production under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative. New Delhi is increasingly investing in domestic missile production, surveillance systems, counter-drone technologies, and integrated battlefield networks. From the Akash missile programme to advanced rocket systems such as SURYASTRA, India is steadily expanding its military-industrial base. While self-reliance in defence production is a sovereign right, the pace and scale of these developments are altering regional military dynamics.

For Pakistan, the implications are significant. Pakistan's strategic outlook, has long been based on credible minimum deterrence and the preservation of strategic balance in South Asia. Islamabad has consistently maintained that deterrence stability is essential for preventing conflict in a nuclearized region. However, the continuous expansion of conventional strike

capabilities creates pressure on the opposing state to preserve deterrence credibility and strategic balance.

This situation reflects the classic “security dilemma” in international relations. Measures adopted by one state to increase its security are often perceived as threatening by others. Although India may describe SURYASTRA as a defensive system, Pakistan is likely to assess it within the broader context of India’s evolving military posture and emphasis on rapid mobilization and precision warfare.

The danger is that such developments may gradually lower the threshold for escalation during crises. Long-range precision weapons can encourage limited military operations based on the assumption that escalation will remain controlled. Yet South Asia’s history demonstrates that crises can escalate unpredictably. The recent May 2025 conflict and Marka-e-Haq demonstrates how dynamic escalation in South Asia can rapidly expand under a nuclearized environment.

Emerging military technologies are making this environment even more complex. Artificial intelligence, surveillance integration, electronic warfare, and autonomous systems are reducing decision-making time during conflicts. The integration of long-range precision strike systems further complicates escalation management and strategic signalling during crises. In future confrontations, military actions may unfold faster than diplomatic channels can effectively respond.

At the international level, responses to regional military modernization often remain selective. International discourse frequently portrays India’s expanding defence capabilities as part of the legitimate rise of a regional power. In contrast, the implications of these developments for South Asian deterrence stability receive comparatively limited attention. This imbalance contributes to growing strategic asymmetry and reinforces perceptions of unequal treatment within the broader global security discourse.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has repeatedly emphasized the importance of strategic restraint, dialogue, and conflict management mechanisms. Islamabad has consistently advocated for deterrence and regional stability rather than military dominance. Preserving long-term peace in South Asia requires that the security concerns of all regional actors be acknowledged equally.

Ultimately, India’s SURYASTRA test represents more than a technological achievement. It reflects the accelerating pace of military modernization and strategic competition in South Asia. Although every state has the sovereign right to strengthen its national defence, unchecked technological competition in a volatile nuclear region carries serious risks. Sustainable peace in South Asia cannot be achieved through military superiority alone. It requires mutual restraint, effective crisis communication, and a credible deterrence balance. If military modernization continues without parallel confidence-building measures and sustained strategic dialogue, South Asia risks entering a more unstable and unpredictable phase of strategic competition. In such an environment, even conventional military technologies may produce consequences that extend far beyond the battlefield.

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Link: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/indias-suryastra-test-and-south-asian-strategic-stability/>

The Rafale Deal and its Impact on the Asia-Pacific Order

Amna Saqib

On 25 May 2026, India finalised its Letter of Request for 114 Rafale fighter jets from Dassault Aviation. It is the world's largest active fighter procurement by declared value, at approximately US\$28 billion, with 92 aircraft to be assembled on Indian soil. The Indian officials have described the acquisition as a response to Air Force squadron shortfalls and as an expression of 'Make in India' industrial ambition. Both explanations are accurate. Neither is complete. This deal is the most visible expression of a decade-long structural reordering of India's defence partnerships. This reordering has not been officially announced. But the procurement record, the diplomatic trajectory, and the parallel shifts in great-power alignments across the Asia-Pacific make its direction, and its consequences impossible to dismiss.

A partnership of mutual strategic necessity

The standard framing in which France being an arms supplier, and India a client, actually misrepresents both parties. The presence of France in Asia-Pacific precedes its current strategic ambitions. The sovereign territories across both oceans and a formal regional strategy since 2018 make it a resident power, not an external aspirant. The AUKUS episode of 2021, in which Australia unilaterally cancelled its submarine agreement with Paris in favour of US-UK nuclear arrangement, gave a clear lesson i.e., Anglosphere-led frameworks offer France little strategic protection. A bilateral partnership with India, built on defence co-production rather than alliance politics, offered a more durable alternative.

India required a Western-standard defence partner willing to transfer technology, manufacture locally, and supply without political conditionalities. France gains a partner that will operate more of its flagship combat aircraft than any country outside France itself; India gains advanced multirole combat platforms independent of Russian supply chains, assembled on its own soil. This is a co-investment in strategic relevance, and both capitals understand it as such.

The philosophical convergence matters equally. The Indian doctrine of strategic autonomy is a refusal of alliance dependency that traces back to Nehruvian non-alignment and has been prosecuted with renewed assertiveness in the current era. This finds its most natural Western expression in France, a power whose Gaullist tradition has always resisted subordination to Anglo-American strategic architecture. Neither capital asks the other to choose sides. That mutual accommodation is itself a strategic asset in a region where the balance of power remains genuinely contested.

What the numbers establish

India's defence import record reflects a strategic reorientation that has proceeded quietly, without official narration. According to SIPRI, by 2022, Russia's share of Indian defence exports fell from roughly 70 per cent in the 2013-17 period to 45 per cent. Over the same time period, the share of France rose to 29 per cent, which is a 489 per cent increase in French defence exports to India. These figures predate the 114-jet acquisition entirely. The structural shift they describe was already well advanced before the current deal was signed.

The Russia-Ukraine war hardened that logic into operational necessity. The export controls on Russian defence goods and the redirection of Russian military production toward Moscow's own war effort exposed supply vulnerabilities across India's Russian-origin platforms, including Su-30MKIs, MiG-29s, T-90 tanks, all dependent on Russian spare parts. The lesson was unambiguous: a military drawing its hardware predominantly from a single external supplier is hostage to that supplier's foreign policy circumstances.

That logic was tested in real time during the May 2025 conflict. The Rafale aircraft were operationally deployed during Operation Sindoor. Pakistan successfully engaged Indian platforms across multiple domains; a performance corroborated by Pakistani military institutions and acknowledged in international assessments. Yet, the Indian institutional response was not reconsideration but acceleration. Within nine months, New Delhi granted Acceptance of Necessity for 114 additional Rafale jets. The procurement decision is itself an analytical signal: whatever the tactical outcomes of the conflict, the strategic commitment of India to the France partnership has only deepened.

Three Asia-Pacific Consequences

The implications of India-France partnership extend across the subcontinent and into the broader Asia-Pacific region. First, a near-180 Rafale fleet, an expanding Scorpène submarine force, and growing carrier-based aviation capability represent a qualitative transformation of Indian military reach, which is compressed into a single generation and anchored in a thirty-year French production and maintenance infrastructure. Collectively, these acquisitions expand Indian operational capacity across the Indian Ocean and into the maritime corridors of the wider Asia-Pacific, reconfiguring the regional military balance in ways that demand careful analytical attention.

Second, the reorientation of India toward Western defence suppliers produces an indirect consequence that has received insufficient attention. The historical restraint of Russia in its military cooperation with other regional actors was premised on preserving its privileged position with New Delhi. As that position erodes, so does the restraint. A sanctions-pressured Russia with diminishing strategic equities in India is structurally incentivised to deepen defence engagement elsewhere, reconfiguring regional arms dynamics in ways that extend well beyond the India-France bilateral relationship.

Third, the most consequential long-term implication of this partnership may be in the maritime domain. A deepening French-naval architecture, carrier-based Rafale aviation, and deepening French naval cooperation collectively redefine India's operational reach across the Indian Ocean region (IOR). It is a body of water through which approximately 80 per cent of global energy trade passes and around which China, India, and several middle powers are simultaneously expanding their naval presence. The India-France naval axis does not merely add capability to one side of that equation. It accelerates the militarisation of a maritime domain whose stability underpins the economic architecture of the entire Asia-Pacific region as well.

The shift is real but its trajectory is not linear. The Russian-origin platforms of India are still the backbone of its armed forces, that will require Moscow's maintenance support for another fifteen to twenty years. The reorientation is generational, not immediate. Moreover, France that sells advanced platforms to India while maintaining its own diplomatic relationships across the

region is not an unconditional strategic partner. Paris has its own interests, its own red lines, and its own Asia-Pacific calculations that do not always coincide cleanly onto New Delhi's.

What the region must reckon with For states across the Asia-Pacific whose strategic calculus is shaped by Indian military capability, the trajectory described above is not a distant contingency; it is an accelerating present. The regional balance a decade from now will be structurally different from the one that has historically anchored deterrence planning, and the window for independent strategic positioning among regional middle powers is narrowing. The India-France partnership is one component of a broader repositioning, unfolding within an order in which the US, China, Russia, and the European powers are all recalibrating simultaneously, and in which the consequences of each recalibration compound the others. That recalibration will not announce itself with a treaty. It will accumulate in manufacturing facilities in Pune, on carrier flight decks in the Arabian Sea, in the slow and structural embedding of French military technology into India's defence infrastructure across a thirty-year production horizon. By the time its full implications for the Asia-Pacific are apparent, the architecture will already be operational. The ledger is being assembled, jet by jet, at a factory in Pune. Its implications affect to the entire region.

