

Nuclear Deterrence Failure in South Asia
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“We(Pakistan) will eat grass, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own (nuclear weapon) ... We have no other choice!” said Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in response to the Indian nuclear tests in 1974.¹ India had always enjoyed conventional superiority over the Pakistani military, so possessing a weapon of mass destruction further tipped the odds of a military standoff between two historically belligerent nations in India’s favour. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Pakistan was determined to secure a nuclear weapon as an equalizer in the military field. In 1998, Pakistan successfully tested its nuclear weapons and has been an overt nuclear power since. At first glance, one would imagine that nuclear weapons in South Asia would increase peace and stability in the region as the threat of using nuclear weapons should deter conflict. However, that does not seem to be the case. In fact, in this paper, I argue that nuclear weapons fail to deter conflict in South Asia as evidenced by the fact that the region has experienced increased military disputes since both countries have become overt nuclear powers because instability on the nuclear strategic level leads to instability on the conventional level.

This paper is divided into four major sections. In section I, I explain orthodox nuclear deterrence theory and its counter-argument the stability-instability paradox, eventually concluding that neither seems to explain the India-Pakistan as well as does the instability-instability paradox. In section II, I describe the events in South Asia in the non-nuclear period between 1972 and 1989, using events such as the Brasstacks Crisis to show that this period was the most peaceful of those analysed in this paper. In section III, I expound on events in the de-facto nuclear period between 1989 and 1998 to show that nuclear weapons seem to make the region more violence-prone. Lastly, in section IV, I interpret the events that occurred in the overtly nuclear period from 1998 to the present day, concluding

¹ 2016. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/816223-we-pakistan-will-eat-grass-even-go-hungry-but-we-will>.

that the probability of military disputes has increased substantially since the two countries went nuclear.

This paper uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to explain the claim that nuclear weapons have increased military disputes in the region. I use data from the *Correlates of War* and the data compiled by S. Paul Kapur in his book “Dangerous Deterrent” to show the increase in the number of military conflicts per month from 1972 onwards. I start my analysis after the 1971 Bangladesh war because this was a crushing defeat for Pakistan that divided up the nation, severely limited its territorial control over Kashmir and entirely revamped Pakistani calculations to promote stability of the region’s security environment. Since the objective of this paper is to analyse the independent impact of nuclear weapons on South Asian security, it is necessary to look at data not from post-partition in 1947, but from 1971 forward.² Thus, the 1971-2016 time period tests the pre and post-proliferation impacts of nuclear weapons on security and conventional disputes.³

Section I: Failures of Nuclear Deterrence Theory and the Stability-Instability Paradox:

Bernard Brodie, a famous military strategist, was one of the first to articulate deterrence theory in the nuclear age. He used the US-Soviet case to argue that a nuclear war would be too big and too costly to ever be fought.⁴ A credible nuclear deterrent should thus always be ready for disposal, but should never be used.⁵ Powell further extends this

² Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg.18

³ Ibid.

⁴ Brodie, Bernard. 2016.

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2008/RM2218.pdf.

⁵ Brodie, Bernard. 2016.

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2008/RM2218.pdf.

analysis saying that even if nuclear weapons are used, countries try to absorb a first strike and then launch a devastating second strike that would render defense impossible. Since no state can physically protect itself from such an attack, they resort to using deterrence to prevent an initial attack.⁶ Schelling also argues that the threat of using nuclear weapons is much more effective than the actual use – implying that nuclear weapons are largely used not for actual use, but to pose a credible and costly threat aimed at mutual deterrence.⁷ In short, the logic behind nuclear deterrence is the idea that the risks and costs of a nuclear war far outweigh the benefits, thus it must never be fought. However, even Cold-War theorists knew that deterrence theory could not last forever. The theory's reliance on rational actors made it break down because of inevitable miscalculations, loss of credible threats, irrational behaviour, constricted time frames, stressful conditions, and miscommunications.⁸

In the India-Pakistan case, nuclear deterrence theory does not seem to apply because nuclear weapons have not deterred conflict. Kapur compiles a list of all military confrontations in South Asia since the 1971 Bangladesh war and concludes that the number of conflict months has actually increased since the acquisition of nuclear weapons:^{9 10}

⁶ Powell, Robert. 2016. <http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/pdf/powell-is2003v27n4.pdf>.

⁷ Schelling, Thomas. 2016. <http://slantchev.ucsd.edu/courses/pdf/Schelling%20-%20The%20Diplomacy%20of%20Violence.pdf>.

⁸ Baroudos, Constance. 2016. "Lexington Institute". Lexington Institute. <http://lexingtoninstitute.org/the-underlying-logic-of-nuclear-deterrence-remains-valid/>.

