MARCH 2023

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM | ICCS Institute for Conflict Cooperation and Security

BASIC

Exploring Nuclear Risk Reduction Pathways in Southern Asia through Nuclear Responsibilities

Alice Spilman, Chiara Cervasio, Eva-Nour Repussard

Executive Summary

In March 2023, BASIC and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham organised 'Nuclear Responsibilities and Nuclear Crises in Southern Asia: Preventing Escalation through a Responsibility-Based Regime in the Asia-Pacific'. The purpose of this dialogue was to identify proposals and areas for cooperation to reduce risk in Southern Asia. The dialogue was attended by experts and government officials from Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore and the United States.

Amongst the areas for cooperation discussed, participants identified proposals that range in scope and focus on different levels, taking into consideration the limits of the current political and strategic environment. Proposals have been grouped into five categories:

1. Strengthening Communication through Distrust Reduction: The 'South Asian Standing Communication Secretariat' (SASCS) ;
2. Developing Mutual Understanding and a Shared Sense of Risk through Civil Society Involvement ;
3. Pursuing 'Low-Hanging Fruits': Extending and/or Updating Current Confidence Building Measures and Agreements ;
4. Cooperating Outside the Realm of Arms Control ;
5. Developing an Inclusive 'Nuclear Risk Reduction Regime' (NRRR).

Introduction

Strategic distrust among nuclear-armed states in Southern Asia is growing, with China, India, and Pakistan co-existing amidst unresolved territorial disputes and longstanding asymmetric capabilities. Track 1 dialogues are either stalled or infrequent, and when they take place, they are all too-often characterised by mutual blaming and assertions of the other's irresponsibility. The triangular nuclear relationships between India, Pakistan, and China is a complicated one, not least because of China's continuing official non-recognition of India's nuclear status and India and Pakistan's positions as non-signatories of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

This Track 1.5 dialogue, jointly organised by BASIC and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham, was convened to explore drivers of nuclear risks in Southern Asia and identify policy options to reduce such risks through the lens of 'nuclear responsibilities'. Through participation in a crisis simulation and the learning that came out of this, participants discussed key drivers of nuclear risk in the region and elaborated proposals to mitigate these risks at the Track 2, Track 1.5, and Track 1 levels. Acknowledging that the current political context and security environment makes security cooperation at the Track 1 level difficult, participants sought to develop multidimensional, bottom-up approaches to collaboration – as one participant put it, 'we have a responsibility to expand our strategic imaginations'.

Box 1: Nuclear Responsibilities

What is the Nuclear Responsibilities Approach?

The Nuclear Responsibilities Approach is a way of thinking and talking about nuclear weapons policies and practices that puts responsibility at the centre of the conversation. It responds to the heightening nuclear risks in the world today and the deep polarisation in global politics over how to reduce them. The approach is centred on the need to shift the nature of the contemporary global conversation on nuclear weapons away from one characterised by rights, blame, and suspicion towards one framed by shared and plural responsibilities, empathic cooperation, and even trust.

What is the Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit?[1]

The Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit is designed to help expert and practitioner communities to think, talk, and write about their nuclear responsibilities, and those of others, in a practical manner. The Toolkit develops a dialogue process and methodology focused around exploration of states' nuclear responsibilities and their related policies and practices, that can guide national-level or multilateral third-party facilitated dialogues. Nuclear responsibilities third-party facilitated dialogues are designed to enable participants to better understand one another's perceptions of their responsibilities, generate opportunities to clarify misperceptions and miscalculations, and create a space to reduce distrust and potentially build trust. Such third-party facilitated dialogues are designed to foster new or more effective policy proposals in relation to specific dialogue themes (in this case, nuclear risks in Southern Asia) through conversations focused on nuclear responsibilities.

[1] Sebastian Brixey-Williams, Alice Spilman, and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit*: A Practical Guide for Thinking, Talking and Writing (London and Birmingham: BASIC-ICCS, August 2021) https://basicint.org/the-nuclear-responsibilities-toolkit-a-practical-guide-for-thinking-talking-and-writing/

Key Drivers of Nuclear Risk in Southern Asia

1. With growing strategic competition, unresolved territorial disputes and rapid military modernisation, Southern Asia is increasingly crisis prone. While participants noted that there are many situations that may lead to nuclear escalation in Southern Asia, both inadvertent and intentional, conversations focused on the following drivers of risk that make managing these scenarios more difficult.

Complex Nuclear Relations

2. Managing nuclear stability in Southern Asia is complicated by the presence of a 'strategic chain' linking Pakistan to India, India to China, and China to the United States.[2] With unresolved territorial disputes and longstanding asymmetric capabilities between China, India, and Pakistan and rapid military modernisation in the region, Southern Asia is becoming a key hotspot for vertical nuclear proliferation. As Jingdong Yuan puts it:

   > While primarily a direct response to perceived and real US threats to its national interests, Chinese nuclear and non-nuclear military developments affect India's assessment and calculation as it has to take into account both China and Pakistan in its strategic planning. Likewise, an India that seeks to maintain credible minimum deterrence vis-à-vis China accrues nuclear capabilities that seriously undermine Pakistan's nuclear deterrence, prompting the latter to expand both the size and type of its nuclear arsenal. The strategic chain has yet to be broken.[3]

3. Simultaneously, there is an increasing view that nuclear dynamics in Southern Asia also moves from the regional to the global level, with India reacting to Pakistan's nuclear programme, and China not indifferent to such developments, influencing nuclear thinking in the U.S and Russia.[4]

4. Changing security alignments and the presence of the 'strategic chain' raise the possibility of crises within the region. Escalatory scenarios are often evoked especially as two nuclear-armed neighbours, India and Pakistan, are in a crisis-prone relationship.[5] This makes nuclear threats recurring and nuclear use developing out of a conventional crisis (both intentional and accidental) a dangerous possibility.