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Link: <https://policyeast.com/the-rafale-deal-and-its-impact-on-the-asia-pacific-order/>

Taking No Sides: How Pakistan's Balanced Foreign Policy is Shaping Global Peace

Dr Muhammadi

The foreign policy of a country is of paramount importance as it outlines the objectives, ambitions and concerns of a state in the surrounding environment, region, and in the international arena. In a fractured global system and an anarchic international environment, Pakistan's approach of 'neutrality' under its balanced foreign policy is rational and futuristic. Pakistan's foreign policy guiding principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, non-interference, non-aggression, and peaceful settlement of disputes are to maintain peace and prosperity among nations. In this context, the recent ceasefire as well as continuous efforts for permanent resolution between the United States (US) and Iran, facilitated and mediated by Pakistan, highlight its diplomatic commitment and provide a credible example.

Over the years, Pakistan has maintained a balanced and rational foreign policy by eluding inflexible alliances and, even on many occasions, playing a very optimistic mediation role to end conflicts and to ease tensions between major adversaries. It was the same policy pursued by Pakistan in bringing Washington and Beijing closer in the early 1970s by arranging a secret visit of Henry Kissinger, the then Secretary of State, to China that put an end to decades of Chinese isolation, and paved the way for the opening of diplomatic relations. Likewise, Pakistan took a neutral stance during the Yemen war in 2015 despite having strong historical ties with both Riyadh and Tehran, as well as its role in enabling peace talks between the USA and the Taliban that paved the way to the Doha Agreement.

Similarly, Pakistan's decision to remain neutral in key geopolitical conflicts, especially in the US- Iran conflict, has enabled it to maintain open channels for dialogue with all parties involved. Unlike various regional actors, Pakistan has positioned itself as a credible neutral negotiator.

Pakistan's ongoing efforts for a ceasefire between the USA and Iran and subsequent facilitation of a durable peace are increasing Pakistan's importance in today's complex diplomatic circles as a credible and effective mediator. A detailed understanding of this ceasefire proves Pakistan's ability to play a proactive role between conflicting parties. A region plagued with deep-rooted mistrust, historical grievances and intense strategic competition among stakeholders, bringing adversaries to a ceasefire and subsequently to negotiations for a durable peace is a big diplomatic achievement. By adopting this approach, Pakistan would further highlight its commitment to promoting global peace and stability.

Another aspect of this policy would be to project a positive image of Pakistan before the international community. For decades, Pakistan has been perceived negatively by the international community, and it has been associated with conflict, security risks, terrorism, etc. However, through diplomacy and a positive approach of constructive cooperation with other countries of the world, Pakistan's approach to conflict resolution through dialogue and promotion of peace and stability would be projected globally and create a new perception of diplomacy, and constructive cooperation. This changing perception has far-reaching benefits

for the country and leads to better relations with the rest of the world and prospects of greater opportunities for economic cooperation.

Pakistan has maintained a balanced and principled stance by actively facilitating dialogue and building trust between the conflicting parties. This requires a nuanced diplomatic approach, in which Pakistan demonstrates its ability to resolve the conflict. With Pakistan's increased diplomatic engagement, historical ties and strategically significant geographical proximity can be rekindled and contribute to its credibility and ability to act as an active regional peacemaker. The subtle and delicate approach by Pakistan and its policy of neutrality can be used as a model for other middle powers as it proves its mettle in conflict resolution. In today's international affairs dominated by great power rivalry, there is a need for countries that can act as conflict stabilizers rather than escalators.

The international community is appreciative of Pakistan's role as facilitator for a ceasefire between US and Iran and its continuous efforts for durable peace and has been viewing the country as a rational player that can play a constructive role for durable peace. These developments depict Pakistan's evolving foreign policy of neutrality coupled with proactive diplomacy. The US State Department termed Pakistan a trusted mediator, while China's support and its cooperative engagement highlighted its ability to mediate between rival blocs. At the UN, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appreciated the constructive role of Pakistan and highlighted global support for its active role in upholding regional peace and stability. Moreover, leaders of the UK, France, Iran, and Qatar applauded Pakistan's constructive diplomatic role. These reactions demonstrate Pakistan's move from an inactive and non-aligned to an active neutrality. It not only maintains a balance in its relations with rival powers but also actively contributes to shaping peace processes by persistent diplomatic engagement. Pakistan's foreign policy has evolved through the prism of pragmatism. Its effective mediation to end conflicts, to hold ceasefires and to search for their permanent solutions in different regions of the world, particularly the recent conflict between the US and Iran, would go a long way in bringing peace and stability to the region. Resolution of this conflict would not only increase the stature of Pakistan at the international stage, but would also be a huge contribution to establishing a stable global and regional environment.

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Link: <https://stratheia.com/taking-no-sides-how-pakistans-balanced-foreign-policy-is-shaping-global-peace/>

Indian Joint Air Defence Doctrine: Implications for South Asian Stability

Abdul Moiz Khan & Summar Iqbal

Indian Joint Air Defence Doctrine was released on 29 May 2026 by the former Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan. The launch of doctrine in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor (Indian framing of May 2025 crisis) and Marka-e-Haq (Pakistan's framing of May 2025 crisis), and one day before the retirement of Gen Chauhan reflects the importance New Delhi attaches to integrated air and missile defense in an era of non-contact warfare. The doctrine reflects India's growing focus on adapting its military posture to strengthen its preparedness for limited conventional conflicts and to enhance synergy among its tri-services. Moreover, the doctrine has been unveiled within a year of the announcement of the Sudarshan Chakra initiative by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The initiative aims to develop a structure similar to Iron dome aimed at protecting critical civilian infrastructure, strategic assets, and military installations across India. However, the pursuit of a robust defensive architecture by New Delhi would carry negative implications for South Asian strategic stability, particularly in the context of future crises with Pakistan.

The Joint Indian Air Defense Doctrine is part of a series of joint doctrines issued by the Headquarters Integrated Defense Staff (IDS) to further institutionalize tri-service integration and joint warfighting. Over the past few years, India has unveiled Joint doctrines related to Multi-Domain Operations, Cyberspace Operations, Amphibious Operations, Special Forces Operation, and Airborne and Heliborne Operations. The objective of these doctrinal updates is to establish integrated operational concepts, enhance interoperability standards and strengthen joint planning mechanisms across the tri-services. Moreover, the doctrine is another stepping stone in the formation of theatre command project. India is pursuing "jointness" and "Integrated Theater Command" since the establishment of the post of CDS in 2020. However, doctrinal harmonization is a pre-requisite for theatreization as integrated commands need common concepts of operations and shared command-and-control frameworks to function effectively. Thus, the Joint Air Defense Doctrine would serve as a doctrinal foundation for future theater-level air defense operations.

The doctrine is focused on developing an integrated and layered air defense architecture capable of countering a wide-spectrum of threats, including drones, loitering munitions, precision-guided weapons, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and saturation attacks. The doctrine emphasizes on developing a synchronized "kill-web" architecture designed to compress decision-making timelines and link tracking systems with weapons across all domains. Drawing on the lessons from recent conflicts around the world, and also from May 2025 crisis between India and Pakistan, the doctrine reflects an increasing effort to develop the capability to detect, track, and neutralize large volumes of incoming aerial threats.

The Indian Joint Air Defense Doctrine would also play an integral role in the broader vision of Mission Sudarshan Chakra – an Indian Iron Dome. Mission Chakra, announced in August 2025, is an initiative to develop an indigenous layered missile defense shield capable of protecting both civilian and military infrastructures. According to the reports, the project aims to integrate advanced surveillance, interception, and counter-strike capabilities for the swift neutralization of threats in all three military domains – land, air, and sea. The doctrine would provide the blueprint for integrating air defense systems, long-range surveillance radars,

command-and-control networks and ballistic missile defense assets for developing a networked system capable of operating across multiple layers and domains.

Beyond conventional air defence systems, India is investing heavily into developing a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) architecture. India has already purchased five batteries of Russian S400 BMD system, and has approved the proposal for buying an additional five S400 batteries that would bring the total number to ten. Moreover, indigenously developed BMD system of India includes Prithvi Air Defense System (PAD) with the capability to intercept missiles at exo-atmospheric altitudes between 50-180 km, and the Ashwin Advanced Air Defence (AAD) system having a range of 20-40 km. India has also deployed short-range air defence systems including Akash and SPYDER. The Joint Air Defense Doctrine would seek to enhance Indian capabilities beyond defending against aircraft, drones and loitering munitions to protect against ballistic and cruise missile – strengthening Indian non-contact warfare capabilities.

However, the implications of defense systems are not only related to their physical capabilities but also to how they can shape perceptions, expectations and decision-making during crises. The Indian Joint Air Defense Doctrine would impact South Asian strategic stability in different ways. The enhancement of defensive capabilities can increase confidence of decision-makers in India regarding their ability to defend critical assets from retaliatory strikes, increasing their willingness to undertake military actions against Pakistan. India has already demonstrated its objectives of carving out space for a limited conventional conflict against Pakistan during May 2025 crisis. An increasingly robust defensive shield would only further reinforce these assumptions. However, this can negatively affect crisis stability in South Asia.

From Pakistan's perspective, the Indian Joint Air Defense Doctrine would only reinforce the concerns regarding Indian strategic posture. Indian developments over the past decade regarding missile defense systems, precision-strike capabilities, advanced ISR platforms, and counterforce enabling technologies contribute to Pakistan's perception that India is shifting away from credible minimum deterrence. This would influence Pakistan's threat assessment in both conventional and strategic domains and can lead to decisions that would help in maintaining the credibility of its retaliatory capabilities. In short, the Joint Air Defense Doctrine and Sudarshan Chakra initiative are not merely technical manuals, but rather reflect India's broader military transformation towards integrated theater commands, multi-domain warfare, and layered missile and air defense architecture. However, in the South Asian strategic environment, even defensive measures can generate negative consequences. The greater danger is not that India will achieve strategic immunity, but the false confidence that they have. In an environment of mistrust, where perceptions of vulnerability and security shape crisis behavior – these assumptions can be more dangerous than weapon systems themselves.