⁹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 24

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 25

TABLE I

Year	MID	Dispute Months	Initiator	Revisionist	Hostility Level	Nuclear Level	India-Pakistan Conventional Ratio
1972	2638	1	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	3.17:1
1973					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	3.33:1
1974					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.77:1
1975					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.66:1
1976					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	3.11:1
1977					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.96:1
1978					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.61:1
1979					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.31:1
1980					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.52:1
1981	2639	5	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.43:1
1982	2640	1	India	Pakistan	Display of force	No nuclear capability	2.51:1
1983	2641	3	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.47:1
1984	2641	1	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.73:1
1984	2642	3	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.73:1
1985	2643	10	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.44:1
1986	2644	2	India	Pakistan	Use of force	No nuclear capability	2.47:1
1986	1111	1	India	Neither	Display of force	No nuclear capability	2.47:1
1987	1111	3	India	Neither	Display of force	No nuclear capability	2.51:1
1988					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.77:1
1989					No militarized action	No nuclear capability	2.4:1
1990	3959	11	India	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.34:1
1991	3985	5	India	Both	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.1:1
1992					No militarized action	De facto nuclear capability	2.01:1
1993	4007	4	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.04:1
1994	4007	12	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.01:1
1995	4007	12	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2:1
1996	4007	12	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.22:1
1997	4007	12	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	De facto nuclear capability	2.2:1
1998	4007	12	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.3:1
1999	4007	4	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.43:1
1999	1112	3	Pakistan	Pakistan	War	Overt nuclear capability	2.43:1
1999	4223	5	India	Neither	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.43:1
2000	4223	10	India	Neither	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.5:1
2001	4277	5	Pakistan	Pakistan	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.88:1
2001	1113	1	India	Pakistan	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.88:1
2002	1113	10	India	Pakistan	Use of force	Overt nuclear capability	2.72:1

Kapur's data shows that in the non-nuclear period (1971-1989) there were 30 dispute months and 186 months free of military confrontation, while the de-facto nuclear period (1990-1998) had 73 dispute months out of a total of 101 months. Even in the de-facto nuclear period, the rate at which military disputes occurred was five times that of the non-nuclear period. Lastly, the overt-nuclear period (1998-2002) contained 45 dispute months out of a total of 55. This shows that the number of dispute months increased by almost 585% since India and Pakistan became over nuclear powers.¹¹

¹¹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 18

Kapur's data includes any month with a military confrontation as a dispute month, not just those that escalated to be counted as "war."¹² This is because even low-level military confrontations are economically costly, lead to a loss of life and always pose the threat of escalating to full-scale war.¹³ Furthermore, nuclear deterrence theory implies that weapons of mass destruction cause states to behave more cautiously. So, if nuclear weapons do indeed have a deterring effect, then one should be able to observe a decrease in disputes across the spectrum or at the very least not observe a positive correlation between nuclear proliferation and conventional confrontation.¹⁴

It is evident that the number of disputes in South Asia has increased monumentally since nuclear weapons – a clear violation of nuclear deterrence theory. Clearly, an alternate explanation is necessary to clarify the worsened military crisis in South Asia. Frank Zagare was the first to assert that nuclear deterrence was not only logically inconsistent but also empirically inaccurate, as is proven by the India-Pakistan case.¹⁵ Even Henry Kissinger, a longtime proponent of nuclear deterrence through the US-Soviet issue and the Korean War eventually changed his mind and argued that far from making the world a safer place, nuclear proliferation had caused increased destabilization and made military rivalries like those between India and Pakistan more acute.¹⁶ The failure of nuclear deterrence theory to explain an empirical increase in military disputes in regions like South Asia leads to the formation of an alternate theory. This is the Stability-Instability Paradox which argues that while nuclear weapons promote stability on the nuclear level, they scale up greater freedom of action at the lower conventional level, as B.H. Lindell Hart summarized: "To the extent

¹² Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 19

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Zagare, Frank. 2016. <http://jtp.sagepub.com/content/16/2/107>.

¹⁶ "The Growing Appeal Of Zero". 2016. *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/node/18836134>.

that the H-bomb reduces the likelihood of full-scale war, it increases the possibility of limited war pursued by widespread local aggression.”¹⁷ It is assumed that while adversaries remain cautious of not crossing the nuclear threshold, they still engage in crisis-provoking behavior or proxy wars because nuclear weapons provide an “insurance policy” against nuclear retaliation.¹⁸ In short, the paradox claims that strategic stability – the likelihood that conventional conflict will escalate to the nuclear level – reduces the chances of launching a conventional attack. In doing so, the lower costs of conventional conflict paradoxically cause strategic stability to make lower-level violence more likely.¹⁹

At first glance, it may seem plausible that the stability-instability paradox can explain the South-Asian case as evidenced by the alarming fact that India and Pakistan fought an all-out war merely one year after becoming overt nuclear states. This is because, Pakistan had an available nuclear deterrent, thus encouraging it to intrude in Kargil and increase proxy conventional wars in Kashmir.²⁰ Nuclear weapons thus insulated Pakistan from an all-out Indian attack, incentivizing it to engage in limited war in the disputed territories. On closer investigation, it seems like the stability/instability paradox fails to explain India-Pakistani relations. This is because of two reasons: the conventional weakness of the revisionist state and strategic instability. The stability/instability paradox avers that a decrease in the probability of a nuclear conflict will increase the likelihood of low-level violence. However, the acquisition of nuclear weapons in South Asia only increased the likelihood of a nuclear conflict. Thus, the probability of conventional attacks has increased with the probability of a

¹⁷ Krepon, Michael. 2016. "The Stability-Instability Paradox". Armscontrolwonk.Com.
<http://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/402911/the-stability-instability-paradox/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 33

