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Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Responsibilities

A BASIC and CSSS Roundtable Report

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The Author

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BASIC

The British American Security Information Council (BASIC) is an independent think tank and registered charity based in Whitehall, London, promoting innovative ideas and international dialogue on nuclear disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation. Since 1987, we've been at the forefront of global efforts to build trust and cooperation on some of the world's most progressive global peace and security initiatives, advising governments in the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East and Russia. Through an approach based on active listening, understanding and empathy, the charity builds bridges across divides and lay new pathways to inclusive security.

BASIC has developed institutional expertise across a number of transatlantic issue areas, including the UK-US nuclear relationship, the UK's Trident programme, the politics of disarmament and arms control in the UK Parliament, NATO nuclear weapons in Europe, the Middle East, the evolving role of responsibility in nuclear governance, and expanding technological threats to SSBN platforms.

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Introduction

This is a briefing arising from a roundtable co-hosted by BASIC and The Centre for Science and Security Studies (CSSS), King's College London, on 25th June 2018. This discussion included international and civil society, think tanks and government representatives. The two sovereign nations have clear explicable reasons for their development of power projection capabilities, whilst also being trapped by their histories, narratives and positions, a deep distrust, and an attachment to strength in the face of opposition. But states do not face a binary choice between strength and weakness, nor between collaboration and confrontation. Rather, they can try to understand the interests and positions of other parties, and also attempt to reflect back their understanding of those positions and to absorb those interests into their own proposals. The empathic approach is essential to the success of international negotiations, and to avoiding further deterioration in the strategic security of all parties in the region.

The BASIC-ICCS Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities

BASIC and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security, Birmingham University, are looking to shape the approach to international nuclear weapon policy in a manner that draws out the dynamic “nuclear responsibilities” of states around nuclear weapons possession as states seek pathways towards global disarmament.

Each nuclear weapon possessor state has described itself as a “responsible” nuclear-armed state, but there exists no common understanding of what this entails. A collaborative exploration of the nature of responsibilities presents an opportunity for a new, inclusive and engaging exploration of nuclear deterrence, restraint, and disarmament.

BASIC's enclosed report, *Foregrounding India's Nuclear Responsibilities: Nuclear weapons possession and disarmament in South Asia* (Dr Rishi Paul), analyses India's approach to framing nuclear doctrine, assesses the risks inherent in abandoning a No First Use policy and offers policy areas for further exploration.

The Role of Nuclear Responsibilities

Role of the NPT

A pioneering framework that engenders the development of nuclear responsibilities not explicitly linked to NPT membership is generally regarded as a more inclusive approach, including the nuclear-armed outsiders whilst also preserving the fundamental goal of global nuclear disarmament. Identifying nuclear responsibilities, however, comes with significant challenges, not least the potential for legitimising the continued possession of nuclear weapons.

The current discourse between the NPT Nuclear Weapon States and their allies concerns the role of nuclear risks and other elements of responsibility rather than immediate disarmament. And yet, the breadth of understanding surrounding the NPT results in a lack of coherence surrounding the scope of responsibilities in pursuing clearly defined objectives, leaving states to self-identify as responsible and to criticise others as irresponsible.

Responsibility or Responsibilities?

How should responsibility be defined? Should it be understood as an amalgamation of beliefs and values manifesting in certain policy choices designed to mitigate overall or particular risks? Responsibilities are grounded in particular contexts but constrained by imperfect information.

Some will argue that when there is tension a state's overriding priority is to its people with international responsibilities running in the background. But this is to miss the point that national security and responsibility to citizens is served by the responsibilities to the international community, so that in the long term the two are complementary. Both the compatibility and harmonisation of these two responsibilities is subject to competing security needs that forestall the ability of nuclear armed states to achieve a consensus with the broader international milieu. Achieving security by undermining others' security is unsustainable and self-defeating. It is to build a castle upon sand.

Another question is authority; who decides which nuclear armed states are responsible or irresponsible? As to be expected, at present, nuclear armed states are ubiquitous in self-proclaiming that they are responsible without any serious effort to define what this means. This vacuum in the international debate also presents an opportunity for the wider international community to step in and shape the evolution in understanding the factors of responsibility.

These sample issues have highlighted the difficulties in finding a role for nuclear responsibilities, especially when they are highly contested or may even need to be based upon aspirations that require a concerted commitment over a period of time.



Indian Framing of Nuclear Responsibilities

Historical Explanations

Framing nuclear responsibilities requires an understanding of historical and cultural context. The stability-instability paradox appears to have played a significant role in the formulation of posture for India and Pakistan, not least as they have engaged in conventional war after they became nuclear armed states, thus breaking the first law of nuclear possession. Some say, however, that Kargil should not be considered a war so much as a low level conflict that had been simmering for over a decade and therefore was not a simple counter-example. India's view, inward-looking and self-reliant, is heavily influenced by Gandhi's pacifism, and the memory of oppression under British rule. The 1974 test and the refusal to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state was a realisation of independence and a chance to become a larger player on the global stage.