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Link: <https://thediplomat.com/2026/06/indian-joint-air-defense-doctrine-implications-for-south-asian-stability/>

Drones, Missiles, and the Changing Economics of Warfare: Takeaways for Pakistan

Syed Ali Abbas

Recent conflicts have demonstrated that battlefield outcomes are increasingly shaped by precision, range, volume, and affordability rather than the use of conventional measures of military power. The ongoing US-Israel war on Iran has shown that long-range missiles and low-cost drones allow a technologically disadvantaged state to impose costs on a stronger adversary far exceeding the investment required to generate them. For Pakistan, facing a conventionally superior adversary, these developments are directly relevant to its security calculus. The May 2025 confrontation with India has already accelerated Islamabad's recognition of this reality, and the US-Israel war on Iran has since validated it on a larger and more consequential scale.

Acting on the lesson that range, precision, and volume are decisive in modern conflict, Pakistan has advanced its conventional missile programme and established a dedicated rocket force command. A credible strike capability, however, depends not only on the missiles but also on the depth of inventory and launchers available to sustain operational pressure under conflict. Similarly, drones, which form an integral part of any modern strike package by saturating air defences ahead of missile salvos, equally demand sustained investment in volume and production scale. Pakistan is moving in the right direction, but on both fronts, continued investment and expansion remain essential.

The US-Israel War on Iran: Asymmetric Cost Imposition in Practice

When the United States and Israel launched war against Iran in February 2026, Tehran retaliated without a conventional parity. Iran's retaliation constituted ballistic and cruise missiles and large numbers of Shahed-series one-way attack drones. In sustained salvos, they targeted American and Israeli key operational nodes such as air defence systems, E-3 AWACS aircraft, and KC-135 aerial refuelling tankers.

However, an important impact was not only operational, but also economic. Iran fired more than 5,000 drones and missiles, pushing American and allied air defence systems to use interceptors at a rate that was unsustainably high. The cost of Shahed drone ranges from twenty to fifty thousand dollars while a Patriot PAC-3 interceptor is approximately four million dollars. The cost of each THAAD interceptor is about 12-15 million dollars. According to estimates, Bahrain exhausted as many as 87 per cent of its Patriot missiles, Israel used up 81 per cent of its Arrow missiles by the end of March and the UAE used up around 75 per cent of its air defence missiles. The United States had to shuffle interceptor stockpiles from other parts of the world to make up for the loss. Stockpiles which had been prepared over many years were depleted in a matter of weeks, which will take now years to replace them. The economic toll of the conflict has also been significant. Israeli economic losses are estimated at approximately three billion dollars per week, while United States military losses during the conflict is assessed at between 2.3 and 2.8 billion dollars.

Pakistan's Strategic Calculus and May 2025

Consider Pakistan's defence budget for FY 2025-26 is approximately 18 billion dollars, as compared to India's defence budget of 75 billion dollars. India has definite strengths in terms of force structure, platform numbers, and military modernisation. It is continuing to evolve towards integrated theater commands, intended to provide increased precision strike capability and quicker joint-force mobilisation at operational depth. Pakistan cannot compete with India platform by platform, but it has the ability to make any Indian military action too costly and its missile programme has a pointed trajectory toward this end. The Fatah missile series is a testament of this capability in Pakistan.

The Fatah missile series, ranging from 140 kilometres with the Fatah-I to 750 kilometres with the Fatah-IV, places virtually all critical Indian military infrastructure within conventional strike range. The depth of a missile force makes Indian operational planning difficult, diverting resources away from the offensive to defence and dispersal. In tandem with Fatah missile series, large volume of low-cost drones can also overwhelm the air defence network and make the defence less deep, creating opportunities for missile attacks.

The conflict demonstrated that range and precision strike capability directly shape escalation dynamics and battlefield outcomes from the earliest phase of engagement. The formation of the Army Rocket Force Command demonstrated that Pakistan now views missile and drone capability as an integral part of its deterrence and warfighting capability. This strategic course has since been confirmed on a larger and more significant landscape by the war in the Middle East.

Building the Inventory Depth

In the US/Israel-Iran war, the heavy volume and continuity of the campaign proved more important than technical sophistication. The sustained production of Iran's attack campaign drove allies to use up their interceptor stocks. A continuous drone campaign, even if interception rate is high, affects targets and erodes adversary interceptors at the same time. It compounds effect of each salvo as it proceeds, continuously reducing defence capability. As launch volumes increase, air defence coverage degrades to the point where missiles can penetrate. To get that same operational impact, Pakistan programmes have not yet reached to the production scale of the missiles and especially drones.

Pakistan is in progress to develop more than six different designs of loitering munitions at various institutes including NESCOM, NASTP and private companies. The challenge is that it becomes a disjointed affair, with a few programmes generating operationally limited quantities, instead of resources being concentrated on one or two scalable designs. At the same time, Pakistan's indigenous drone manufacturing is being rapidly pursued and is expected to increasingly fulfil national defence requirements. While advanced systems can be used as decoys and as radar emitters ahead of a missile salvo, they are not adapted to be the mass attrition layer needed for this strategy.

The right model should be simple airframe, small piston engine, commercially available guidance electronics, and conventional warhead. Pakistan's existing industrial base, spanning its composites manufacturing sector for airframes, its automotive industry for engine components, and Pakistan Ordnance Factories for warheads and fuses, provide a credible foundation upon which this production capacity can be built. The requirement is to concentrate

production resources on scalable, and simple designs rather than fragment them across a portfolio that produces technical variety at the cost of operational volume. Moreover, spreading assembly across multiple dispersed sites, rather than concentrating production in a handful of large facilities, ensures that drone manufacturing continues even under wartime conditions when centralised infrastructure becomes a target.

Translating conflict experience into doctrine, production capacity, and operational readiness is a gradual process, and Pakistan is still working through it. The strategic direction is sound and the institutional foundations are in place. What remains is the harder industrial work, scaling missile inventory, expanding launcher numbers, and building drone production to the volume this strategy demands. The Iran war has confirmed that this approach is correct. The task now is to build it before the next conflict.

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Link: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/sustaining-strategic-volume-in-the-age-of-mass-drone-warfare/>

Research Paper | Assessing Media Framing of India's Nuclear Program

Shahwana Binte Sohail

Abstract

This research investigates how Indian and Western media portray India's nuclear ambitions. The study highlights how these portrayals legitimize India's exceptional position in the global non-proliferation regime and affect the strategic balance and crisis behaviour in South Asia. In the Indian media, the Indian nuclear program is framed as safe and progressive while ignoring the risks and challenges of the facilities, which are not under proper safeguards. Western media also portrays India as a "responsible nuclear state", whilst framing Pakistan through the narrative of instability and escalation. By applying Robert Entman's Media Framing Theory, the study suggests that this selective framing strengthens India's nuclear exceptionalism and influences strategic perceptions in South Asia. This dual narrative is supported by the 2008 NSG waiver and civil nuclear agreements legitimizing India's exceptionalism. In parallel, it erodes the effectiveness of global non-proliferation norms and increases the imbalance in the South Asian region. It shows how media narratives and biased Western media coverage play an important role in shaping strategic signalling and regional stability. The study finds that regional stability can be strengthened through equitable non-proliferation measures and strategic parity.

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Link: <https://ijssbulletin.com/index.php/IJSSB/article/view/2530>

Maritime New Initiatives in Quad and South Asian Strategic Stability

Murad Ali

The 11th ministerial-level meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) took place in New Delhi on 26 May 2026. It was the third Quad meeting after Trump assumed office for the first time. The meeting incorporated new agenda items along with the existing ones. The most concerning development in the Quad meeting was the adoption of Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance (IPMSC) cooperation under the umbrella of the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA). Similarly, the meeting decided to establish a port in Fiji in the Pacific Ocean that would be jointly overseen by the member states. The new initiatives particularly IPMSC and the port in Fiji seem to be guided by the strategic and security insecurity of the member countries regarding China.

The Quad features an alliance of four states: the United States, India, Japan and Australia. It evolved from a simple humanitarian group in 2007 into a strategic and defense alliance in 2017 in response to China's economic and military rise in the Asia-Pacific region. The Quad alliance has embodied the US's Asia-Pacific imperatives of counterbalancing China and strengthening its strategic position in the region. Similarly, India's security and strategic understanding of the region reflect a similar perception of China's role in the region. Both the US and India have adopted a similar strategic and security understanding of the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, Quad has evolved into a strategic and security driven alliance against China in the region. The strategic implications for South Asia are also concerning, given the India-Pakistan rivalry.

The language used by the foreign ministers at the meeting on 26 May 2026 was clearly focused on the requirements of traditional security in the Asia-Pacific region, implicitly referring to China. India appears increasingly inclined to transform the Quad into a strategic and security alliance. India has fostered its defense collaboration with Australia in futuristic technology research. On the sidelines of the Quad meeting in May 2026, both countries discussed the need for maritime security cooperation and are slated to jointly host a Search and Rescue (SAR) and tabletop exercise at the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Chennai in June 2026. They are also working on strengthening underwater domain awareness against China's maritime activities in the Indian Ocean Region. Similarly, maritime defense collaboration between India and Japan has been enhanced to promote interoperability and synergy between their defense forces. Both countries have agreed to synchronize their maritime capabilities to protect their maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific region

The three new initiatives in the maritime domain illustrates the changing strategic behavior of the Quad member states. First, the IPMSC was proposed by India and would focus on the Indian Ocean. This initiative would help track the maritime movements and positions of other countries through the latest tracking technologies and satellite data. The member states would share data to provide real-time information on the types of vessels operating in the Indian Ocean. The IPMSC is clearly aimed at countering China in the Indian Ocean. China reacted sharply to the IPMSC initiative and stated that it would promote bloc-based competition with clear strategic aims.