²⁰ Chari, . 2016. <http://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/stability-instability-paradox-south-asia.pdf>.

nuclear attack - a clear violation of the stability/instability paradox. Kapur recognizes this inconsistency and argues that the appropriate model to describe the India-Pakistan issue is what he calls the “instability-instability paradox.”²¹

The South Asian security environment is radically different from that in the Cold War. Stability-instability theorists use the Cold War to make their point. During the Cold War, a low probability of United States’ use of nuclear weapons made it more likely that the Soviets would attack Western European countries because they were conventionally stronger than NATO. Since it was highly improbable that the US would escalate conflict to the nuclear level, the Soviets could have attacked first without much fear of crossing the nuclear threshold.²² On the flip side, however, if the Soviets were conventionally weaker than NATO, then it would have been improbable to prevail over NATO even though the unlikely nuclear conflict was discouraging an aggressive attack. Since the revisionist state, the USSR was conventionally stronger than the opponent, the stability-instability paradox explains the increased use of low-level violence during the Cold War.²³ These conditions do not apply in the South Asian case because the revisionist state, Pakistan is conventionally inferior to India. Table 1 shows that India has consistently had an army that is twice or three times as large as Pakistan.²⁴ Therefore, high strategic stability would decrease Pakistan’s insulation from a conventional military attack by India. Hence, it is very costly for a conventionally weaker state to launch an aggressive attack as it may be wiped out by the stronger army provided that escalation to the nuclear level was unlikely due to increased

²¹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 41

²² Ibid. pg. 40

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. pg. 25

nuclear stability.²⁵ Furthermore, limited military conflict in the disputed territories in South Asia is highly unlikely to lead to a nuclear confrontation. Yet, the slopes are slippery and limited conflict can easily lead to full-scale conventional confrontation and even escalate to the nuclear level. This danger of nuclear escalation allows the conventionally weaker and revisionist Pakistan to undertake limited aggression without fear of full-scale confrontation. Additionally, this method also attracts third-party attention that may lead to diplomatic solutions, which would yield better results for Pakistan than any that can be reached by military confrontation with a significantly stronger India.²⁶ To summarize, an increase in low-level conventional military disputes in South Asia has only been possible due to a lot of strategic nuclear instability. Thus, counter to the stability-instability paradox, the South Asian nuclear crisis can only be explained by an “instability-instability paradox.”²⁷

It follows from the instability-instability paradox that nuclear weapons embolden a conventionally weaker, revisionist state. Without weapons of mass destruction, a conventional attack by a weaker state may lead to a crushing defeat if not put its existence in mortal peril. Nuclear weapons increase military capabilities by reducing the adversary’s willingness to launch an all-out attack fearing nuclear escalation in retaliation. In addition to this equalizing effect of nuclear weapons, it is in the best interest of a weaker state to maintain strategic instability to deter an all-out conventional attack. Muhammad Irshad argues that there are significant risks of nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan as escalation beyond the nuclear threshold is extremely probable.²⁸ Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf once hinted at this strategy by claiming: “However many of us they kill, this

²⁵ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 41

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Muhammad Irsad, “Crisis of Nuclear Neighbors,” *Defence Journal*, 6, no. 2 (2002) pg. 120-125

policy of 'strategic defense through tactical offense' will enable Pakistan to kill enough [Indians] to make their losses unacceptable."²⁹ The threat of nuclear confrontation can allow a weaker state to behave belligerently on the subnuclear level as it is insulated from a catastrophic attack by a stronger adversary. In fact, this has been proven to be true especially in the 1999 Kargil war. Pakistani leaders reckoned that their overt nuclear capability provided them greater deterrence from a robust Indian attack, so forces were deployed at the Line of Control (LOC). India, in response, ruled out the possibility for an all-out conventional retaliation contrary to its historical stance of meeting Pakistani aggression with full-scale horizontal escalation.³⁰ This was entirely out of fear of escalation to the nuclear level. Even though the international community condemned Pakistani aggression and eventually forced them to retreat, the result of the Kargil war was far from as catastrophic as it could have been had Pakistan not possessed weapons of mass destruction. To summarize, there is a clear correlation between increased nuclear strategic instability and the increase in military disputes in South Asia; a phenomenon that can only be explained by the instability-instability paradox.

Section II: The Non-Nuclear Period (1971-1989):

In this section, I argue that the non-nuclear period was the most peaceful period of all those analyzed in the paper. This was due to Indian satisfaction with territorial divisions after the Bangladesh War and thus had no incentive to launch further conventional attacks. On the flip side, Pakistan was dissatisfied by these divisions but was far too weak after the

²⁹ Kapur, S. Paul's interview of President Pervez Musharraf, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, April 2004.

³⁰ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 44

war to behave in an aggressive manner.³¹ Furthermore, events such as Islamization, Afghan anti-Soviet guerrilla warfare and Pakistan's developing nuclear capabilities increased the probabilities of undertaking military action in the immediate future during de-facto and overt nuclear capabilities.

