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Crisis Communications: Indian and Pakistani Perspectives on Responsible Practices

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Introduction: Communicating in Crises Amidst Nuclear Distrust

By Nicholas J. Wheeler[1], Chiara Cervasio[2], and Alice Spilman[3]

Thomas Schelling in his 1966 opus, *Arms and Influence* argued that, 'There is probably no single measure more critical to the process of arms control than assuring that if war should break out the adversaries are not precluded from communication with each other'.[4] We agree, but our focus in this compendium is on how adversaries can communicate in ways that will both prevent crises from occurring in the first place, and should they occur, ensure that they are de-escalated as swiftly as possible. The key goal of our third-party facilitated dialogue, 'Nuclear Responsibilities and Crisis Management: Exploring Communication Mechanisms between India and Pakistan', out of which this report has emerged, was to bring together Indian and Pakistani nuclear policy experts and journalists to explore the responsibilities of the governments, as well as those of the print and social media, in crisis situations. Held in Bangkok in December 2022, the dialogue followed the methodology and process outlined in the Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit, jointly developed by BASIC and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham.[5]

> *'Our focus in this compendium is on how adversaries can communicate in ways that will both prevent crises from occurring in the first place, and should they occur, ensure that they are de-escalated as swiftly as possible.'*

The essays collected in this compendium offer important insights into how India and Pakistan can communicate in ways that can help prevent crisis escalation. Through the analytical lens of nuclear responsibilities, the papers offer a fresh perspective on the implications of the distrust-driving dynamics[6] in the India-Pakistan relationship for the functioning of communication mechanisms and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in crisis situations.

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[4] Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.263-264, cited in Steven E. Miller, 'Nuclear Hotlines: Origins, Evolution, Applications' (Stanley Centre for Peace and Security, Institute for Peace and Technology (IST), and Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, October 2020), p.7. https://stanleycenter.org/publications/nuclear-hotlines/

[5] 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/

[6] Following the BASIC-ICCS *Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit*, we define distrust as 'the active belief that another actor cannot be trusted because their past and current behaviour is perceived as untrustworthy'. Mistrust, on the other hand, can be defined as a situation where 'actors are uncertain about the motives and intentions of others. They lack the information and knowledge to decide that others should be distrusted, but nor do they have the positive expectations to take on the vulnerability required for trust' (Brixey-Williams, Spilman, and Wheeler, *Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit*, p.13).

As the Pakistani journalist Ejaz Haider notes in his essay in this compendium, the 'paradox that attends confidence-building measures (CBMs) [is that] they work the least when you need them most' (p. 13). The contributors' essays in this compendium explore such a conundrum from a number of perspectives, showing how India-Pakistan communication during bilateral crises is a complex process influenced by multiple actors and different layers of communication, including government-to-government, military-to-military, government-to-domestic audiences, government-to-media, media-to-media. Two key themes emerge from the essays. The first is that India and Pakistan have developed several crisis communication mechanisms, however, information sharing during crises is severely limited due to the deep strategic mutual distrust characterising the bilateral relationship. The second theme is that media coverage by mirroring nationalistic government rhetoric and fuelling public opinion can play a key role in fuelling or escalating a crisis.

India and Pakistan have developed two main formal communication mechanisms at the military and political level respectively. A dedicated military communication link was established following the 1971 War between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan, which has become known as the 'DGMO hotline'.[7] The DGMO hotline, modelled on the 1963 Washington-Moscow hotline, is currently the highest level of military contact between India and Pakistan and has been used in times of crisis to exchange information as well as more routinely. The DGMOs' offices reportedly communicate on a weekly basis, especially with regard to any incidents concerning the Line of Control (LoC).[8] In 2004, the leaders of India and Pakistan also decided to establish a hotline between their respective foreign ministries aimed at preventing misunderstandings that might lead to nuclear escalation.[9]

On paper, these look like robust and effective channels for crisis communication. However, two fundamental problems have limited their effectiveness as tools of crisis de-escalation. The first is that Indian and Pakistani decision-makers have either suspended use of these channels at key moments in a crisis or they have been less than forthcoming in the information they have provided. The second problem is that one or both sides simply refuse to use the formalised channels for crisis communication.