---

[2] Robert Einhorn and W.P.S. Sidhu, *The Strategic Chain: Linking Pakistan, India, China, and the United States* (Brookings Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Series, Paper 14, March 2017). https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/acnpi_201703_strategic_chain.pdf

[3] Jingdong Yuan, 'External and Domestic Drivers of Nuclear Trilemma in Southern Asia: China, India, and Pakistan', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 2 (2022): 296–314 (pp. 297-98). doi: 10.1080/25751654.2022.2158700 Yuan, 'External and Domestic Drivers of Nuclear Trilemma in Southern Asia'. See also Tanvi Kulkarni, *Managing the China, India, and Pakistan Nuclear Trilemma* (Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) and Toda Peace Institute, 2022) https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/134.managing-the-cip-nuclear-trilemma.pdf (accessed 23 March 2023).

[4] Ashley J. Tellis, *Striking Asymmetries: Nuclear Transitions in Southern Asia* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022), p. 6.

[5] Wilfred Wan, *Nuclear Risk Reduction: A Framework for Analysis* (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research UNIDIR, 2019), p. 10. https://unidir.org/publication/nuclear-risk-reduction-framework-analysis (accessed 23 March 2023)

Distrust, Uncertainty, and (Mis)communication

5. Other key drivers of risk in Southern Asia are poor communication, uncertainty about an adversary's intentions, pervasive strategic distrust, a lack of mutual understanding, and a lack of transparency. Poor communication can be broken down into the absence of strategic dialogue, the non-use or misuse of communication mechanisms in times of crisis, poor quality of signalling, and poor signal interpretation. Meanwhile, accurate communication is made more difficult by the environment of mis/dis-information and the growing distrust between regional actors. Collectively, these drivers of risk make crisis prevention and crisis management more challenging by creating an environment shrouded in fear and uncertainty.

6. In the Southern Asia context, several crisis communication mechanisms are already in place.[6] However, communication – especially during India-Pakistan crises – has been severely limited due to the deep strategic mutual distrust characterising the relationship.[7] Formal communication mechanisms in the India-Pakistan context are rarely used, or if they are, the information shared, especially at times of crisis, is both limited and highly ambiguous.[8] Moreover, there is uncertainty over whether any information shared in these channels can be trusted, just at the moment when a trustworthy channel is most urgently needed.

7. Given the mindset of distrust on both sides, each worries that the other is using the channels to mask their malign intentions – to deceive the adversary and lull them into a false sense of security; or by a belief that sharing too much information with the adversary could expose oneself militarily in the event that the crisis escalated to war.

8. The key problem of existing communication mechanisms, and more generally of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in the India-Pakistan relationship, is that whilst they are aimed at communicating each side's peaceful intentions, they require a certain level of mutual trust to work effectively.[9] When decision-makers hold extremely negative and biased perceptions of an adversary's intentions, they are likely to misinterpret as a trick or a sign of weakness any message aimed at signalling crisis de-escalation from an

---

[6] For example, the India-Pakistan Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs) hotline; the India-Pakistan Foreign Secretaries hotline; the India-China military hotlines on the Eastern Sector of their disputed border (See Davinder Singh, 'Hotline Communication: A Strategic Necessity', *CLAWS Journal* (Winter 2014): 77-90). https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/908612919_DavinderSingh.pdf). India and Pakistan also signed several important agreements in relation to immediate notification of any accident relating to nuclear weapons; the prohibition of attack against nuclear installations and facilities and pre-notification of flight testing of ballistic missiles. For a full list of India-Pakistan Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), see Michael Krepon, *South Asia Confidence-Building Measures (CBM) Timeline* (Stimson Centre, 2017). https://www.stimson.org/2017/south-asia-confidence-building-measures-cbm-timeline/. See also Rabia Akhtar, Chiara Cervasio, Ruhee Neog, Alice Spilman, and Nicholas J. Wheeler, eds., *Exploring India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms through Nuclear Responsibilities*, BASIC-ICCS Publication, forthcoming May 2023.

[7] On this, see also Nicholas J. Wheeler, Chiara Cervasio, and Alice Spilman, 'Communicating in Nuclear Crises Amidst Distrust' in 'Exploring India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms through Nuclear Responsibilities'.

[8] Akhtar et al., *Exploring India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms through Nuclear Responsibilities*.