The non-nuclear period, while the most peaceful, laid the foundation stone for further destabilization of the region. After the Bangladesh war, when India managed to dismember Pakistan and create a new nation out of the east wing, it also managed to gain 5000 square kilometers of Pakistani land in Kashmir and 93,000 prisoners of war.³² Unlike India, Pakistan thought this seizure of territory was uncalled for and in need of reversal. So the leaders of both countries, Bhutto and Gandhi, met in Simla in 1972 to broker a deal. In exchange for the release of prisoners of war, Pakistan had to concede to the current demarcation of the Line of Control (LOC) and agree that any future resolution on Kashmir must be through bilateral means.³³ However, the issue was far from settled. Pakistan interpreted the Simla agreement as a temporary agreement and remained resolute to liberate Kashmir from Indian occupation; the aftermath of the Bangladesh War had "transformed the long-standing Kashmir dispute into a fetish of national identity... Kashmir became sacred land and Pakistan's raison d'être was intertwined with the jihad to liberate it from Indian non-believers."³⁴ Basically, the Simla agreement signaled that Pakistan could not pursue any immediate change to the Kashmir dispute given its weak position after the 1971 war. However, the Kashmir issue suddenly became the focal point of India-Pakistan

³¹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 65

³² Knopf, Jeffrey. 2016. "Recasting The Proliferation Optimism-Pessimism Debate: Security Studies: Vol 12, No 1". Tandfonline.Com. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636410212120003>.

³³ Chari, P. R., Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal, and Regional Centre for Strategic Studies. *The Simla Agreement 1972 : Its Wasted Promise*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2001. Pg. 204

³⁴ Ziring, Lawrence. *Pakistan : At the Crosscurrent of History*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. Pg. 131

diplomacy moving forward, incentivizing Pakistan to rebuild its military in pursuit of a unified Kashmir.

President Bhutto remained steadfast to improve the military capabilities of Pakistan. He publicly announced the commencement of a nuclear weapons program in order to acquire an equalizer against the stronger Indian army. This decision was calcified particularly after India tested its nuclear capabilities in a peaceful explosion in 1974. Although the test definitely did not imply that India had the capacity to possess a nuclear weapon, the 1974 test increased Pakistan's determination to take no risks and start developing nuclear capabilities of its own. Bhutto called for the creation of an "Islamic bomb."³⁵ An Islamic bomb would increase Pakistan's prestige and leadership amongst all Muslim states that it was now close allies with. The bomb would also have a rally around the flag effect for Bhutto domestically, and most importantly as is aforementioned, would insulate Pakistan from any future all-out Indian conventional attack.

The Bangladesh War also showed Pakistan that religious identity was necessary to form a glue between the different ethnic and provincial differences between the various regions of the country. Thus, a process of Islamization was adopted to create a sense of unity between a disjointed group of people. General Zia-ul-Haq staged a coup and overthrew President Bhutto. Islam was going to be the foundation of the re-formation of a post-1971 war Pakistan. In this quest, democratic political parties were banned, martial law was established, a parliamentary system based on Islamic values was created, interest (riba) was outlawed, religious taxes like zakat were implemented and the madrassah (Islamic school) system was expanded.³⁶ The most important consequence of Islamization in the

³⁵ Ziring, Lawrence. Pakistan : At the Crosscurrent of History. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. Pg. 152

³⁶ Ibid. pg. 131

India-Pakistan context was the revamped military. Earlier, military officials came from educated backgrounds and were secular due to the training they had received from the British Indian Army. Zia changed the military requirements and started recruiting military officials from rural areas that belonged to traditional and religious sections of the country.³⁷ Thus, the Pakistan army – the most powerful political tool of the country was now entirely Islamized and entirely dedicated to regaining Kashmir back from the Indian “non-believers” and building the “Islamic bomb.”³⁸ These events only increased the probability of future military disputes across the border.

General Zia doubled down on his Islamization policy in Pakistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that had led to a mass immigration of Afghans into Pakistan. Pakistan was backed by the US to lead an anti-Soviet resistance in the region. Pakistan empowered a number of Afghan mujahedeen groups that were fighting Soviets, with extensive covert support from the U.S CIA.³⁹ This proxy war that eventually caused the Soviets to retreat making Pakistan wonder that if the “mighty Soviets,” then maybe it could force India out of Kashmir.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the tactics used in Afghanistan were also deployed against India in the mid-1980s to back the Sikh uprisings in Punjab, leading to proxy disputes with India. By 1987 almost 2,000 people had been killed in the uprisings.⁴¹ However, the Afghan war radically changed the nuclear environment of South Asia. In 1977, the US had convinced France to prevent providing Pakistan a nuclear reprocessing plant and the 1976 Symington Amendment prevented US military aid to states that were reprocessing

³⁷ Cohen, Stephen P. *The Pakistan Arm : With a New Foreword and Epilogue*. 1998 ed. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

³⁸ Ziring, Lawrence. *Pakistan: At the Crosscurrent of History*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. Pg. 132

³⁹ *Ibid.* pg. 180

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Crenshaw, and Crenshaw, Martha. *Terrorism in Context*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. Pg. 352-409

nuclear fissile material.⁴² However, to help Pakistan in defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan, Reagan signed the 1984 Pressler Amendment which lifted economic sanctions and also allowed the sale of F-16 jets. These jets gave Pakistan a nuclear weapons delivery platform, that could be used against India in the future.