The first problem of channels not being effectively used when they are most needed (i.e., during bilateral crises) is well illustrated by the 1986-1987 Brasstacks crisis. Pakistan Prime Minister Muhammad Junejo had indicated at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in November 1986 his concerns about India's largest military exercise to date to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The latter had assured Junejo that it was only a military exercise but promised to scale it back. However, when this did not happen and Pakistani fears grew that the exercise might be a cover for a military attack, Pakistani officials sought reassurances about India's intentions through the DGMO hotline. When these were not forthcoming, Pakistan militarily responded in a way that placed it in a position where it could strike against Indian Punjab

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[7] Davinder Singh, 'Hotline Communication: A Strategic Necessity', *CLAWS Journal* (Winter 2014): 77-90. https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/908612919_DavinderSingh.pdf

[8] Happymon Jacob, '(Mis)managing the Border: A History of Practices and Mechanisms' in *Line of Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics*, eds. Sumit Ganguly, and E. Sridharan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019); Tanvi Kulkarni and Happymon Jacob, 'How Long Will the 'New' India-Pakistan Ceasefire Last?', *The Wire*, 01 June 2018. https://thewire.in/security/lasting-ceasefire-india-pakistan

[9] 'Nuke hotline for India, Pakistan: Nuclear testing ban extended', *CNN International*, 20 June 2004. https://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/06/20/india.pakistan/; Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Agreement between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Reducing the Risk from Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons'. https://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA07B0425.pdf. The two countries also established in 2011 a 'terror hotline' between the home secretary of India and the interior secretary of Pakistan to facilitate real-time information sharing with respect to terrorist threats. See 'India, Pakistan agree to 'terror hotline', *Express Tribune*, 29 March 2011. https://tribune.com.pk/story/139313/india-pakistan-agree-to-terror-hotline

(India was combatting a Sikh insurgency at this time that it believed was supported militarily and financially by Pakistan). As both sides moved closer to the brink of armed conflict, the hotline fell silent because each feared that the other might use the DGMO channel to deceive the other about its real military intentions.

The problem that India and Pakistan faced in the Brasstacks crisis was that, as both sides mobilised for war, there was uncertainty as to whether information exchanged in the DGMO channel (the only hotline existing at the time) could be trusted, just at the moment when trustworthy communication was most urgently needed.

The second problem of one or both sides not using the existing machinery of crisis communication was evident in India's response to what it later claimed was an accidental launch of its BrahMos missile in March 2022. The missile can be equipped with a conventional or a nuclear warhead but on this occasion was unarmed. It was fired from Sirsa in India and after flying for a period in Indian airspace, it suddenly changed course and entered Pakistani airspace, landing – harmlessly thankfully – in Mian Channu in the Khanewal District in the Punjab. India subsequently sacked three officers of the Indian Air Force (IAF) for not following standard operating procedures.[10] However, it appears that there was no attempt by Indian officials or policymakers in the hours after the accidental launch was known to inform Pakistan through the use of the formal DGMO/foreign secretary hotlines, or other backchannels. Indeed, as the Pakistani Professor Salma Malik highlights in her essay, BrahMos is an example of how effective communication is often the first casualty in India-Pakistan incidents and crises (p. 24).

Communication can break down between the two sides in these moments because each applies what Ole Holsti called an 'inherent bad faith model'[11] of the other side's intentions. In his essay, Haider argues that the conflictual nature of India-Pakistan relations and the lack of communication during accidents like the BrahMos can 'result in terrible miscalculations' and that 'there are lessons to be learnt by both sides that could inform new shared nuclear responsibilities' (p. 11). But as he appreciates, there is very little likelihood of new CBMs or verification mechanisms being established in the absence of a new trusting relationship between the two sides.