Second, the IPMDA initiative, which would be complemented by the IPMSC, was launched in Japan in 2022 and would enhance maritime domain awareness in the Asia-Pacific region. It was formally crystallized at India's Information Fusion Centre in Gurugram. This manifests the Quad's military orientation by promoting maritime domain awareness through the sharing of real-time information to track and identify maritime threats. For instance, with IPMDA technology, India would be able to promptly detect and respond to the maritime movements of China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean, which could adversely impact their threat perceptions.

Third, the meeting announced the establishment of an infrastructure project in Fiji, a strategically important Pacific island nation. This symbolizes the first such joint initiative by the Quad. Historically, Fiji has been strategically associated with Australia. Quad members also carried out joint military drills under the annual Malabar Exercise in the region. Sana Hashmi a postdoctoral fellow at the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation with a special focus on China, in an interview with Al Jazeera, said that "China perceives the Quad as an anti-China coalition, and this new project in Fiji is viewed as the Quad expanding its operations from Indo-Pacific hotspots into the Pacific Island countries." Similarly, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning admonished that any cooperation in the region "should not target any third party."

The Quad meeting in May 2026 explicitly demonstrates the willingness and readiness of the member states to enhance their maritime footing and strength in the Indo-Pacific region. China was not referred to directly, but in the joint statements issued during the meeting, the foreign ministers of the member states expressed serious concerns regarding the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Secondly, it signified the revival of the US's attention toward the Asia-Pacific region. It proved that the US focus on the Western Hemisphere and the Middle East does not alter the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific region for Washington. As for as Pakistan is concerned, the IPMSC and IPMDA could directly impact strategic stability in the Indian Ocean.

The IPMSC would promote maritime surveillance and information sharing among the member states, through which India could locate and monitor Pakistan's maritime movements in the northern Indian Ocean. Pakistan also has serious security concerns regarding the Quad, as it undermines strategic stability in the Indian Ocean Region. It encourages India to exercise maritime brinkmanship in the same manner as it exercised land and aerial brinkmanship in 2019 and 2025 against Pakistan. Similarly, the Quad could contribute to a security dilemma in South Asia, as India's accumulation of naval power through the group could indicate the encirclement of Pakistan. Considering the delicate security calculus of South Asia, which is home to two nuclear-armed rivals, the expansion of Quad could deepen mistrust, magnify strategic competition, encourage bloc politics and enhance the risk of escalation. The moment when regional stability requires dialogue and confidence building measures, the emergence of new geopolitical fault lines may complicate efforts to maintain peace and stability in the maritime domain.

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Link: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/how-the-quads-new-maritime-initiatives-impact-south-asian-strategic-stability/>

India's Agni-VI: An Unnecessary Escalation

Murad Ali

India's missile program is one of the main elements that determines its strategic ambition. Its missile's inventory is developing rapidly over the past decades. Agni-VI marks as the latest initiative that has sparked debate among strategists and scholars across the globe about India's strategic design. Nonetheless, the Agni-VI has yet to be officially tested, it is assumed as an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) with range between 10000 to 12000 kms. The question is, whether India has developed this capability? Why does India develop a missile system that does not align with its strategic necessity? What are India's intentions in developing such capabilities?

Recently, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh was asked by a reporter about an Agni-VI missile test. The minister responded with a cryptic smile, stating, "Be patient. Everything will turn out well." Importantly, he neither confirmed nor denied the reports. His response was significant because he chose not to dismiss the speculation outright. This ambiguous reply has fueled assumptions that the Agni-VI project remains active and may be progressing discreetly. It created the impression that the Agni-VI program does indeed exist, although questions remain regarding its current stage of development and whether it is ready for testing.

There are several reasons to suggest that the Agni-VI program is not merely speculation but a reality under development. First is the testing of advanced propulsion systems related to India's next generation submarine launched ballistic missile programs, especially the K-series missiles. The development of K-series missiles faces many technical complexities as compared to the land-based systems in the context of environmental factors, launching constraints, and space limitations.

However, India had successfully manufactured the K-series missile by showing significant progress in overcoming a number of technological barriers such as advanced propulsion, guidance systems, and MIRV integration. All of these technologies could be adapted for a land-based missile such as the Agni-VI system. Second, there is another indicator that indicates the notion that India might have acquired or is about to acquire the Agni-VI system. The recent Agni-V tests showcased erratic flight trajectory, maneuvering behavior, and enhanced precision. Some analysts perceive these features as conceivable indicators of post-boost vehicle testing; the technology which is responsible for deploying Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs). These technological developments are believed to be a harbinger of more advanced strategic missile systems such as Agni-VI.

Third, India's rail-mobile Agni-V test, which could be considered as a potential reason that India is preparing the necessary infrastructure and operational mechanisms could be related to Agni-VI in the future. Rail mobility is particularly effective for a large number of ICBMs as it increased survivability and concealment. Large missiles like Agni-V and Agni-VI could encounter operational constraints while launching from a land-based platform. Whereas railway infrastructure is capable of supporting significantly larger payloads. Therefore, the accumulation of technological, operational, and political capabilities signifies that India continues to invest heavily in advanced strategic programs such as Agni-VI.

The Agni-VI will be the most advanced and sophisticated production of India's defense industry to date. It would be more survivable, and capable of penetrating into the enemy's heavily defended airspaces. The most advanced the world include the US's THAAD, Russia's S-500, and China's HQ-19. These systems are capable of intercepting missiles at multiple stages of flight, and making the ballistic missile trajectory vulnerable.

Agni-VI is said to have advanced penetrating capability, enabling the interceptors to bypass, dodge, and overrun the incoming missile grid. This embodies a significant development from the past generation of missiles that hinged primarily on speed and altitude. India's missile program was designed to counter threats from China and Pakistan. Although India's existing missile capabilities possess sufficient range to strike any part of Pakistan as well as China, it is still moving toward acquiring an ICBM with a range of around 12,000 km.

This development demonstrates India's broader strategic ambitions to establish deterrence at the global level. The concept of Agni-VI reflects India's aspiration to compete with great powers such as the United States, China, and Russia. Economically, India has risen to become the world's fourth-largest economy, while in terms of population and geographical size, it ranks as the second- and seventh-largest country, respectively.

The perception within the Indian government has increasingly evolved toward viewing India as a major military power on the global stage. Similarly, India's advances in missile technology underpin its ambition to attain a global strategic reach. The Agni-VI is not a security concern for Pakistan and China, however, its potential capabilities to extend India's strategic reach to any region of the world must be shocking for the international community. The missile can carry multiple independently targetable warheads.

MIRVs capability further enhances the missile's precision, flexibility, maneuverability and survivability. With the rapidly evolving global geopolitical landscape, the Agni-VI would be a stepping stone for India to introduce New Delhi into a global strategic calculus along with the United States, Russia, and China. Agni-VI is not just a missile, but it also marks India's strategic shift from regional to global. The US has always supported India against China by favoring India with defense equipment, waiving off the Nuclear Suppliers Group requirements, and listing it in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR); but all have backfired in the form of a capability that can hit Washington, London, and Paris. Nonetheless, no Western power has issued any statement against the Indian ICBM program, which is highly surprising.

Agni-VI has distorted India's credible minimum deterrence policy and reflects India's deterrence viability at the global level. It threatens the global strategic framework in India's pursuit of international prestige, and recognition. The International community particularly the United States is continuously ignoring and turning a deaf ear to India's development of land-based as well as sea-based ICBMs. Agni-VI, as well as the K-5 and K-6 SLBMs, have symbolized India as an emerging global strategic power. Considering the irresponsible and reckless attitude of India as a nuclear power state, and the Brahmos episode in particular, these developments should not be ignored by the US and western powers, because the costs of such developments would ultimately be paid by those countries.

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Link: <https://stratheia.com/indias-agni-vi-an-unnecessary-escalation/>

The Indus Waters Treaty at a Crossroads

Nawal Nawaz

By holding the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in “abeyance” since April 23, 2025, India has transformed water from a shared resource to a tool of geopolitical leverage. Mediated by the World Bank, the IWT was signed in 1960 to regulate interstate water tensions between Pakistan and India. The treaty has long served as a mechanism for managing water-related tensions between two nuclear-armed states amid recurring crises and diplomatic freezes. The Indus Basin serves as a lifeline for both Pakistan and India, sustaining the livelihoods and agriculture of more than 300 million people. During the partition of British India in 1947, boundaries were demarcated along the Indus watershed, creating an upstream-downstream asymmetry that India has leveraged as the upper riparian state. Owing to this upstream-downstream asymmetry, India controls the flow of water from critical barrages into Pakistan. Islamabad relies heavily on the Indus Basin river system for irrigation, hydropower generation, and ensuring its water security. By placing the IWT in “abeyance,” New Delhi has not only undermined the spirit of cooperation but also violated the legal foundation of the treaty.

The IWT has remained in abeyance since the Pahalgam attack in April 2025, with India accusing Islamabad of cross-border terrorism, an allegation that Pakistan denied. Following India’s decision to place the treaty in abeyance, water flows through the Baglihar and Kishanganga dams were restricted for short periods, reflecting a dangerous pattern in the hydro-politics of the Indus Basin. There is no provision in the IWT that allows for its unilateral suspension or termination. Article 12(4) of the IWT requires mutual agreement for any amendments to the treaty. In May 2026, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) issued a supplemental award, reinforcing Islamabad’s concerns regarding India’s hydroelectric projects on the western rivers, particularly the Ratle and Kishanganga dams. The award clarified that treaty imposes “substantive limits” on India’s storage capacity on the western rivers allocated to Pakistan. The PCA’s ruling addressed the issue of maximum pondage – the volume of water permitted to be stored in a reservoir – holding that pondage for run-of-the-river hydroelectric plants must be justified by project requirements, site hydrology, and hydraulic conditions. Building on its August 2025 award on the general interpretation of the IWT, the PCA’s latest legal development rejected attempts to justify expanded water-control capabilities based on bare assertions of compliance, emphasizing that installed hydropower capacity must be realistic and well-founded.