In response to growing hostilities in South Asia, India ordered the Brasstacks military exercise in 1986. This was India's largest military exercise ever and was held in the Rajasthan desert which borders the Pakistani province of Sindh – a region where the Pakistani army was already fighting separatist forces. India had already engaged in military disputes before the Brasstacks crisis, for example, when it rapidly seized the Siachen glacier after Pakistan started issuing mountaineering licenses thinking that the glacier within their side of the Line of Control.⁴³ However, despite limited adventurism, India did not want to engage in an aggressive dispute with Pakistan even though it was far stronger conventionally – in favor of greater stability in the region.⁴⁴ Brasstacks, however, seems like a counter-argument to India's desire for stability in the region. Authors like Scott Sagan claim that Brasstacks was a "thinly veiled attempt by the Indian Army... to provoke a preventive war with Pakistan."⁴⁵ However, even though the military exercise increased hostilities in the region, the motive behind the exercise seems more geared towards coercive diplomacy aimed at deterring Pakistan from supporting insurgent Sikhs, than towards a military conflict. Moreover, the Brasstacks crisis might just have occurred due to misperceptions and miscommunications. This is because the "hotline" between India and Pakistan was cut off during the exercise, it

⁴² Ahmed, Samina. "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices." *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): pg. 184.

⁴³ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 84

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Sagan, Scott Douglas., and Waltz, Kenneth Neal. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons : An Enduring Debate*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2013. Pg. 94

was a mere continuation of an old exercise known as Digvijay so Indian military officials could not have predicted the escalation of their moves, and lastly, the exercise was largely to placate the demands of Rajhiv Gandhi's personal fascination with extensive military exercises.⁴⁶

To summarize, the non-nuclear period was a relatively peaceful period with military disputes only occurring in 30 out of 216 months. The major crisis during this period never escalated to be categorized as one that involved "use of force," and was largely a result of misperceptions and miscommunications.⁴⁷ This peace did not result due to similar motives of the two countries. Pakistan was especially dissatisfied by the territorial divisions after the Bangladesh war but was too weak to act as a revisionist. Furthermore, certain events during this period laid the foundation for increased military conflicts in the near future: Islamization in Pakistan made Kashmir the core dispute between India and Pakistan, the Afghan War offered Pakistan new strategies to fight against India such as supporting militias, and finally the burgeoning nuclear weapons program allowed Pakistan to equalize its military with India by gaining a shield from an all-out Indian attack.⁴⁸

Section III: The De-Facto Nuclear Period (1990-1998):

By 1990, both India and Pakistan possessed de facto nuclear capabilities. Even though Pakistan did not possess a physical weapon, it was well known that it could assemble one in a short period of time if need be. One would imagine that this threat of conflict escalating to the nuclear level would deter an adversary from launching an attack

⁴⁶ Sagan, Scott Douglas., and Waltz, Kenneth Neal. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons : An Enduring Debate*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2013. Pg. 87

⁴⁷ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. *Studies in Asian Security*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 89

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pg. 90

against a nuclear state. However, this does not seem to apply to the South Asian case. Actually, the number of military disputes between India and Pakistan increased after they possessed de facto nuclear capabilities. Table 1 shows that 73 out of 101 months in this period contained military disputes – a frequency of five times more disputes than when the countries did not possess nuclear capabilities. Around the 1990s, developments in Kashmir had spawned anti-India protests and demonstrations. Pakistan's de facto capability allowed it to further arm and train Kashmiri insurgents, so an indigenous insurgency had now evolved into an overt proxy war between Pakistani-backed guerrillas and the Indian army.⁴⁹ Pakistan believed that backing such an insurgency would gradually deteriorate the Indian army, deplete resources and sully India's global reputation.⁵⁰ By 1994, 5,700 Indian security personnel had been killed in Kashmiri insurgencies – exceeding the number of Indian deaths in the 1948 and the 1965 Indo-Pakistani wars combined.⁵¹ So, it was obvious that Pakistan was literally waging a rather costly war against India in real terms. Moreover, these events occurred simultaneously with other international geopolitical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the emergence of newly independent states in central Asia and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These events gave Pakistanis hope that the international community may help them get Kashmiri independence from India. However, what eventually happened was a growing resentment in Kashmir against both India and Pakistan. The ironic dilemma now facing Kashmir was that Pakistani-backed insurgents wanted not only independence from India but from Pakistan as well. Also, at this point it

⁴⁹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 93

⁵⁰ Lancaster, John and Kamran Khan. 2016. "Extremist Groups Renew Activity In Pakistan". Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/02/08/extremist-groups-renew-activity-in-pakistan/ce788d0d-aa58-4491-af3d-5b96e3b08ad9/?utm_term=.92780e20a410.