[9] See Ejaz Haider, 'The Perils of (Not) Communicating in the Absence of Trust in a Dangerous Nuclear Dyad' in *Exploring India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms through Nuclear Responsibilities*, ed. Akhtar et al. Key works on CBMs include Johnathan Alford,'The Usefulness and the Limitations of CBMs', in *New Directions in Disarmament*, eds. William Epstein and Bernand Taud Feld (New York: Praeger, 1981), 133–44; Marie-France Desjardins, *Rethinking Confidence-Building Measures* (London: Inter- national Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996). An innovative and insightful application of trust research to CBMs is Christopher Andrejs Berzins, *The Puzzle of Trust in International Relations: Risk and Relationship Management in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science 2004).

adversary.[10] In other words, it is easier for distrusters to believe that an adversary is a 'wolf in sheep's clothing',[11] rather than appreciate that they might be trustworthy and sincerely interested in crisis de-escalation. This is because, in distrusting relationships where actors operate with an 'inherent bad faith model' of an adversary, the interpretation of signals is biassed towards negative assessments.[12] Information is filtered through a psychological mechanism of cognitive consistency for which any new information and evidence that appears to challenge that image is interpreted in ways that confirm the hostile perception of the other.[13]

Addressing Risks through Shared Nuclear Responsibilities

9. To mitigate these drivers of risks, participants identified a number of shared responsibilities that included:
    a. Responsibility to communicate in a comprehensive manner.
    b. Responsibility to enhance certainty through credible communications and careful use of language.
    c. Responsibility to create an inclusive normative nuclear order.
    d. Responsibility to display pragmatic transparency.
    e. Responsibility to reassure an adversary's security or status concerns.
    f. Responsibility to prepare for accidents.
    g. Responsibility to appreciate and understand your opponent.
10. The policy proposals discussed during the dialogue and outlined in this report build on these responsibilities and are aimed at addressing the drivers of risks discussed above.[14] The policy proposals focus on different levels (Track 1, 1.5, and 2) and are more or less broad in scope (from creating new regimes to enacting new Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)), taking into consideration the limits of the current political and strategic environment.

---

[10] Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018*).* Chiara Cervasio, *Reassurance through Special Envoys: the Empathic De-escalation of security and status dilemma dynamics in China-India Relations, 1986-2000* (PhD Thesis, the University of Birmingham, 2022).

[11] Andrew H. Kydd, 'Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seeker's Do Not Fight Each Other', *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 114-54. doi: 10.1080/09636419708429336

[12] Ole Holsti coined this term to refer how decision-makers can impute malign intent to others by virtue of a polity's inherent characteristics, such as its political values or ideology (in David J. Finlay, Ole R. Holsti, and Richard R. Fagen, *Enemies in Politics* (Chicago: Rand McNall, 1967). See also Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions*, pp. 145-146; Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp. 75-99).

[13] Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions*; Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary*; Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*; Cervasio, *Reassurance through Special Envoys*.

[14] As such, the policy proposals can inform a broader discussion on measures to reduce escalatory risk through crisis prevention regimes and communication mechanisms, set out by Wilfred Wan in his 2019 report. See Wan, *Nuclear Risk Reduction*, pp. 22-26.

Strengthening Communication through Distrust Reduction: the 'South Asian Standing Communication Secretariat' (SASCS)

1. Participants largely discussed that, in a situation where two or more adversaries are committed to de-escalating a crisis, but each wrongly imputes malign intent to the other, a potential corrective is the exercise of what has been called *security dilemma sensibility* (SDS). This is an appreciation that an adversary might be motivated by fear and insecurity rather than aggressive intention, and that they might potentially be trustworthy.[15] By empathising with one another, and on the assumption that both are seeking a path to mutual security, it is possible through the exercise of SDS for two or more nuclear adversaries to find a path to de-escalation.[16] Reciprocal or mutual empathy does not mean sympathising with the adversary or agreeing with their worldview, however, it creates a space where a zone of potential agreement opens up that can lead to de-escalation.[17]

2. How, then, to address these pernicious psychological dynamics in ways that promote crisis prevention and de-escalation if crises occur? One important policy proposal that participants agreed on was that *India, Pakistan, and potentially China should establish a 'South Asian Standing Communication Secretariat' (SASCS)*. The Secretariat would comprise permanent regional expert staff recruited from the members, as well as rotating national representatives from foreign ministry, defence ministry, and intelligence communities.[18] The purpose of the Secretariat would be (i) to provide the member states with a forum where they could routinely discuss issues of concern to the other(s) in terms of military movements, exercises etc.; (ii) discuss the viability of existing CBMs and how these might be extended to promote increased confidence in each other's peaceful intentions; and (iii) drawing from past experiences, discuss how to ensure that actors effectively utilise existing channels of communication in times of crisis.

---

[15] The full definition of security dilemma sensibility is: 'an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear' (Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 7, their emphasis).

[16] Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*; Cervasio, *Reassurance through Special Envoys*.

[17] Cervasio, *Reassurance through Special Envoys*. See also Joshua Baker, 'The Empathic Foundations of Security Dilemma De-escalation', *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1251-66. doi: 10.1111/pops.12623; Jonathan W. Keller and Yi Edward Yang, 'Empathy and Strategic Interaction in Crises: A Poliheuristic Perspective', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 2 (2009): 169-89. doi: 10.1111/j.1743-8594.2009.00088. Crucially, empathy also implies an appreciation of the adversary's room for manoeuvre and of the domestic political constraints that might stand in the way of particular concessions (Keller and Yang, 'Empathy and Strategic Interaction', p. 172).

[18] By bringing together Indian and Pakistani (and perhaps in the future Chinese officials) in a shared space that could involve a mix of face-to-face and virtual interactions, the SASCS would be an advance on the Nuclear Risk Reduction Centre (NRRC) concept. This has been proposed for India and Pakistan, modelled on the US-Soviet/Russian one that is based in the capitals of the two countries and where there is no regular face-to-face or virtual interaction between officials. For a detailed discussion of the NRRC concept in the India-Pakistan context, see Rafi uz Zaman Khan, 'Nuclear Risk-Reduction Centers' in *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia*, ed. Michael Krepon (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.171-183.