This highlights a further paradox of CBMs: it is not only that they depend on trust for their effective functioning but also, they require trust to be established in the first place. It is often argued that CBMs are a mechanism for the building of trust,[12] but there is little or no evidence to support this in the India-Pakistan context. Instead,

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[10] Rahul Singh, 'IAF sacks three officers for BrahMos misfire into Pakistan in March', *The Hindustan Times*, 23 August 2022. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/iaf-sacks-three-officers-for-brahmos-misfire-into-pakistan-in-march-101661263805711.html

[11] Ole Holsti, 'Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy', *Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 1 (1967): 16-39, citation at p.17; see also Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: US-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NT: Cornell University Press); Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.93-6.

[12] A good example of this is the May 2021 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) report by Antoine Levesques, Desmond Bowen, and John H. Gill who consider 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'. See Antoine Levesques, Desmond Bowen, and John H. Gill, *Nuclear Deterrence and Stability in South Asia: Perceptions and Realities* (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 2021), p.4. https://www.iiss.org/research-paper//2021/05/nuclear-deterrence-south-asia.

the historical record suggests that breakthroughs in the development of major CBMs has depended on the prior existence of trust between Indian and Pakistani leaders.[13]

On the major security dilemma assumption that leaders on both sides have peaceful/defensive intentions but are unable to signal this to each other because of all the distortions, pathologies, and biases in the communication process that are detailed in this compendium,[14] the key challenge remains how to reduce the mutual distrust that produces and reproduces these failures of signalling.

The problem in a crisis, especially one where nuclear jingoism is rife in social media communications, is to distinguish the noise created by this proliferation of information from credible signals of each other's intent. Having a secure, trustworthy channel of communication enables decision-makers to avoid the problem that afflicts distrusting relationships, namely, that genuine signals of conciliation are filtered through the cognitive bias of an enemy image.[15] What is needed to counter such enemy images is the development of trust at the highest levels of Indian and Pakistani diplomatic interaction such that leaders and key decision-makers know that signals sent from their counterparts in a crisis can be treated as trustworthy. Accurate signal interpretation between decision-makers who are seeking to de-escalate a crisis is crucial to the success of such efforts and building this trust remains a key challenge for Indian and Pakistani leaders, governments, and peoples.

> *'Because of all the distortions, pathologies, and biases in the communication process that are detailed in this compendium, the key challenge remains how to reduce the mutual distrust that produces and reproduces these failures of signalling.'*

Previous BASIC-ICCS Nuclear Responsibilities dialogues have identified the use of nuclear jingoism in social media and the mass media in both countries as a major impediment to India-Pakistan communication during bilateral crises.[16] For example, dialogue participants noted that sections of the media in both countries during the 2019 Pulwama/Balakot incident depicted the adversary as an arch-enemy, exaggerating risks and exacerbating the risks of inadvertent escalation.[17] A key goal of the Bangkok dialogue was to explore the

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[13] For example, the significant nuclear CBMs agreed in the 1999 Lahore Declaration, which continue to this day, only became possible because of the interpersonal trust that developed between prime ministers Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee (see Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp.192-238 for a full discussion of this case).

[14] See Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp.58-111; Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[15] Holsti, 'Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy'; Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*; Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*; Chiara Cervasio, *Reassurance through Special Envoys: the Empathic De-escalation of Security Dilemma and Status Dilemma Dynamics in China-India Relations, 1986-2000* (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2022).

[16] Chiara Cervasio and Rishi Paul, *Different Perceptions, Shared Understandings: Towards a Responsibility-Based Regime to Reduce Nuclear Risks in the Asia-Pacific* (BASIC-ICCS, 2022). https://basicint.org/report-different-perceptions-shared-understandings/; See also Nidaa Shahid, 'The Potential for Developing Shared Nuclear Responsibilities in an Unstable South Asian Nuclear Relationship' (BASIC-ICCS, July 2022). https://basicint.org/potential-for-developing-shared-nuclear-responsibilities/

[17] Cervasio and Paul, *Different Perceptions, Shared Understandings*, p. 23.

responsibilities of journalists, print, and social media, in avoiding such escalatory language, especially during crisis situations.