The PCA’s August 2025 award also strengthened Pakistan’s review rights by obliging India to provide sufficient technical information for any proposed project. The Court held that failure to do so meant New Delhi’s proposed project could not justify the conditions outlined under paragraph 8(c) of Annexure D of the treaty. However, India outright rejected the PCA’s ruling, describing it as the decision of an “illegally constituted so-called Court of Arbitration.” Such a response reflects New Delhi’s reluctance to engage through the legal mechanisms embedded within the treaty’s framework

The IWT has successfully resolved controversies through its sophisticated dispute resolution mechanism. The Permanent Indus Commission, established under the framework of the IWT, has encouraged both Pakistan and India to exchange information and address bilateral disagreements in an amicable manner. Furthermore, the treaty provides a comprehensive

institutional framework to prevent such escalation. In the event of a dispute, both the neutral experts and the PCA maybe be approached for its resolution. The settlement of the Baglihar Daam dispute demonstrates that technical disagreements can be resolved through the treaty's dispute resolution mechanisms rather than through political confrontation.

However, since 2022, India has refused to participate in meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission, raising objections to the competence of arbitration forums within the IWT framework. By sidelining these institutional processes and linking water cooperation with broader regional security disputes, India has undermined South Asia's last surviving confidence-building framework

New Delhi asserts that the treaty is outdated, ill-equipped to address contemporary challenges, and biased in favour of Islamabad. There is no denying that the treaty itself is not without its shortcomings. Experts on both sides argue that it lacks a robust climate adaptation mechanism and fails to address the issue of groundwater depletion. Islamabad also highlights loopholes in the treaty, particularly its inability to impose quantitative limits on India's hydropower development on western rivers. Nevertheless, reform remains a better approach than unilateral suspension. Treaties evolve through negotiation, and India's coercive approach of imposing changes outside the agreed framework highlights New Delhi's preference for power politics over cooperative governance.

The increasing number of run-of-the river hydropower projects on western rivers allocated to Islamabad has further exacerbated Pakistan's concerns. Islamabad has repeatedly raised objections to projects such Kishanganga and Baglihar, arguing that the security of the downstream state has been jeopardized by the manipulation of water flows. Even technical disagreements have become politicized, normalizing the use of water as a tool of geopolitical leverage.

From a shared resource, water has now been turned into a strategic weapon that was once a source of interstate tension between Pakistan and India In such challenging times, global experiences offer important lessons. Israel and Jordan have signed a peace treaty in 1994, establishing a Joint Water Committee to manage their mutual dependence on shared water resources. This agreement demonstrates that cooperation can endure amid deep political hostility. Under the peace treaty, Israel agreed to supply Jordan with 75 million cubic meters of water annually. Along similar lines, Islamabad and New Delhi could reach a to manage the waters of the Indus Basin, recognizing the strategic necessity of water cooperation. The restoration of IWT could serve as the foundational step toward rebuilding trust in an otherwise fractured bilateral relationship. Therefore, the future of the Indus Basin must be shaped by cooperation, legality, and shared survival rather than hydro-political brinkmanship.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/the-indus-waters-treaty-at-a-crossroads/>

Pakistan's Diplomatic Role in the US-Israel War on Iran

Shahwana Binte Sohail

The US-Israel War against Iran has once again highlighted the precarious nature of security in the Middle East and the chances of regional wars escalating into conflicts with global ramifications. In the face of rising tensions and the growing concern of a wider conflict, it became important to exercise restraint and intensify diplomatic efforts for de-escalation and management of the conflict. In this context, Pakistan emerged as the country that played a crucial role between the two warring countries. During the war, Pakistan presented itself as a strong voice for dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts, in keeping with its reputation as a responsible regional power that promotes peace and stability.

Due to this crisis, it brought out a changed international perception about the role of Pakistan in diplomacy. While the foreign policy of Pakistan has always favoured dialogue, peaceful co-existence and respect for the sovereignty of countries, its active role in the Iran- US conflict put its foreign policy engagements with various stakeholders in the spotlight. Overall, Pakistan's actions demonstrated the ongoing relevance of diplomacy and political engagement as powerful tools for resolving conflicts and averting escalation in a world where geopolitical competition remains a key driver of international relations.

Today, influence is not necessarily synonymous with military force or economic muscle in international politics. Diplomatic weight is also important in shaping results, reaching consensus and avoiding conflicts from getting out of control. In a world of interconnection, states with the ability to hold dialogues and to advocate for a measure of restraint are growing in influence. In fact, Pakistani diplomacy during the crisis showed this reality and the emerging role and importance of middle powers in regional stability through constructive diplomacy.

Pakistan has also been very active in the management of the crisis by sustained diplomatic contacts and de-escalation mediation efforts. It helped to arrange the ceasefire that was agreed on 7 April and helped to maintain calm during the war. In this context, Pakistan facilitated discussions between Iran and Israel which took place on 10 and 11 April and helped to extend the ceasefire in the war. Moreover, it agreed to hold talks on a possible Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as part of its efforts to build long-term stability via dialogue and negotiated solutions.

Pakistan emphasized the need to observe sovereignty, peaceful settlement of disputes and the rule of law in international law during the crisis. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has strongly condemned those acts that could further escalate the conflict and has called for restraint, dialogue and adherence to international law. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar also played a proactive role by holding diplomatic dialogue with regional and international counterparts and reiterating Pakistan's commitment to de-escalation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Additionally, Pakistan has also utilized multilateral platforms such as the United Nations and other forums to call for calm as well as for a diplomatic resolution to prevent the escalation of the situation into a broader regional conflict. Pakistan has repeatedly urged in the UN and other international fora adherence to the UN Charter and international law and has been urging de-escalation of the situation, along with other members.

In this context, Pakistan continues to communicate with the important stakeholders, including the United States, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Iran, and the other Gulf Countries. This reflected the fact that Pakistan's relentless efforts were directed towards maintaining the lines of communication and facilitating international efforts directed towards the de-escalation of the situation. Pakistan's policy of restraint and not confrontation was aimed at creating a conducive atmosphere for dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Strategic considerations were also a key factor in Pakistan's strategy. Like other countries, Pakistan has a direct interest in not having instability spill over its borders, as it has close historical, cultural and economic ties with countries in the region. The conflict has the potential to affect regional security, energy markets, trade routes and population movements if it were to be prolonged or expanded. The region's socio-economic activity, border management and refugee movements may be further strained by increased instability. Thus, the advocacy for de-escalation not just accorded with the Pakistani diplomatic philosophy but was also in line with Pakistan's national interests.

There are many examples in the international arena of the importance of diplomacy during a crisis. Oman's quiet diplomacy helped to negotiate what is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Qatar has successfully hosted many dialogue events between conflicting parties in the Middle East, and Norway played a significant role in the Oslo peace process. As these examples are evident, influence in international politics is not only military or economic power. Trust, credibility, access and ability to act as a conduit for dialogue can sometimes be as important as anything else in diffusing tensions and providing the opportunity to communicate.

The Iran-US Crisis further reinforced this principle. Diplomatic engagement was vital in preventing the confrontation from escalating further, keeping it from escalating further, even though military signalling and deterrence were always important. Pakistan's commitment to dialogue and political engagement was instrumental in reaching agreement on the Islamabad MoU in the first place. Pakistan's efforts for restraint and promotion of peaceful means of dispute resolution enabled it to join the international trend in maintaining regional stability.

The crisis highlighted a critical dimension of Pakistan's responsibility as a stakeholder that is mostly underestimated. Often, Pakistan is seen from the perspective of geopolitical competition and security issues. Its response, however, showed its ability to make a positive contribution to the region by promoting stability and supporting diplomatic efforts to maintain peace. This made Pakistan more credible as a state that was interested in dialogue and not confrontation.

The Iranian situation also underscores the importance of having balanced relations, especially during conflict. Pakistan's relations with both the conflicting parties and other major powers and its neighbors allowed it to reach out to and suggest diplomatic measures when the situation worsened. The ability to create a space for dialogue and minimize misunderstandings is an important diplomatic advantage for states that can do so in an era of growing geopolitical polarization.

In today's contemporary international politics, economic power and military strength are no longer the only measures of influence. States that can manage a crisis and promote dialogue and support de-escalation are increasingly shaping regional and international outcomes. The continued importance of diplomacy as a means of achieving regional stability was evident in

Pakistan's efforts to foster dialogue, communication, and the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution.

Top of Form In an increasingly geopolitically fragmented world with frequent regional conflicts and increasing uncertainties in international affairs, states that can promote dialogue and help to restrain the use of force are more valuable than ever. Pakistan's response to the Iran–US battles highlighted that diplomacy, positive engagement, and principled advocacy for peaceful solutions continue to be potent tools of influence. Diplomacy will not always produce quick results, but it is crucial to give space for a negotiated solution to prevent a crisis from escalating. A well-balanced, proactive and dialogue-based foreign policy enables Pakistan to further consolidate its position as a responsible stakeholder and contribute more effectively towards regional and international peace and security.