3. The Secretariat's role, then, would be to provide a space in which its members could discuss and potentially agree on their shared responsibilities to better communicate in times of crisis, reduce the risks of misperceptions, especially in times of crisis,[19] and in so doing, reduce the distrust that has led Indian and Pakistani political and military officials to not effectively utilise these mechanisms of de-escalation in previous crises (e.g. Operation Brasstacks in 1986-87, where the formal channels of communication fell silent as the crisis escalated).

4. The SASCS would also have an early-warning function, in that parties could bring issues that could lead to conflict to this body with a view to trying to prevent a crisis developing. In this role, the SASCS would have important affinities with the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) that was established by the United States and Soviet Union as part of monitoring compliance with the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and the 'Interim Agreement Between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Certain Measures With Respect to the Limitation of Offensive Arms' (SALT 1). The Memorandum of Understanding that established the SCC required that officials meet at least twice a year in Geneva and there was written communication between these meetings. The SCC did not resolve compliance issues, nor was it mandated to conduct negotiations, but as a consultative forum it played an important role in helping both parties discharge their shared responsibilities under SALT 1 and the ABM Treaty. The SCC functioned well as long as both sides believed that the other was committed to pursuing security in common.[20] The SASCS would depend for its effectiveness on a similar commitment.

5. Although some analysts have argued that CBMs are a means of building trust,[21] the challenge is how to establish these CBMs in a context of distrust where each side looks to the other to make the first move in establishing cooperation.[22] The purpose of the SASCS would be to contribute to a process of distrust reduction by fostering reciprocal security dilemma sensibility as part of developing a new crisis prevention regime for Southern Asia. The SASCS would provide a safe space where the parties could share their fears and develop new policies and practices to ameliorate these. Cultivating a habit and practice of SDS at the official working level is a critical precondition for the development of long-term trusting relationships that can contribute to long-term practices and policies of risk reduction.

6. Historically, the breakthroughs in major CBMs between India and Pakistan have occurred when trust has existed at the highest levels of diplomacy between the two governments.[23] For example, the most far-reaching nuclear CBMs were agreed in the Lahore Declaration, which only became possible because of the interpersonal trust between prime ministers Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.[24] Establishing a SASCS would depend upon an equivalent level of trust between Indian and Pakistani leaders. It might be replied that if this level of trust existed, and both leaders believed they had a trustworthy channel where they could exchange messages knowing

---

[19] Nidaa Shahid, 'The Potential for Developing Nuclear Responsibilities in an Unstable South Asian Nuclear Relationship' (BASIC-ICCS, July 2022). https://basicint.org/potential-for-developing-shared-nuclear-responsibilities/

[20] For excellent overviews of the SCC, see Robert W. Buchheim and Philip J. Farley, 'The US-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission' in *US–Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons*, eds. Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, and Alexander Dallin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 254-270; Gloria Duffy, 'Conditions That Affect Arms Control Compliance' in *US-Soviet Security Cooperation*, eds. George, Farley, and Dallin, pp. 270-293.

[21] See footnote 9.

[22] See Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp. 75-100.

[23] This argument is developed at greater length in Wheeler, Cervasio, and Spilman, 'Communicating in Nuclear Crises Amidst Distrust'.

[24] This case is discussed in Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp. 192-238.

that they would be interpreted as signals of inherent credibility,[25] then there is no need for a SASCS. However, given that interpersonal trust at the leader level cannot be relied on to continue as leaders change over time, the challenge is to embed trusting relationships in the bureaucratic structures of both states that do not depend on particular leader-to-leader constellations of trust.[26] The SASCS has a key role to play here as an incubator of such trusting relationships.

Developing Mutual Understanding and a Shared Sense of Risk through Civil Society Involvement

7. Beyond the pervasive distrust, the three nuclear-armed powers suffer from the absence of a common strategic dialogue.[27] This absence makes an understanding of one another's postures and threat perceptions challenging and limits the possibility for shared comprehension of nuclear risks.[28] The above suggestion to establish the SASCS may be one space to facilitate such strategic discussions, but the limited political will at this time makes this very difficult. Track 1 dialogue, however, is not the only means of developing mutual understanding and comprehension of risks.

8. In the Pakistan-India dyad, opportunities to develop mutual understanding between the populations have dwindled over recent decades. However, historical instances of knowledge exchange and relationship building could be revived, revised, or regenerated. For example, journalistic exchanges have a historical precedent. Both Indian and Pakistani journalists used to have the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural exchanges to encourage mutual understanding and better balanced reporting of incidents between India and Pakistan.[29] Educational exchanges also have precedence, with NGOs engaging in programmes like 'Exchange for Change' where students get to visit each other's countries

---

[25] Our findings here are convergent with those of Antoine Levesques, Desmond Bowen and John H. Gill, who wrote in the Executive Summary of their May 2021 study of nuclear deterrence and stability in Southern Asia that, 'a robust, trusted, reliable, deniable backchannel between their leaderships is the most promising means by which India and Pakistan could achieve greater strategic and nuclear-deterrence stability . . . Such a mechanism should help avoid or mitigate the costs of any future crisis as well as eventually help India and Pakistan to adopt new CBMs on the way to building greater trust' ('Nuclear Deterrence and Stability in South Asia: Perceptions and Realities', The International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 2021, p.4). Levesque, Bowen and Gill, however, see the development of trust as a consequence of new CBMs, whereas we find that trust-building processes are a necessary precondition for the development of new CBMs and for CBMs to work effectively (for a fuller development of the argument, see Wheeler, Cervasio, and Spilman, 'Communicating in Nuclear Crises Amidst Distrust'). On the challenge of projecting signals of inherent credibility in adversarial relationships, see Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[26] For a discussion of this challenge of how to embed interpersonal trust in the bureaucracies and societies of adversarial states, see Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, pp. 190-200, 251-7 and Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp. 276-80.