⁵¹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 103

was well known that Pakistan was backing insurgents in Kashmir, so India started mounting pressure on Pakistan; this act culminated in the 1990 standoff between the two militaries. In response, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto further pushed for the development of nuclear weapons, even though it was already a de facto nuclear state. Nuclear capabilities, as has been mentioned, would provide insulation from an explicit Indian attack against Pakistan, consequently allowing the continued backing of Kashmiri insurgents.⁵²

A possible counter-argument to my thesis can be found in pro-deterrence interpretations of the 1990 Crisis. After the Kashmir insurgencies had erupted, Pakistan organized the Zarb-i-Momim military exercise, the largest in its history.⁵³ This raised alarms and India began deploying troops along the Pakistani border. 200,000 Indian troops were faced with 100,000 Pakistani troops sometimes a mere 200 meters apart.⁵⁴ Bhutto claimed that Pakistan was ready to fight “one thousand years of war” and in response, the Indian Prime Minister said: “those who talk about a thousand years of war should examine whether they will last a thousand hours of war.”⁵⁵ Clearly, the 1990 crisis showed signs of escalating to levels of all-out war, yet the military standoff diffused in 2 weeks after US National Security Advisor Robert Gates brokered a deal between the two nations that mandated the withdrawal of troops and the initiation of confidence building measure. Pro-deterrence theorists look at this crisis with optimism arguing that the 1990 crisis did not escalate to a military dispute because the de facto nuclear capability of both nations imposed higher costs than benefits of intervention, thereby deterring any cross-border attacks. This may be plausible because some former senior Indian officials confessed that

⁵² Bhutto, Benazir. 2016. <http://rediff> interview benazir bhutto march 12 2004.

⁵³ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 108

⁵⁴ Ibid. pg. 109

⁵⁵ Ibid.

they ruled out cross-border attacks against Pakistan because of its nuclear weapon capability.⁵⁶

The 1990 crisis, however, does not show that nuclear deterrence works in South Asia. Snoke and George argue that the absence of an attack might simply mean that an attack was never intended to begin with.⁵⁷ There is substantial evidence that India never prepared for a military strike against Pakistan. Even though armies were deployed at the border, only one unit of several was allowed to leave its peacetime station.⁵⁸ Some Indian generals also report that they were allowed to take leaves up to one month without stoppage; this is highly unusual for any army that may be on the brink of war.⁵⁹ Another Indian general, Nambiar admits that since India never took aggressive tactics such as dumping ammunition or laying mines, it was never seriously contemplating an attack on Pakistan.⁶⁰

Even though the lack of an attack during the 1990 standoff shows the lack of an intention to attack, it must not be forgotten that Pakistan's budding nuclear capability had caused this problem to begin with. The 1990 crisis started after India stationed troops to defeat Pakistani-backed Kashmiri insurgents. It must be realized that Pakistan had only adopted this proxy-war strategy because of its nuclear power capability. Without de facto nuclear capabilities, Pakistan would never have adopted aggressive policies in Kashmir, as it had not during the entire non-nuclear period before the 1990s. In a sense, Pakistan's de facto nuclear capability had laid the foundation for the 1990 crisis. So far from having a deterring effect on military conflict, nuclear weapons had actually caused much instability in

⁵⁶ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007.

⁵⁷ Kirschbaum, Stanislav, Annemarie Jacomy-Millette, and Jeanne K. Laux. "George, Alexander L. Et Smoke, Richard, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy : Theory and Practice, New York, Columbia University Press, 1974, Xii + 666 P." *Études Internationales* 8, no. 1 (1977): 117-18.

⁵⁸ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 111

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pg 112

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pg 113.

the region by basically triggering a massive military standoff between the two nations. To summarize, Indo-Pakistani relations became more conflict-prone in the de-facto period because Pakistan started backing insurgents in Kashmir after the process of Islamization and the use of similar tactics in the Afghan War. Such an aggressive policy was only possible because of the insulation that a nuclear capability provided Pakistan. Thus, nuclear capabilities worsened Indo-Pakistani relations and increased military conflict in South Asia.

Section IV: The Overt Nuclear Period (1998 – 2002) and the Present Day:

On 28th May 1998, Pakistan successfully detonated its nuclear bomb at a test site in Chagai. At this point, both India and Pakistan officially became states with overt nuclear capabilities. Following from nuclear deterrence theory, one would predict that conflict would immediately halt due the mutually assured destruction principle; the real result, however, has been vastly contrary to this prediction. In the 55-month period between 1998 and 2002, India and Pakistan have had military disputes in 45 months; an average of 0.82 military disputes in a month – a 14% increase from the de facto period, which was already five times as violent as the non-nuclear period. Less than one year after going overt, both countries fought a war at Kargil that resulted in around 1,300 battle deaths, enough to be labeled an interstate war.⁶¹ Furthermore, less than 2 years after this war, the two nations went head to head in a massive military standoff where 500,000 Indian military troops were stationed at the Line of Control, the largest ever in Indian history.⁶² Thus, the overt nuclear period was the least stable or peaceful of all periods analyzed.

⁶¹ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 116

⁶² Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 116

The Kargil operation had been planned since as long ago as the 1980's following the Siachen glacier issue.⁶³ However, top Pakistani politicians had not given the operation the green light even during the de facto period because they believed that the army was not in a position strong enough to launch such an attack, especially without an overt nuclear capability. After the Chagai tests, however, Pakistan could engage in much more aggressive behavior. Within one week of entering Kargil, Pakistan had already occupied 150 kilometers of land beyond the LOC. India responded with a strong retaliation, and after considering escalating the conflict to a horizontal conventional war, it eventually decided not to cross the LoC. A month into the war, India had managed to push back Pakistan to behind the LoC, so a defeated Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif traveled to Washington and struck a face-saving deal that involved withdrawing from Kargil and returning to peace talks with India called the Lahore Process.