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Link: <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/pakistan-diplomatic-response-us-iran-war/>

Book Review | Nuclear War: A Scenario by Annie Jacobsen

Shahwana Binte Sohail

Annie Jacobsen's *Nuclear War: A Scenario* is a compelling and thought-provoking analysis of the risks associated with modern nuclear weapons and the structural weaknesses of contemporary deterrence mechanisms. Jacobsen blends investigative journalism and a fictional scenario-based story of a nuclear crisis that starts with a North Korean strike on the United States and quickly spirals into a worldwide nuclear war. She provides insights into the speed with which a nuclear crisis can spiral beyond political control, based on interviews with former military officers, nuclear scientists, intelligence experts, policy makers and on declassified documents. The outcome is an engaging and insightful contribution to nuclear strategy, escalation, deterrence and crisis management.

Nuclear War: A Scenario is fundamentally about the fragility of contemporary nuclear command and control systems and the very short time frame for political decision-making that is at stake in the event of a nuclear war. In minute-by-minute detail, Jacobsen shows how any one missile could set off a chain reaction among several nuclear nations, leading to escalation, as a result of miscalculation, technological limitations, and military procedures. It also explores how early-warning systems work, how the "launch-on-warning" doctrine operates, how U.S. presidents make decisions, and the human and humanitarian implications of nuclear war. After all, is the current deterrence system adequate to deter catastrophic escalation in the nuclear era?

The book's main thesis is that the current systems of nuclear command and control are based on very short decision-making cycles. National leaders can be given just a few minutes to consider threats and give approval for a response. In great detail, Jacobsen describes the operation of missile detection systems, early-warning systems, the process by which the President makes decisions, and retaliatory doctrines. She chronicles minute-by-minute the events that might lead to a large-scale nuclear exchange between multiple nuclear powers following a single nuclear launch, given uncertainty, technological limitations, and institutional pressures.

A significant strength of the book is its ability to translate complicated strategic and technical concepts in an engaging, clear and accessible manner without oversimplifying them. Things such as launch on warning and ballistic missile trajectories, electromagnetic pulse (EMP) effects and nuclear command and control (C2) systems, and deterrence are explained understandably. This accessibility is especially helpful in view of the technical aspects of nuclear policy debates. In this book, Jacobsen manages to convey the expertise of specialists in a way that is accessible to policymakers, students, researchers, and the general public without being superficial.

The book also importantly brings attention to the humanitarian impacts of nuclear war. Jacobsen vividly describes the immediate effects of a nuclear detonation, such as blast destruction, thermal radiation, firestorms, and radioactive fallout. More importantly, she explores the enduring effects of a nuclear war, including nuclear winter, crop failure, famine, and a general breakdown of society. In doing so, she invites readers to consider a wide range

of considerations apart from military and strategic ones, and to contemplate the human toll of nuclear arms.

Meanwhile, the book challenges the reader to think critically about the assumptions it makes and its analytical method. However, Jacobsen argues that nuclear systems remain vulnerable to rapid and potentially systematic breakdown. Through her narrative, she portrays a highly pressurized strategic environment, where leaders are given little opportunity to make any real decisions once a crisis has started. Such a portrayal reinforces the book's main argument that nuclear decision-making processes are fragile and that an accelerated timeline can be dangerous. Her concerns are shared by Thomas Schelling, who alerted to the potential of coercion, brinkmanship and unintended escalation in nuclear crises. When it begins, it's difficult to stop it from escalating, as in the event of Jacobsen's scenario.

The methodology employed in the book is also noteworthy. Most of Jacobsen's work involves interviews with former officials and subject-matter experts and is based on publicly accessible documents and scientific research. This will allow some interesting information and make the story more realistic. Expert testimony plays a large role in the discussions about military procedure and the effects of nuclear weapons, giving the discussions credibility. But there are drawbacks to interviews. Experts' views and opinions are shaped by personal experience, institutional culture and professional bias. Moreover, much of the information about the elements of nuclear plans and command organizations remains classified and is therefore unconfirmed. Hence, it can be considered as an analytical exercise, and not as a prediction of how a nuclear crisis would play out.

A second problem is how rising tensions are dealt with in the book. Jacobsen outlines a series of events that happen in a very short amount of time and in a way that might seem too deterministic. The storytelling approach has the power to build a sense of urgency but can also make it seem like there is no choice. The scenario is predicated on the assumption that there is limited space for diplomacy, crisis management, political restraint and strategic adaptation until escalation progresses towards global catastrophe. It might be argued, of course, that this is a "worst case" scenario, which was selected to raise awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons and not necessarily an accurate and unbiased representation of the state's behaviour. In principle, thinkers such as Kenneth Waltz have suggested that for rational states, nuclear deterrence makes war costly and thus helps to create strategic stability. Jacobsen's account challenges this positive perspective and warns that deterrence fails through accident, misconception and erratic decision-making with potentially deadly consequences.

Even with its shortcomings, the book is an effective reminder of the catastrophic effects of miscalculations and rapid escalation. The book also has some drawbacks in the discussion of international politics from the present perspective of security studies. The book deals mostly with the nuclear situation in the United States, Russia and North Korea; and less attention is paid to the situation in other nuclear regions, particularly South Asia. The analysis could have been more comparative in nature in the context of the current deterrence equation between India and Pakistan and the crisis. Similarly, in the field of strategic stability and nuclear decision-making, the role of new technologies like Cyber warfare, AI, autonomous systems etc is also relatively small considering the significance of these technologies.

Yet for all these drawbacks, *Nuclear War: A Scenario* is a valuable addition to the debate on nuclear security and strategic stability. It does not provide a completely new theory or point of view on nuclear war, but it does make people think about the reality and the potential for

destruction of nuclear war. Jacobsen succeeds in making the technical world of strategy accessible to a lay audience and conveying this world as a lively and entertaining story. Those who don't agree with her assumptions or conclusions will find it hard to ignore the issues raised.

Nuclear War: A Scenario is a timely and thought-provoking book deserving the attention of scholars, policymakers, strategic analysts and informed readers. Although it may not be analytically balanced as it uses a worst-case scenario, the advantages of this far outweigh the drawbacks. Jacobsen points to the irreversibility of nuclear decisions, their swiftness, and their increasing complexity, to remind us that nuclear risks remain one of the most pressing threats to international security. The book also invites dialogue with other studies of nuclear deterrence, strategic stability and escalation by such figures as Thomas Schelling and Kenneth Waltz.

Nuclear policy, deterrence and escalation are major themes in the book and for students and practitioners in strategic studies and security affairs, it can be a cautionary tale and a valuable contribution to the ongoing debates about deterrence, escalation and global stability.

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Link: <https://stratheia.com/book-review-nuclear-war-a-scenario/>

Intercontinental-Range Missile Development in South Asia and Its Potential Threat to the United States: A Comparison of India and Pakistan's Missile Development

Fakhar Alam

The United States Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, was recently asked about the development of intercontinental-range missiles in South Asia at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2026. The questioner referred to the testimony of Tulsi Gabbard, the then United States Director of National Intelligence, in a Senate hearing, who said that Pakistan is developing long range missiles that could hit the American mainland. In the first place, Pakistan has not developed a long range missile capable of hitting the American mainland. Secondly, it is surprising that India has reportedly tested Agni-VI, a 12000 Kilometer range missile that can hit areas of the United States. Why are Pakistan's missiles, which have far less range, presented as a threat, while India's missiles, which have been tested, are underplayed by American officials? To this question, the US Secretary of War responded that right now, we (America) are not pointing fingers at the ICBM program of either of them and calling it a threat to the United States. The following article explores myths and realities surrounding long range missile development in South Asia and assesses the future threats of these missiles to America.

Before Pakistan conducted nuclear weapons tests in May 1998 in response to the second series of Indian nuclear tests, Pakistan faced India in three major wars and various border skirmishes. Predominantly, the 1971 Indo-Pak war and the separation of East Pakistan compelled Pakistan's political and military leadership to conclude that without possessing nuclear weapons, Pakistan could not survive in India's neighborhood. A conventional superior hostile adversary in the neighborhood would continuously pose an existential threat to it. Therefore, for Pakistan, the primary rationale for developing nuclear weapons was to deter Indian aggression at all levels. Simultaneously, Pakistan's nuclear use doctrine is also India centric. Even the Director General of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the armed forces of Pakistan, and the Foreign Office's spokesperson have openly stated that Pakistan's nuclear weapon program is India centric.

Similarly, Pakistan's missile inventory is being developed to deter and counter threats from India. Right now, Shaheen III is the longest range missile in Pakistan's missile inventory. It can travel up to 2750 Km and carry both conventional and nuclear payloads, covering the whole of India up to the Nicobar and Andaman Islands, the farthest land area of India. Pakistan believes that Shaheen III, along with other capabilities, has effectively deterred India from initiating a major offensive and from doing so in the future. Along with that, Pakistan is strengthening its conventional deterrence through effective and credible mechanisms, including raising a Rocket Force Command and modernizing its conventional warfighting capability. This leaves Pakistan with no incentive to develop a missile with a range exceeding 2750 KM. Shaheen III, along with other strategic inventory and conventional warfighting tools, has so far deterred and has the potential to deter future conventional and nuclear aggression from India. Moreover, there is no credible source that has reported Pakistan is developing an Intercontinental range nuclear or conventional missile with a range of more than 2750 km.

In contrast, India's nuclear weapon program is prestige driven. The father of the Indian nuclear program, Dr Homi Bhabha, in 1958, declared that India could detonate a device within 18 months if the government gave the green signal. This was said long before China tested its nuclear weapons or Pakistan had even thought of developing a nuclear deterrent. New Delhi actually states that its nuclear weapon capability is primarily aimed at deterring Pakistan and China. However, its missile capability range exceeds its security needs. Right now, India possesses the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) technology. It has tested the Agni-V, with a range of 5000–8000 km. Agni-V can hit every city of Pakistan and most military and industrial centers in mainland China. However, recently, the chief of India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Sameer V Samath, in an interview, was asked when Agni-VI would be operational. The DRDO chief responded that it's the government's decision, but we (DRDO) are already ready for this. Interestingly, a few months after this interview, in May 2026, India tested an Agni series missile, and it is alleged that it was the Agni-VI missile.