[27] Manpreet Sethi, *Complexities of Achieving Strategic Stability in Southern Asia: An Indian Perspective* (Toda Peace Institute, 2020). https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-90_manpreet-sethi.pdf (accessed 19 March 2023).

[28] Sethi, *Complexities of Achieving Strategic Stability*; Manpreet Sethi, 'Nuclear Risks in Southern Asia: The Chain Conundrum' in *Nuclear Risk Reduction: Closing Pathways to Use*, ed. Wilfred Wan (UNIDIR, 2020). https://unidir.org/publication/nuclear-risk-reduction-closing-pathways-use (accessed 19 March 2023).

[29] For more information on this, see Nirupama Subramanian, 'The Importance of Media Coverage for Mutual Understanding: What Way Forward for Indian and Pakistani Journalists in India and Pakistan to Cover Each Other's Countries?' in *Exploring India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms through Nuclear Responsibilities*, ed. Akhtar et al.

to learn and build bonds.[30] Participants agreed that a resurgence of this kind of cultural exchange would help foster mutual understanding that may benefit long-term risk reduction efforts.

9. In the wake of public apathy and political complacency, there are also calls to bring nuclear risks back into the popular imagination.[31] ***Awareness raising of nuclear risks through popular culture*** is one possible way to develop a shared sense of risk amongst Southern Asia communities. Specifically, it was suggested that regional film or television could collaborate to depict the consequences and harms of nuclear weapons use in Southern Asia, in the style of *The Day After* – a 1983 film that follows people's lives following a nuclear explosion in Kansas.

10. To foster mutual understanding between the Track 2 communities, ***the establishment of a regional Women in Security Enterprise (WISE)*** was also suggested. WISE would include women from India and Pakistan, and ideally China, working on security issues and would operate virtually given the travel limitations between the countries. WISE was suggested to fulfil a number of objectives including:

    a. Providing an opportunity to develop connections in ways that are not possible through diplomatic tracks. Such connections serve to facilitate mutual understanding about one another's security environment and concerns, exchange knowledge and best practices, and create space for future collaboration. It was noted that a group of women discussing these issues would likely cause less political concern and raise less political suspicion than a mixed gendered approach;

    b. Empowering women in the field and in the region;

    c. Securing a pipeline of expertise in the region;[32]

11. Numerous global women's networks already exist, but it was noted that they may be problematic and treated with suspicion in Southern Asia. Moreover, the purpose of this network in the first instance is to create space for the exchange of views between the nuclear powers within the region. The great value in this suggestion is that it can be started immediately.

12. A network of this kind should also ***encourage regional collaboration on research and joint publications*** on risk reduction in the region. Participants noted the importance of fostering local debate on crisis management and prevention[33] given that Western think tank work can be viewed with suspicion by government officials wary of what could be perceived as paternalistic interventions by third parties. One proposed topic of study was a gap analysis of CBMs both within and beyond the India-Pakistan

---

[30] 'Exchange for Change - India', *The Citizens Archive of Pakistan*. https://citizensarchive.org/portfolio-item/exchange-for-change-india/ (accessed 23 March 2023).

[31] Manpreet Sethi, 'Bringing nuclear risks back into popular imagination', *The Hindu*, 10 August 2020. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/bringing-nuclear-risks-back-into-popular-imagination/article32311140.ece (accessed 23 March 2023).

[32] The authors recognise the significant contribution of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) as a peacebuilding initiative in Southern Asia and do not provide an alternative to WISCOMP, but a complimentary regional dialogue. For more information on WISCOMP, see https://wiscomp.org/our-story/

[33] On this, see Kamal Madishetty, 'The Shared Responsibility of Reading the 'Other' Right', in *Improving India-Pakistan Crisis Communication Mechanisms*, ed. Akhtar et al.

dyad to identify opportunities for new CBMs. The UN repository of military CBMs could be built upon for the purposes of this project.[34]

13. A more high level Track 2 dialogue was also suggested in the form of an *India-Pakistan 'eminent persons' meeting*. Such a dialogue would be modelled on the Japanese led International Group of Eminent Persons for a World Without Nuclear Weapons.[35]

14. To facilitate more collaboration and relationship building, *the creation of a Regional Nuclear Experts Directory* was suggested. The purpose of the directory is to detail, from an indigenous perspective, the network of regional experts working on security issues affecting Southern Asia, to create a tool that can be used to connect experts.

15. Developing mutual understanding beyond the regional level is equally important. Given India and Pakistan's status as nuclear-armed states outside of the NPT, there are few opportunities to develop mutual understanding and a shared sense of risk amongst them at the Track 1 level. One way of opening up space for discussions on multilateral risk reduction at a Track 2 level would be to *expand the P5 Young Professionals Network to a P5 + 2 Young Professionals Network*. The Young Professionals Network was recently established by the P5 as a means of generating new ideas for strategic risk reduction, and to create a sustainable community of practice among young professionals in P5 countries. While it may be politically difficult to include Indian and Pakistani young professionals because of their status outside of the NPT, this or a similar kind of multilateral engagement is viewed as vital for global risk reduction and progress towards disarmament in the long run.