Ambiguity on NFU

The credibility of their nuclear declaratory policy and broader posture is an important responsibility for all nuclear armed states. India has two key problems with its NFU policy, namely that it contains too many caveats and is ultimately disbelieved by Pakistan. An NFU that lacks credibility is almost as bad as one that does not exist at all. One solution to this could be to formalise the policy by negotiated treaty. A bilateral treaty could commit India and Pakistan to an unconditional NFU policy and a verifiable end to the production of fissile material. In return, India would need to consider effective means to assure Pakistan of its national

security without damaging and destabilising nuclear deployments. One unusual and counter-intuitive idea could be to provide funds (over a set duration) for Pakistan to purchase and upgrade conventional forces designed to stabilise the relationship.

Impact of Indian Relationship with Pakistan and China

India's nuclear posture has more than half an eye on China, which complicates the bilateral India-Pakistani nuclear relationship. The India-Pakistani dyad is for India a regional rivalry, but for Pakistan it is an existential threat. India's dyad with China is in fact a triad as the influence of the United States must be brought in. China and India also have an expanding trade relationship currently totalling over \$70 billion. The incentive for India to clear up its disputes with Pakistan is the promise of a more effective global influence.

The Numbers Game

Pakistan has always had ten more nuclear missiles than India. However, a common misperception is that India are developing just as fast as Pakistan. Whilst India has a far greater stockpile of fissile material and capacity to produce more plutonium and HEU (Belfer Centre 2017), most independent experts believe Pakistan is amassing a larger arsenal at a more rapid rate. As the smaller state, Pakistan is not only out-gunned conventionally, it could be more exposed to nuclear attack, blackmail or deterrence as it would take far fewer warheads to destroy the country. There are no arms control agreements between India and Pakistan.

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Pakistani Framing of Nuclear Responsibilities

Influence of Indian Actions

Pakistan's nuclear programme began as a civil programme, and its diplomats actively participated in the NPT negotiations with the possibility of joining as a non-nuclear weapon state. India's 'peaceful' nuclear test in 1974 was a wake-up call and triggered a military programme in Pakistan in earnest. Pakistan declared that they would only sign the NPT if India did likewise.

Pakistan was a great advocate of regional bilateral arms control measures, but India was to have none of this. For example, after the 1998 tests Pakistan proposed a number of confidence building measures (CBMs), including a hotline between foreign secretaries and advance notification on ballistic and nuclear tests. When India introduced its Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) this challenged the credibility of the Pakistan deterrence posture, leading them to implement a policy of full spectrum deterrence (FSD) as a countermeasure.

Impact of AQ Khan

The proliferatory legacy of the A.Q. Khan Network is generally considered a bad chapter in Pakistan's nuclear history, one that the government would like to move on from. Though the case is considered closed, it deeply harms Pakistan's reputation and claim to be a responsible nuclear armed state, and has meant that Pakistan has had to work particularly hard to be rehabilitated. This may be unfair, as whilst the most extensive global supplier of sensitive nuclear technology, A.Q. Khan's network was not unique. All nuclear armed states have gained nuclear technology with assistance from other states.

Indian and Pakistani Collaboration?

Defining CMD

India and Pakistan both claim to follow a strategy of credible minimum deterrence (CMD), though participants agreed that this needs a more comprehensive definition from both sides. India is pursuing a full nuclear triad and Pakistan full spectrum deterrence. The potential for a full arms race remains if both define their CMD as preserving a relative military balance with one another.

India may be on a road to abandoning its CMD policy. Most notably the 2017 Joint Military Doctrine only referred to credible deterrence as opposed to credible minimum deterrence which is a very significant development. In addition to this, within India consideration has been taken in regard to differentiating the nature of its CMD between China and Pakistan. As it has a larger capacity and conventional superiority, a CMD against China may require a higher capability, especially as China is not a status quo power.

The first minister said that he did not believe in an NFU policy, and the terms 'first use' and 'first strike' are often used interchangeably by senior Indian officials.

Clarification of India's NFU Policy

Ambiguity surrounds India's NFU policy, to such an extent that some question whether they are still abiding by it. The first minister said that he did not believe in an NFU policy, and the terms 'first use' and 'first strike' are often used interchangeably by senior Indian officials. However, many statements and rhetorical questions have been taken out of context, and senior ministers have made personal remarks quoted to hint at changes in official policy, so we have to be careful not set up a straw man. This highlights the sensitivities of nuclear signalling in terms of doctrine, and that clarity of explanation is very important. Every nuclear power has a responsibility first and foremost not to confuse other actors in a manner that could destabilise the situation.

Therefore, there was a strong sense among a majority of participants that India needs to more clearly demonstrate that they still follow a NFU policy or drop it. The onus should be placed on a nuclear state to issue a NFU and have the ability to back it up credibly.

Cold Start Doctrine

Much like the Indian NFU policy, the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) has numerous ambiguities, not least as to whether it even exists. There have been cases where military generals or senior commanders have seemingly confirmed the existence of a CSD before retracting these previous statements, which has resulted in the CSD never being completely confirmed or denied. It would be more responsible were the Indians to be more transparent with their nuclear doctrine around the CSD, not least to then be in a position to explain it, the thinking behind it, and how they consider it a contribution to regional security. This would offer the chance for both sides to consider the longer term consequences of CSD and other potentially escalatory measures attempting to acquire the upper hand.