The test was conducted near Chandipur from the Integrated Test Range along Odisha's coastline. The missile covered a range of more than 3500 km. Though no official source commented on the test, however the test day coincided with Operation Sindoor's first anniversary. The analysts believe that it was an Agni-VI ICBM test, which could carry a payload of 1.5 to 3 tons to 12000 KM. If launched from either the West side or the East side of India, this missile can easily hit parts of Europe and the American mainland, including a few of America's big states. So, in reality, India not only possesses ICBM technology but also has tested technology that could hit the American mainland, whereas Pakistan is neither developing nor intends to develop an ICBM. Therefore, the debate surrounding long range missile development in South Asia is based on political assumptions rather than objective reality.

It is important to note that in international politics, there are no permanent enemies or friends; only national interests determine whether a state is a friend or an enemy. In history, it has been observed that the worst of enemies have become good friends within a few decades and strategic partners have become worst enemies. During the last two decades, the US and India have been on the same page due to converging strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific. With the changing global geopolitical landscape, the American approach to the region has shifted. American interests and priorities in the Asia Pacific are not the same as they were two decades ago. If these interests continue to change further over time, then US-India relations might not remain the same as they were during the last two decades. Therefore, capabilities developed today should be assessed not only in terms of the present day geopolitical realities but also through the uncertainties of the evolving future strategic environment. Today, if India advances its missile ranges, particularly those beyond its regional deterrence requirements and could reach major parts of Europe and the US, it should not be ignored. Washington must realize that national security assessments must consider capabilities, intentions and the possibility of changing geopolitical dynamics. Strategic realities remain beyond transient partnerships and the missile ranges matter regardless of the political relationship of the moment.

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Pakistan and the Return of Middle-Power Mediation

Muhammad Kumail Mehdi

The US and Iran have signed an agreement to end the war and restore peace. While acting as a mediator between the two warring parties, Pakistan played a crucial role in bringing about this agreement. Although the peace is beneficial for all states, given the economic toll of rising oil prices, this article talks about the emerging role of Pakistan at the international stage. In the contemporary multipolar world, this achievement marks the diplomatic weight of middle powers such as Pakistan. The agreement, called Islamabad MOU, should not be viewed as an isolated feat, but a broader shift towards multipolarity, where the middle powers will have leverage to influence rival states.

Throughout its history, Pakistan has been known for its peace-promoting efforts and bringing rivals together. For instance, in 1971, at the height of the Cold War, Islamabad helped bridge ties between China and the US. It ended diplomatic isolation of China thus influenced the balance of power in that era. Additionally, Pakistan played a key role in the 1988 Geneva accord, which paved the way for the withdrawal of USSR's forces and the end of nine years of war in Afghanistan. Based on this legacy, it can be argued that Pakistan has grown into an intermediary of significant interaction.

With the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia, the US unipolarity started to wane. This declining US hegemony created space for the middle powers to play an active role in the international politics. The necessity of middle powers accelerated because power started to disperse at the global level, and the great powers needed alliances. As stated by Evelyn Goh that middle powers become more influential during great-power rivalry because they can act as bridge-builders, providing stability, between competing major powers.

In the post-Cold war unipolar world, Washington's undisputed military power, diplomatic reach, and institutional legitimacy enabled it to have direct engagements with both allies and rivals. For example, Strategic arms control with Russia and negotiations over China's integration into the global economy highlighted how great powers relied less on the intermediation of middle powers in the Unipolar era. It does not mean that the role of middle powers faded entirely, but in the great power-to-great-power equation, their role became limited and only on regional security issues. In the unipolar era, Islamabad was viewed as a partner in relation to Afghanistan and issues like counter terrorism.

As the conflict of the US and Israel against Iran began, an opportunity emerged for the middle powers to play an active role to bring about peace. Countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia called for restraint and sought to prevent the escalation. However, their ability to act as effective intermediaries was constrained by their close security ties with the US. Moreover, the presence of the US military bases in their territories and Iran's retaliatory strikes against those assets created complications. Although Doha remained a key diplomatic actor, Tehran had enough reasons to question their neutrality. This situation created a demand for a new neutral intermediary.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan assumed the role of a neutral actor. As one scholar notes, successful mediation requires more than just access to disputants; the mediator must also

possess credibility and acceptability in the eyes of all parties. Like KSA and Qatar, Pakistan had access to both the disputants, but unlike them, Pakistan was more credible and trustworthy to Iran because no attack on Iran had originated from Pakistani soil. Because of Islamabad's shuttle diplomacy, Tehran and Washington agreed on a temporary 2 weeks ceasefire and their representatives met in Islamabad.

Nevertheless, Iran and US failed to achieve a mutually acceptable peace agreement. The US imposed a naval blockade against Iran, and strikes resumed. However, Pakistan leadership, the Prime Minister and the Army Chief, continued to keep the diplomatic channels open between the disputants. As William Zartman observed, successful conflict management often depends on maintaining communication during deadlocks. Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's two official visits to Iran for high level talks, while staying in touch with the US leadership, ensured that diplomatic mechanisms remained intact. This bridge-building effort finally bore fruits in the form a recently announced MOU between Iran and the US, winning Islamabad credit from the international community for its remarkable diplomatic role.

In the contemporary multipolar world, where there is no power concentration, this diplomatic achievement is significant for a middle powers like Pakistan. It shows Islamabad's legitimacy in the eyes of multiple actors, Iran, the Gulf states, and great powers like China, Russia, and the US. It can be argued that Pakistan emerged as a major stability provider and an influential player in the region. More importantly, it highlights how middle powers can increase their influence not only through military or economic muscle, but by acting as a trusted intermediary, facilitating dialogue, and providing diplomatic connectivity to rival states. To sum up, in 1971, Pakistan helped break the ice between China and the US. Likewise, in 2026, Pakistan facilitated the negotiation between Iran and the US. Whether this agreement brings lasting peace remains to be seen, but Islamabad has gained international prestige and legitimacy. Unlike the unipolar era, where middle powers had a limited role to play in a multipolar world, the relevance of middle powers has increased. In this context, middle powers will have greater influence because of their ability to connect rivals.

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Link: <https://blog.ciss.org.pk/pakistan-and-the-return-of-middle-power-mediation/>

Book Review | Marka-e-Haq: Deterrence, Provocation and Strategic Maturity in South Asia

Muhammad Ali Baig

‘Marka-e-Haq: Deterrence, Provocation and Strategic Maturity in South Asia,’ is a book that is both theoretically ambitious and grounded in the practical developments of the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis. This book seeks to analyze the deterrence stability, strategic, military, diplomatic, and technological aspects of the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, named Mark-e-Haq by Pakistan. The book assesses broader questions of deterrence stability, strategic culture, escalation management, strategic stability, and regional security concerns in South Asia. This book consists of chapters written by policy makers, academicians, and experts in the field. This book is thus a valuable source material for various stakeholders and readers, such as policy makers, security practitioners, researchers, strategic studies scholars, military officers, defence professionals, students, analysts and nuclear policy analysts.

This book contains ten chapters. Each chapter is relevant to a specific theme related to security in South Asia. Dr. Zafar Khan is the editor of the book. He has compiled the chapters and preserved the theme of the book in accordance with its title. He is the Executive Director of the Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN). A Professor of International Relations, he holds a PhD in Strategic Studies from the University of Hull, Yorkshire, UK. His well-known national, and international publications, diversified experience, and credentials help the readers assess each chapter through the lens of a strategic studies and defence expert. The volume helps readers gain deeper insights into the strategic episode of Marka-e-Haq in South Asia’s contemporary history.

This review first provides a glance at each chapter, along with its core argument, key elements, strengths, and key takeaways. Chapter one, ‘India’s Strategic Drift and South Asia’s Security Dilemma’ is written by Ambassador Zamir Akram (Retd.). The chapter focuses on the relationship between India’s evolving strategic direction and its implications for regional security. To analyze this relationship, the concept of a security dilemma has been developed and is central to the chapter. The main points of the chapter are regional security risks, strategic behavior, and the impact of policy shifts on deterrence and stability. The author examines how India’s strategic choices influence the regional security environment and push other states towards a security dilemma.

The second chapter has been written by Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, titled, ‘India’s Terror Industry: Threat to International Peace and Security.’ He talks about how the acts of Indian sponsored terrorism and cover operations have become important causes of instability not only in South Asia but even worldwide. He says that such acts work as a means of creating tension between India and Pakistan while India creates chaos in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir merely for blaming Pakistan. Terrorism, he writes has become an instrument of foreign policy of India. The chapter also discusses the international legal and political repercussions of such acts of terrorism.

This Chapter ‘Kashmir and Water Resources: Nuclear Flashpoints in South Asia,’ has been written by Dr. Rizwana Abbasi who discusses the connection between water security and the

dispute over Kashmir, in the back drop of South Asia's nuclearized and militarized environment. She writes about the issue of water i.e. rivers originating from Kashmir and entering into Pakistan as becoming a strategic asset of India to be used against Pakistan. She talks about the concerns of water security and human rights issues under international law. She discusses the consequences of environmental strain coupled with Indian political hostility in terms of regional security and their escalation.

Lieutenant General Mazhar Jamil (Retd.) has written the fourth chapter titled, 'Strategic Culture of Bharat and Offensive Doctrines, Pakistan's Response: Cohesive Deterrence.' This chapter explains Indian strategic culture with the development of offensive military doctrines i.e. based on violence and unilateralism. Consequently, Pakistan – being as regional security stabilizer – has given a response framed by the concept of Cohesive Deterrence. The chapter assesses the doctrinal interaction between the two states through the lens of Indian strategic culture, which dates back thousands of years to the ideas of Kautilya, which is very illuminating. More importantly, the author analyzes how strategic culture shapes doctrine and how deterrence adapts in response to evolving military postures. Strategic culture and doctrine are interconnected, and responses to offensive military concepts are likely to shape future deterrence dynamics.