Pursuing 'Low-Hanging Fruits': Extending and/or Updating Current Confidence Building Measures and Agreements

16. Given the absence of a strategic dialogue in Southern Asia as mentioned above, and the pervasive distrust characterising the current strategic environment, broad policy proposals can be harder to implement. Thus, there is value in identifying 'low-hanging fruit' policies, such as updating or expanding existing CBMs and agreements, using the same notification mechanisms that have continued to work amidst increasing distrust.

17. In October 2012, building on the 1999 Lahore 'Memorandum of Understanding', India and Pakistan signed an Agreement 'On Pre-Notification of Flight Testing of Ballistic Missiles'.[36] This agreement prevents misunderstanding and the risk of inadvertent escalation by increasing transparency, without jeopardising the strategic ambiguity each side believes it needs to maintain for deterrence. However, the agreement was made prior to current technological advancement, and cruise missile and

[34] United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, *Repository of military confidence-building measures* (2023). https://www.un.org/disarmament/cbms/repository-of-military-confidence-building-measures/ (accessed 19 March 2023).

[35] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'The First Meeting of the International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without Nuclear Weapons', 12 December 2022. https://www.mofa.go.jp/dns/ac_d/page3e_001286.html (accessed 23 March 2023).

[36] Agreement Between India And Pakistan On Pre-Notification Of Flight Testing Of Ballistic Missiles, signed on 03 October 2005. http://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA05B0591.pdf (accessed 23 March 2023).

hypersonic missile tests are not currently included in it. The proposal is that *India and Pakistan should seek to extend their existing missile test agreement, to include notification of cruise and hypersonic cruise missile tests*. Such tests can be particularly dangerous in provoking unnecessary escalatory responses by increasing ambiguity on one side's intention ; and raising the prospects for misperceptions around conventional and/or nuclear attacks – mainly as cruise and hypersonic cruise missiles flight paths are much more unpredictable than ballistic missiles.

18. The next area where it was suggested that progress could be made was on the 1988 'Agreement Between India and Pakistan On The Prohibition Of Attack Against Nuclear Installations and Facilities'.[37] The Agreement states that both countries will not attack or assist foreign powers to attack each other's nuclear installations and facilities, and requires them to share a list of facilities every year with the other party. Given the importance of the agreement, it was suggested that *India and Pakistan should seek to extend the Agreement to include China.* This may serve to bridge the South and North East Asia divide and bring China into confidence building measures without directly tackling nuclear weapon issues. Despite its limitations, such as the lack of verification provisions and the question as to whether India and Pakistan have declared all their facilities as their nuclear capabilities have expanded,[38] the Agreement is an important bilateral CBM. Indian and Pakistani participants to the dialogue stressed that, irrespective of how bad the relationship was, each side has continued to exchange a list of their nuclear facilities with the other each January. Participants agreed that such a regular exchange is an important shared responsibility for India and Pakistan and, if either side discontinued this responsible practice, it would send a negative signal of their intentions to the other.

19. Turning to the maritime domain, agreements could benefit from being expanded to include new technologies to prevent maritime accidents/incidents. For example, *the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea should be expanded to include Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships or Unmanned Surface Vehicles*. Similar policies to address the prevention of incidents/accidents risks, and prevent crises in the maritime domain, were elaborated during a previous BASIC-ICCS nuclear responsibilities dialogue.[39]

Cooperating Outside the Realm of Arms Control

20. Given the current strategic environment and the difficulties of implementing bilateral and multilateral arms control measures in Southern Asia, it was suggested that risk reduction measures could be adopted outside the realm of formal arms control agreements. Focusing on nuclear safety and security, and technical cooperation for issues like verification, are fruitful (and historically successful) areas for cooperation that bypass some of the political challenges of discussing deterrence requirements.

---

[37] Agreement between India and Pakistan on the Prohibition of Attack Against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, signed on 31 December 1988. https://www.nti.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/india_pakistan_non_attack_agreement.pdf (accessed 16 March 2023).

[38] Toby Dalton, *Modernize the South Asia Nuclear Facility "Non-Attack" Agreement* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2017). https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/06/28/modernize-south-asia-nuclear-facility-non-attack-agreement-pub-71382 (accessed 23 March 2023). On this, see also Kulkarni, *Managing the China, India, and Pakistan Nuclear Trilemma,* p. 20.

[39] On this, see Eva-Nour Repussard, *Nuclear Responsibilities at Sea: Bridging the Maritime-Security Nexus in the Asia-Pacific* (BASIC, March 2023). https://basicint.org/report-nuclear-responsibilities-at-sea/

21. Following President Barack Obama's 2009 Prague speech where he named nuclear terrorism as the most pressing threat to global security,[40] nuclear-armed states have sought to enhance the security of nuclear materials and safeguard against nuclear terrorism through Nuclear Centres of Excellence (COE). China established the State Nuclear Security Technology Center in 2016,[41] while India opened the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership in 2017.[42] Meanwhile Pakistan has established three CEOs: the Pakistan Centre of Excellence for Nuclear Security, the National Institute of Safety and Security, and the Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences.[43] Despite their different national focuses, the COEs act as an important platform for strengthening the regional and global nuclear security architecture and provide fruitful opportunities for collaboration.[44]

22. In light of the unpredictable risks posed by the changing climate and devastation caused by natural disasters, the focus of ***Nuclear Centres of Excellence across the region could be expanded to include emergency preparedness*** for disaster management. COEs could engage in joint training for managing nuclear accidents caused by naturally occurring incidents as this might be a particularly well-suited function for regional implementation given the geographic proximity of the three countries. Doing so would allow for the sharing of best practices, normalisation of cooperation, and the promotion of technical interdependence.