Jilani agrees with the claim made throughout this paper, that acquiring a nuclear weapon made Pakistan more aggressive because it believed that it was insulated from catastrophic Indian retaliation: "Pakistani leaders were willing to take even bolder steps than they had previously, crossing the LoC with Pakistan Army forces."⁶⁴ Pakistani adventurism can be predicted according to the instability-instability paradox, but what is truly interesting is to see why India did not retaliate with all-out war against Pakistan after the Kargil conflict. In fact, India ruled out the possibility of crossborder attacks and limited itself to fighting Pakistani troops on the Indian side of the LoC. India's military capabilities were unchanged after Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons; it could engage in the same level of conventional warfare before or after Kargil, yet it showed restraint when it came to

⁶³ Ibid. pg 118

⁶⁴ Ibid. pg. 124

conflict. Although deterrence theory optimists would attribute this to the costs of mutually assured destruction arguing that since conflict did not escalate to all-out war or the nuclear level, the deterrent effects of nuclear weapons had a stabilizing effect on the region by preventing escalation. I find this argument less convincing because evidence shows that the Indian decision not to escalate the crisis was based on non-nuclear reasons. Indian Army Chief of Staff during the Kargil War admitted that the decision not to escalate was to garner as much support by the international community as possible. This presented the image that Pakistan was the aggressor and India the victim. Moreover, Indian Army officials confess that they were willing to escalate the crisis if the “tactical situation had gone badly.”⁶⁵ India’s limited military action in Kargil had been so successful at pushing Pakistan back behind the LoC that it did not have any incentive to escalate the crisis. It had already been established since the Simla agreement in 1972 that India was satisfied with the territorial division of Kashmir, so it was not worth escalating a war that India had already won at the expense of a tarnished image in the international community.

Kargil was a disaster for Pakistan from an economic, political and military perspective. Pakistan had lost hundreds of soldiers, was diplomatically isolated and eventually saw a military coup that toppled the democratic government in 1999.⁶⁶ Despite these events, Kashmiri insurgents were still attacking India and the worst effect of this was a terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in 2001. An Indian investigation found that the attack had been organized by Pakistani-backed terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba.⁶⁷ This

⁶⁵ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 129

⁶⁶ Hussain, Irfan. 2016. "The Cost Of Kargil". DAWN.COM. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1074346>.

⁶⁷ Lakshmi, Rama. 2016. "Indians Blame Attacks On Pakistan-Based Group". Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/12/15/indians-blame-attacks-on-pakistan-based-group/7c071121-af5d-4daa-b28a-8a16d00369ba/?utm_term=.a712779011e4.

was a turning point in India's foreign policy with Pakistan. India was now convinced that the Pakistani threat to use a nuclear weapon was a mere bluff; Pakistan would not use a nuclear weapon unless it was "half-gone."⁶⁸ Thus India started adopting a more aggressive stance towards an already hostile Pakistan; it launched Operation Parakram that mobilized 500,000 troops along the Pakistani border costing roughly \$1 billion.⁶⁹ These threats were met with Pakistani cooperation as President Musharraf banned the named terrorist groups and vowed to stop funding insurgents in Kashmir. The crisis became more tense when terrorist groups attacked an army camp at Kaluchak, leading Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee to declare that India was prepared to fight a "decisive battle."⁷⁰ However, India never launched an attack much to the pleasure of pro-deterrence optimists. Yet, this train of thought dismisses the coercive powers of diplomacy; US Deputy Sect. of State Richard Armitage had managed to extract promises from President Musharraf to stop the flow of terrorists into Kashmir. Since Pakistan had conceded to stop the infiltration of terrorists and terrorist activities had already gone down, there was no necessity for India to launch an attack. Again, it must be realized that nuclear weapons had actually caused this crisis to begin with, as Kashmiri-backed terrorist groups were a mere part of a grand Pakistani tactic to engage in low-intensity conflict with India. So while the 2001 crisis shows that India did not engage in conventional war, it fails to highlight the idea that nuclear weapons made the area more unstable. After the crisis, one thing was certain. Nuclear weapons may sometimes deter an all-out conventional attack, but they fail to deter military confrontation on a limited low-level scale; this has led to increasing and prolonged violence in South Asia.