Chapter five 'Marka-e-Haq and the New Discipline of Deterrence' is written by Brigadier Dr. Zahir Kazmi (Retd). The author argues that recent developments have introduced new considerations into deterrence thinking. The concept of a new discipline of deterrence suggests doctrinal or theoretical evolution. This chapter extracts lessons from the Marka-e-Haq and examines how strategic thinking may be changing. Crises like those between India and Pakistan may require a rethinking of traditional assumptions about deterrence and escalation.

The sixth chapter is 'Perils of Self-Deception in Nuclear South Asia.' The author is Dr. Rabia Akhtar. She warns in her chapter against strategic overconfidence and its perils. She discusses the risks of miscalculation in a nuclear sensitive environment, particularly in South Asia. It is highlighted in the chapter that cognitive biases i.e. self-deception of India and calling Pakistan's nuclear bluff in security policymaking become a significant challenge for the region. Furthermore, she examines how inaccurate Indian assumptions may have increased the risk of escalation during the May 2025 crisis.

Chapter seven is 'Escalation Ladder and Future Crisis Blueprint.' It is written by Brigadier Dr. Naeem Salik (Retd.). The chapter is built around the concept of the escalation ladder. It examines how a future crisis may unfold. The author focuses on potential crisis progression and escalation management. The chapter further discusses and identifies lessons for managing future crises. The core argument is to understand escalation pathways which is essential for preventing crises from developing into larger conflicts.

The eighth chapter of the book, 'Re-Assessing Deterrence Stability in South Asia – Lessons from the May 2025 Crisis' is written by Lieutenant General Khalid Ahmed Kidwai (Retd.). The author examines the May 2025 crisis as a test of deterrence and crisis management mechanisms. He further evaluates deterrence dynamics between India and Pakistan, arguing that deterrence remained effective, although it was subjected to significant stress due to Indian aggression. The main purpose of the chapter is to draw lessons from the May 2025 crisis, during which nuclear deterrence, crisis stability, escalation management, and strategic signaling all played their role.

Chapter nine is written by Lieutenant General Sarfraz Sattar (Retd.) titled 'Lessons from Marka-e-Haq in view of Indian Strategic Culture.' The chapter seeks to analyze India's strategic behavior through the lens of strategic culture. It examines how historical and cultural patterns of decision making influence military doctrines and political choices. It links strategic culture to crisis escalation particularly in relation to Indian military behavior during the 2025 crisis. Ultimately, the author argues that strategic culture remains a critical factor in understanding South Asian regional crises.

Finally, the chapter ten is 'Strategic Stability in south Asia – A Difficult Journey Ahead' which is written by Lieutenant General Aamer Riaz (Retd.). This chapter assesses the challenges to strategic stability which remains fragile despite nuclear deterrence where emerging technologies are transforming traditional deterrence relationships. The chapter demonstrates that Indian military modernization increases uncertainty during crises due to technological developments and doctrinal evolution. The author further discusses how future stability depends upon responsible strategic behavior.

One thing to appreciate about the book is the references provided by the authors to support their research. The sources cited throughout the volumes rely on primary material, which strengthens its academic and policy value. Also, from a scholarly perspective, Marka-e-Haq represents an important contribution to contemporary security literature. It is particularly, valuable as a source, as a compendium of how Pakistani strategic thinkers interpret the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis and its implications for regional stability. Overall, the book suggests – based on the historical evidences of India-Pakistan tensions and recurring crises – that Indian behavior has contributed significantly to regional instability.

The contributors' core argument is that Pakistan demonstrated strategic maturity during the crisis by avoiding uncontrolled escalation. In response to India, Pakistan maintained deterrence credibility by responding proportionately to military developments. According to the authors, this helped preserve regional stability despite the heightened tensions generated by India in a nuclearized environment. The title of the book 'Maturity in South Asia,' therefore, reflects the contributors' view that in the crisis Pakistan demonstrated strategic restraint rather than strategic recklessness.

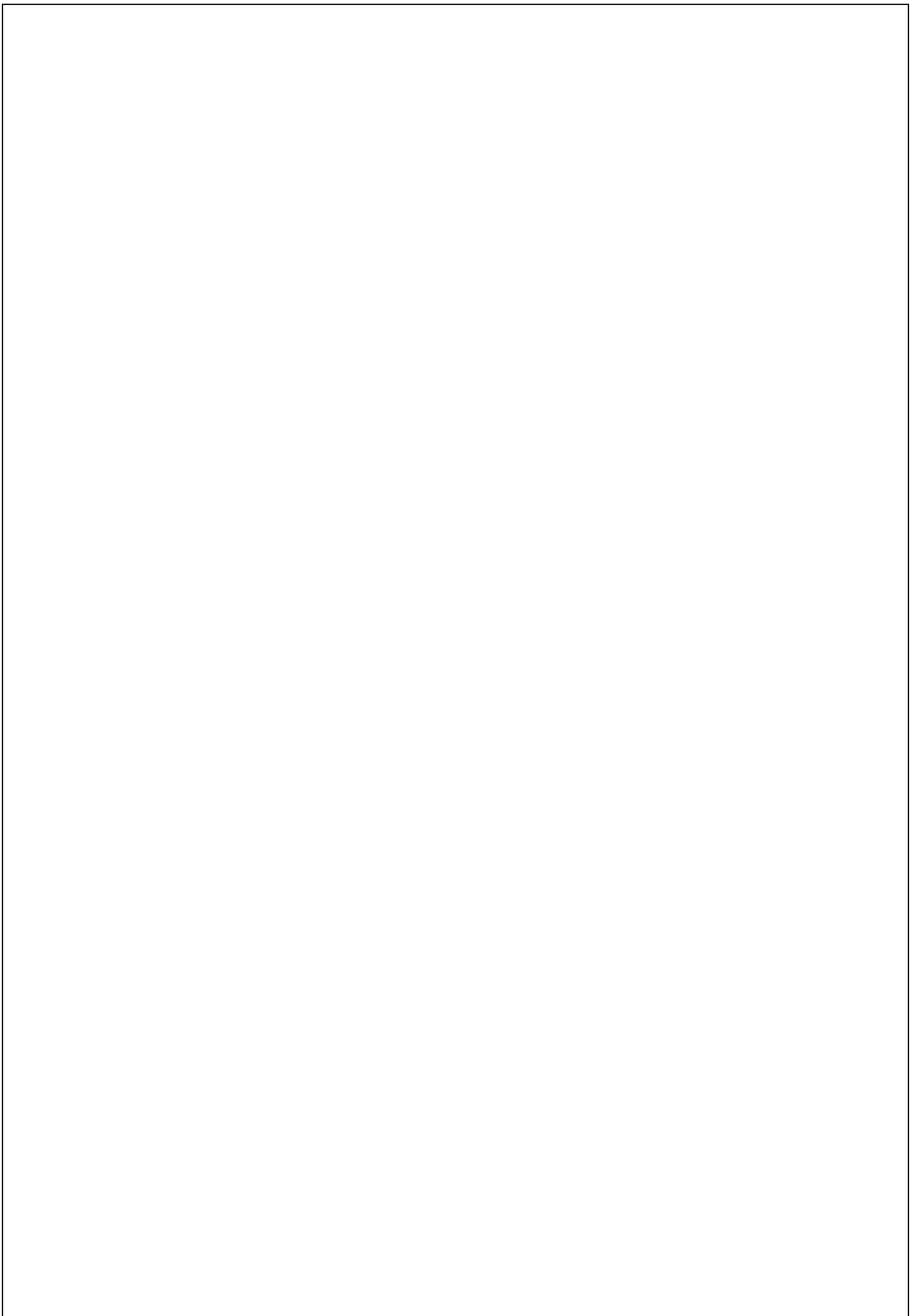
One may argue that a limitation of this book is that, first, it is solely written by Pakistani contributors i.e. mostly practitioners and could have included academics, scholars and other experts. However, in my opinion, this provides important insights into Pakistan's strategic perspective. The volume opens different theoretical as well as practical dimensions for readers regarding the nuances of strategic stability and its components, including deterrence stability, crisis stability and arms race stability. Second, several chapters appear primarily policy-oriented rather than deeply theoretical. This is not necessarily a weakness, rather, it may appeal to readers seeking a combination of policy oriented analysis and theoretical innovation.

In relation to deterrence, the book implicitly and explicitly suggests that Pakistan's deterrence framework remains effective in preventing major wars despite increasing technological and doctrinal challenges from India. It also acknowledges that future conflicts will involve precision strike capabilities, information warfare, Artificial Intelligence (AI), ISR dominance, cyber operations and other emerging technologies. Therefore, Pakistan's strategic community must continuously adapt its deterrence posture. The book further argues that deterrence is not

a permanent condition but an ongoing process requiring political, diplomatic, and military coordination. In conclusion, Marka-e-Haq: Deterrence, Provocation and Strategic Maturity in South Asia is best understood as a strategic reflection on the May 2025 crisis and its broader implications for regional security. The book's greatest value lies not in providing a definitive account of the crisis, but in simulating discussion on how deterrence, strategic culture, military doctrine, and emerging technologies are shaping the future security landscape of South Asia. The volume also highlights that water security, hybrid warfare, information operations and terrorism are increasingly important dimensions of national security. For scholars of strategic studies, it offers a useful window into contemporary thinking on deterrence and crisis management in a rapidly evolving regional environment.

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