23. Given the increasing presence and role of private tech companies in issues affecting national and regional security, another fruitful area could be ***cross national cooperation of private companies on technical measures***. Example issue areas include the technical aspects of 'blockchain verification' and fissile material tracking through 'zero knowledge proof'.[45] The idea of tech-to-tech cooperation is based on the principle of lab-to-lab cooperation between the United States and Soviet-Union where the two superpowers worked together on a number of joint verification measures. Lab-to-lab cooperation is considered a 'constructive tool' in the diplomatic tool box which may be fruitfully applied to the Southern Asia context.[46]

---

[40] The White House Office of the Press Secretary, *Remarks By President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered*, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, 5 April 2009. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered (accessed 19 March 2023).

[41] Alina Constantin, Andrew Newman and Thomas Isaacs, *Nuclear Security Centers of Excellence in Asia: Opportunities for Collaboration* (Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2017). https://media.nti.org/documents/NTI_Centers_of_Excellence_in_Asia_Background_Paper_Aug2017.pdf (accessed 19 March 2023).

[42] US Embassy and Consulates in India, *Joint Press Statement on 10 years of Cooperation regarding the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership*, 24 November 2020. https://in.usembassy.gov/joint-press-statement-on-10-years-of-cooperation-regarding-the-global-centre-for-nuclear-energy-partnership-and-the-extension-of-the-memorandum-of-und/ (accessed 19 March 2023).

[43] Zenobia Homan and Amelie Stoetzel, *Exploring nuclear and radiological security in South Asia A case study handbook* (London, Centre for Science and Security Studies, King's College London, 2022), p.8.

[44] Constantin, Newman and Isaacs, Nuclear Security Centers of Excellence in Asia.

[45] Alexander Glaser, Boaz Barak, and Robert J. Goldston. 'A Zero-Knowledge Protocol for Nuclear Warhead Verification.' *Nature. 510* (2014): 497-502. doi: https://doi.org/10.1038/nature13457.

[46] Noah Mayhew, *Back to the Future: Reviving U.S.-Russian Lab-to-Lab Cooperation* (Arms Control Association, 2021). https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-11/features/back-future-reviving-us-russian-lab-lab-cooperation (accessed 19 March 2023).

Developing an Inclusive 'Nuclear Risk Reduction Regime' (NRRR)

24. Risks of escalation in Southern Asia are exacerbated due to the lack of a binding legal framework regulating nuclear weapons use and proliferation, as neither India nor Pakistan have signed the NPT. More than a non-proliferation treaty, the NPT provides a framework within which States Parties review the status of non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, discuss risk reduction measures, debate negative security assurances and so on.

25. Decades before its 1998 nuclear tests, India firmly promoted global nuclear disarmament and opposed the NPT which it considered a discriminatory treaty enshrining the rights, privileges, and status of the existing nuclear powers.[47] After 1998, India has continued to oppose the NPT, while remaining a firm advocate of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. Pakistan, on the other hand, had been a firm supporter of the NPT before the 1998 nuclear weapons tests in Southern Asia, but consistently refused to sign the Treaty prior to India, due to concerns over India developing nuclear weapons.[48] After 1998, however, Pakistan's refusal to sign the NPT has also been grounded in status concerns, as the country 'strongly desires nuclear legitimacy before signing the treaty'.[49]

26. Grounded in such considerations, it was suggested that India's and Pakistan's status as *de facto* nuclear weapon states could be considered within a new multilateral framework. To ensure non-proliferation and collectively move towards disarmament, all states in the global nuclear order share a responsibility to reshape the current nuclear regime to make it more inclusive. There was consensus that this could take the form of a new global *'Nuclear Risk Reduction Regime' (NRRR)* which would complement the NPT.

27. The crucial difference between the NRRR and similar initiatives, such as the US-led Creating and Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND), is that the former would not be a US initiative, but driven by a larger coalition of states, including crucially India and Pakistan. In particular, India and Pakistan could act as 'norm entrepreneurs' for this policy proposal, as non-signatories to the NPT sharing nuclear risks and having an interest in reducing them. However, recognising the limitations of India-Pakistan cooperation, it is more likely that a larger coalition of states can take the initiative to promote this policy proposal in the international milieu.

28. The new regime could start as a conference and then gradually become a convention. The regime should include non-nuclear-armed states and crucially all nuclear-armed states, while seeking to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in global politics. To reduce nuclear risks and move towards disarmament, the NRRR would take a different approach compared to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), as its ultimate objective would be to de-legitimise the prestige and status

---

[47] Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 'Understanding India's Exceptional Engagement with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime', in *India Rising: Ideas, Interests and Institutions in Foreign Policy* , eds. Johannes Plagemann, Sandra Destradi, and Amrita Narlikar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 23-49; Rishi Paul, Foregrounding India's Nuclear Responsibilities (BASIC-ICCS, 2018). https://basicint.org/report-foregrounding-indias-nuclear-responsibilities-nuclear-weapons-possession-and-disarmament-in-south-asia/

[48] Shireen, M. Mazari 'Pakistan, the NPT and the Non-Proliferation Regime', *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2003): 7-30. doi: 10.1080/10163270309464042; Zafar Khan, 'Pakistan and the NPT: Commitments and Concerns', *Margalla Papers* (2012). http://111.68.99.125/website-merge/margalla-papers/doc/Margalla-Papers-2012.pdf#page=5 (accessed 23 March 2023).