⁶⁸ Kapur, S. Paul. *Dangerous Deterrent : Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Studies in Asian Security. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press : Sponsored by the East-West Center, 2007. Pg. 133

⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 134

⁷⁰ Rahul Bedi and Anton La Guardia, "India Ready for Decisive Battle," *Daily Telegraph*, May 23, 2002

The overt nuclear period shows that the frequency of war actually increased with the possession of nuclear weapons because it emboldened a conventionally weaker Pakistan to engage in conflict without the fear of being wiped out by a much stronger conventional force. The tactic of employing low-level conflict led to the Kargil war and was the basis of the 2001 crisis. These events showed that while nuclear war may have a slight impact on deterring nuclear war, it definitely does not deter all kinds of war. The Kargil war especially highlighted that limited war could be fought under a nuclear backdrop. Thus stability on the ground level was far from achieved. In fact, it was made worse as is evidence by the increased number of military disputes since the non-nuclear period. Lastly, even on a strategic level going overt with nuclear weapons made the policy unstable because Pakistan could use nuclear weapons whenever it wanted: early on in a conflict, in a pre-emptive way or as a second strike.⁷¹ Pakistan's military leadership has deliberately presented an image of being impulsive by making rash decisions only to instill uncertainty on the strategic level to act as an effective deterrent because India would never be able to predict Pakistan's willingness to escalate to the nuclear level.⁷² Thus instability on a strategic level leads to even more instability on a lower level; perfectly encapsulated by the instability-instability paradox.

Since the crisis in 2002, the two nations have continued to be engaged in skirmishes and military disputes. Most conflicts between the respective armies have been against non-state actors such as terrorist groups, which are often accused to be backed by the other nation's government. After the 2008 Mumbai hotel bombings, for example, India accused Pakistan of harboring and supporting Lashkar-e-Toiba, the group blamed for the attack.

⁷¹ Sood, V. K., and Sawhney, Pravin. *Operation Parakram : The War Unfinished*. New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003.pg. 147

⁷² *Ibid.* pg. 148

Correlates of War data shows that between 2003 and 2010, India and Pakistan have had disputes in 35 out of 84 months.⁷³ However, Pakistan has had military disputes with non-Indian actors in 33 other months, while India has had similar disputes in 42 months.⁷⁴ These months may overlap. Not only have military disputes between the two countries continued, they have also started engaging in military conflict with actors other than each other.

In 2004, the Indian army fired and killed 3 Pakistani fishermen leading to 1 month of conflict. In 2005, India attacked and seized individuals along the Line of Control and Pakistan responded by firing on Indian forces in challenged demarcated territory in India; in this incident, military disputes occurred for 10 months. In 2007, the train between the two countries, the Samjhauta Express was bombed.⁷⁵ In 2008, terrorists attacked the largest city of India, Mumbai, leading to heightened tensions along the border. These attacks seem to be endless, because as recently as September 2016, India has conducted surgical strikes in Kashmir leading to the breakdown of bilateral peace talks between the two countries in December 2016. However, one must realize that since 2002, the playing field has changed entirely, as India and Pakistan have been engaged in several military conflicts against other actors as well. Pakistan, for example, fought terrorist groups in the North-West near Afghanistan as part of the American War on Terror. Thus, while it may seem that conflict between India and Pakistan is steadily decreasing over time, it can be argued that this is a temporary deviation from the prediction, as both countries have been engaged in temporary conflicts with other actors. The India-Pakistan issue always looms in the background.

⁷³ "MID Data Set (V4.01) Available — Correlates Of War". 2016. Correlatesofwar.Org. <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/news/mid-data-set-v4-01-available>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion:

This paper has tried to show a pessimistic approach towards deterrence theory. My evidence shows that far from making a region more stable and peaceful, the acquisition of nuclear weapons has actually made military conflict more likely. Since nuclear weapons can deter an adversary from launching an all-out attack in fear of escalating a conflict beyond the nuclear threshold, a conventionally weaker army can be emboldened to carry out limited military action in pursuit of its goals. It is thus in the best interest of the weaker, revisionist state to present an image of volatility and instability on the nuclear strategic level, so the stronger state is fearful of nuclear escalation. This is precisely the idea behind the instability-instability paradox that seems to explain the impact of nuclear weapons on South Asia.

After the Bangladesh War, Pakistan was dissatisfied with the territorial divisions of the war but was too weak to act. Thus it hesitated to provoke the conventionally stronger India leading to months of peace. However, Islamization in the country made Kashmir the paramount issue in the Indo-Pakistan crisis, arming Afghan guerrillas to defeat the Soviets provided Pakistan with a new low-level conflict strategy, and the burgeoning nuclear weapons program emboldened Pakistan to spur attacks against India. This became evident when both countries possessed de facto nuclear capabilities as Pakistan started to arm insurgents in Kashmir, leading to a military standoff in 1990. Pakistan eventually attacked using armed forces in 1999 at Kargil because it now possessed overt nuclear capabilities that would insulate it from an all-out Indian retaliation. Even though Pakistan lost the Kargil war, it continued arming and training terrorists such as those that attacked the Indian Parliament in Delhi in 2001 leading to another major standoff between the two nations. Ever since then,

the two countries have continued to engage in military conflict until as recently as September 2016.

While it is true that India and Pakistan have not fought an all-out war since possessing nuclear weapons, they have fought at Kargil which is categorized as an inter-state war. Military disputes continue to increase leaving us to conclude that while nuclear weapons seem to deter nuclear or all-out conventional war in South Asia, they do not deter all sorts of war. In fact, a conventionally weaker state is more likely to engage in low-level conflict and the stronger state reciprocates as escalation might push the conflict beyond the nuclear threshold due to the strategic instability between the two nations. It is, thus, safe to say that the acquisition of nuclear weapons has failed to deter military conflict in South Asia, counter to what pro-deterrence theorists may postulate.