The CSD acts as an effective signal to other states that India is prepared to launch a response to military aggression. Its origins stem from India's inability to mobilise its forces during the 2001 terrorist attack (taking nearly a month), and while the CSD may not enable them to mobilise their forces immediately it will cut the time down to around 6 days. Even though it is ambiguous, the signalling around the CSD is seen as deterring Pakistan (and to some extent US intervention against Indian interests) to a greater effect.

India needs to more clearly demonstrate that they still follow a NFU policy or drop it



Obstacles to Disarmament in South Asia

Nuclear awareness and narratives in South Asia

It is generally accepted that a major responsibility for all nuclear armed states is to attempt to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in their foreign policy in a manner that strengthens stability and makes nuclear exchange less likely. This can only be achieved if India and Pakistan started a process of establishing and deepening mutual confidence building measures (CBMs) between them. Then there is the aforementioned issue surrounding the ambiguity of each state's policy of CMD.

India currently appears reluctant to go down this road, not least because it appears to afford Pakistan status in this area. Should other actors become involved in the South Asia responsibilities dialogue? Could external actors put more pressure on India to engage in good faith, or to engage at all? Could more be done to challenge deeply entrenched narratives that support conflict and label adversaries as implacable enemies? India has always been seen in Pakistan as an existential threat due to their shared history, rhetoric and behaviour. In the seminar the question was asked if India's position as Pakistan's enemy was inescapable? Climbing out of these traps takes patience and effort on the part of large numbers of people. Globally, discriminatory trends must be addressed, otherwise Pakistan would be reluctant to become involved in the disarmament process. Currently, the manner in which India appears to have been welcomed into the wider

non-proliferation regime (nuclear deal, NSG etc), whilst Pakistan has been excluded, undermines the values attached to collective responsibilities and the concerted drive towards risk reduction.

China will have a major impact on South Asia's move to disarmament. The US in particular, view China as a threat and have taken moves to counter their influence. Most notably the suggestion of the Indo-Pacific would elevate India's position as a counter balance to China, but will weaken any intent on India's part to negotiate directly with Pakistan.

Nuclear responsibilities outside of the NPT Framework?

There are two competing pathways for disarmament that currently dominate the non-proliferation debate today - the ban treaty, and the step-by-step process and the universality of the NPT. There was general agreement that it was tricky to see where South Asia would fit into either of them cleanly.

The onus is placed on declared NWS to be willing to assist in bringing India and Pakistan into such a constructive process.

One participant suggested that a hybrid pathway was required to incorporate South Asia into the disarmament process. They suggested that this could incorporate the step-by-step process by first recognising India and Pakistan as de facto nuclear armed states, then developing a regional model in which they accept obligations (that are not necessarily within the NPT framework and may be bilateral agreements), and a third step is disarmament initiatives at the international level in which they can both become involved.

The onus is placed on declared NWS to be willing to assist in bringing India and Pakistan into such a constructive process. This process does not require that India and Pakistan formally join the NPT itself, for reviewing and amending the Treaty's provision defining a Nuclear Weapon State as one that 'manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to the 1 January 1967' to incorporate them would be far too challenging. Discussing possible fora for disarmament, one participant suggested that it needed to happen outside of the NPT but could be within the Conference on Disarmament (CD). There was a suggestion that the responsibilities agenda could provide a structure for dialogue that breaks the current obstacles created by India and Pakistan's exclusion from NPT processes.



Conclusions

The roundtable on South Asia raised many useful questions that demonstrated a richness behind a nuclear responsibilities framework. The weaknesses within the NPT were recurring issues, especially as India and Pakistan sat outside the Treaty framework and there was no prospect of that changing in the foreseeable future.

Ambiguity was also discussed frequently. And in particular their reference to definitions was another salient issue. NFU as a concept was seen as having problematic dimensions of credibility, requiring any state issuing an NFU statement to back it up with practical measures. India's NFU policy, with its exceptions, is regarded by some people as highly ambiguous, some believing that it needs greater weight of evidence behind it and fewer exceptions, or that India should drop it as a policy. A choice to drop the NFU itself could be highly destabilising and harden domestic nuclear attitudes. India was also criticised for neither confirming nor denying the existence of a CSD and for senior officials' statements confusing this situation further. A nuclear armed state has a responsibility to be clear not only to their domestic audiences but also to the international community what their nuclear posture is as this will reduce the opportunity for misunderstanding.

Ultimately, nuclear responsibilities can be seen to stem from a state's ability to clearly articulate its nuclear posture and the legacy of past actions. Pakistan and India both developed their military nuclear capability after the NPT was created, and this has meant that the rest of the international community, members of the NPT, has come to view them as less responsible than the original signatories of the NPT. Pakistan's reputation has further been marred by the activities of the A.Q. Khan network and these repercussions are still being felt today.

Endnotes

- 1 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Accessed: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/141503.pdf>

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