[49] Khan, 'Pakistan and the NPT; Mazari, 'Pakistan, the NPT and the Non-Proliferation Regime'.

that is currently associated with the possession of nuclear weapons through adopting a 'carrots and sticks' approach, i.e. through giving incentives to join the regime and imposing costs associated with non-compliance with the regime's obligations.

29. Such obligations include the use of communication channels, verification structures, and a commitment from states towards transparency in relation to doctrines, arsenals, and stockpiles. The proposed costs associated with non-compliance include ostracising and stigmatising practices, for example limiting veto powers within the United Nations Security Council, and imposing economic sanctions. The proposed incentives to disarmament include providing economic assistance to state parties who wish to disarm; strengthening the regime of collective security guarantees; and providing Negative Security Assurances to state parties.

Conclusions

30. This dialogue achieved two main things. Firstly, participants embraced the responsibility to expand their strategic imaginations to come up with a number of proposals, ranging in scope and feasibility, to address drivers of risk in Southern Asia. Cognizant of the political realities that currently govern the dyadic relationship, a number of ideas for developing mutual understanding at the civil society level that can be implemented without government involvement were suggested.

31. Recognising that there are many CBMs already in place between India and Pakistan, participants also identified ways to update or expand existing CBMs such as extending their existing missile test agreement to include notification of cruise and hypersonic missile tests, and extending maritime safety regulations.

32. Taking into consideration the strategic chain and the increasingly important role of China in the region, efforts were also made to develop ways of bringing China into CBMs through extension of the non-attack agreement between India and Pakistan, and through regional cooperation of nuclear COEs to tackle disaster management and emergency preparedness.

33. Finally, at a more ambitious level, participants suggested the creation of a South Asian Standing Communication Secretariat to provide a space in which its members could explore and agree on their shared responsibilities to better communicate in times of crisis, and the creation of a new Nuclear Risk Reduction Regime that would complement the current international arms control regime. This new regime would benefit from being inclusive: all states would be able to participate in discussing and agreeing on risk reduction measures.

34. The majority of these proposals are long term suggestions for mitigating the challenges of poor communication, uncertainty, and lack of mutual understanding over time. None of the proposals will individually act as a panacea for risk reduction in Southern Asia, but participants emphasised the importance of continuing to strive to reduce distrust and normalise relations between the communities of India, Pakistan, and China.

35. The second achievement of this dialogue is not found in the outputs, but is equally valuable. Bringing together participants from across the Asia-Pacific, with significant representation of Southern Asia, and giving them a safe space for open and creative dialogue enabled the development and deepening of personal connections and personal trust between participants. This type of dialogue serves as one means of developing mutual understanding between communities who do not often get opportunities to engage with one another. The impact of this was evident in a number of agreements to collaborate

on some of the more easily implementable proposals listed above and jointly publish on some of the topics discussed.

Acknowledgements

This report is part of the BASIC-ICCS project: 'Building a Responsibility-Based Regime to Reduce Nuclear Risks in Southern Asia and the Asia-Pacific', generously funded by the Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Centre (CPACC). The report does not directly reflect the views of the British Government. BASIC and the ICCS are grateful for the financial support received for this project.

The authors would like to thank Mhairi McClafferty, Policy Intern at BASIC, for her help in developing this report and organising the dialogue. The authors would also like to thank Professor Nicholas J. Wheeler, Non-Resident Senior Fellow at BASIC, for his insightful contributions to this report, and Sebastian Brixey-Williams, Executive Director of BASIC, for his comments on previous drafts of this report. Moreover, the authors would like to thank all the participants of the Hanoi dialogue for their participation and rich contributions.

Authors

Alice Spilman (lead writer) is a Policy Fellow at BASIC and has worked on the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities since 2019. Alongside her work at BASIC, Alice is completing a PhD at the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham. Alice's PhD thesis focuses on power practices in nuclear negotiations and looks specifically at contested conceptions of nuclear responsibility in the non-proliferation regime. In the summer of 2022 Alice was a visiting fellow at the Centre for Security and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington D.C. with the Project On Nuclear Issues team. Outside of BASIC, Alice is on the leadership team for International Student Young Pugwash and is one of three representatives of the United Kingdom at the P5 Young Professionals Network.

Dr Chiara Cervasio is Policy Fellow at BASIC, where she works as Programme Manager of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities and Programme Officer for Risk Reduction in the Arctic. She obtained her PhD in Political Science and International Studies from the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham in 2022. Her expertise is in nuclear risk reduction in the Asia-Pacific, trust-building practices in international diplomacy, and Arctic security. Chiara is currently researching policy options to reduce distrust and nuclear risks in Southern Asia and the Asia-Pacific through an applied focused on shared nuclear responsibilities.

Eva-Nour Repussard is a Policy Fellow at BASIC, where they work on the Risk Reduction and Nuclear Responsibilities Programmes. Prior to that, Eva-Nour was a Project and Research Assistant at SCRAP Weapons, co-coordinating the strategic stability project. Eva-Nour's research focuses on the cyber-nuclear nexus. They hold a MA degree from King's College London in Intelligence and International Security and a BA (Hons) in International Relations from the University of Birmingham and from Fudan University in Shanghai.