In her essay, the Indian journalist Nirupama Subramanian highlights how governments on both sides have used the media as an instrument for opinion-building, especially at times of crisis. 'A war-like atmosphere is created', Subramanian argues, 'growing the conviction in the public mind that further escalation and aggression is the only resolution to any crisis, and that the best leaders are those who promise this' (p. 15). In so doing, governments on both sides tie their hands by creating what Subramanian calls dangerous 'commitment traps' that might be difficult to escape as a crisis unfolds (p. 17).[18] Similarly, Malik explains that emotional rhetoric and the popularisation of nuclear weapons have characterised India-Pakistan interactions during crises over the past decade. Malik argues that each side has created a threat perception of the other, enhancing a sense of insecurity which has led to a 'glorification' of nuclear weapons in the domestic discourse in each country (p. 24). As the Indian researcher Kamal Madishetty notes in his essay, such media sensationalism could result from deliberate attempts to stoke acrimony or from a genuine lack of understanding of each other's context. He argues that 'both misleading and misinformed rhetoric can raise tensions and, consequently, nuclear risks, too' (p. 29).

The compendium authors suggest different ways to mitigate the pernicious effects of the negative and biased mutual perceptions and nuclear jingoism in India-Pakistan relations.

> *'The problem in a crisis, especially one where nuclear jingoism is rife in social media communications, is to distinguish the noise created by this proliferation of information from credible signals of each other's intent.'*

Madishetty argues that the two nuclear adversaries bear a shared responsibility of "reading each other right" through the strengthening of area studies, which can ensure there are scholars on both sides equipped to exercise 'realistic empathy'. This is a multi-level responsibility – of the government, but also of the scholarly elite in universities, think-tanks, and the media in both countries (see also Akhtar and Neog in this collection). Such a responsibility can be fulfilled by encouraging the development of 'communities of expertise', namely, Indian experts on Pakistan and Pakistani experts on India. The lack of such expertise, he argues, is currently a powerful driver of misperceptions between the two adversaries.

Malik argues that Indian and Pakistani leaders bear a shared responsibility to reinforce narratives and norms around the non-use of nuclear weapons and eradicate the public discourse on "nuking the other" and demeaning the other. She also suggests specific CBMs to enhance crisis communication, such as extending the existing pre-notification regime on ballistic missile testing to encompass cruise missiles and establishing bilateral Nuclear Risk Reduction Centres.

Subramanian argues that disarming the media as a weapon of war would reduce the risks of misperceptions, especially in times of crisis, and also avoid the above-mentioned 'commitment traps' (see also Haider in this

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[18] The escalatory danger highlighted by Subramanian is framed by International Relations scholars as the problem of 'audience costs'. Such costs potentially arise for leaders when they make public threats in a crisis and fail to live up to these. In such a situation, leaders who back down risk a backlash domestically, imposing costs on them that they may find unacceptable. See James D. Fearon, 'Rationalist Explanations for War', *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706903; James D. Fearon, 'Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68-90. https://www.jstor.org/stable/174487

collection). She reminds readers of how in the early years after partition, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart Liaquat Ali Khan reached a ground-breaking agreement in 1950 in relation to the protection of minority rights in the two states that was predicated on both sides committing to 'prevent dissemination of news and mischievous opinion calculated to rouse communal passion or against the territorial integrity of the other or warmongering' (p. 16).

Based on her extensive reporting from Pakistan where she was one of two Indian Islamabad based journalists from 2006-2010, Subramanian argues that both countries have a 'shared responsibility' to recover the spirit of the 1950 Nehru-Liaquat Agreement and normalise media coverage of the neighbour. To achieve this, she proposes that India and Pakistan should restart the practice (discontinued after 2013) of giving visas to each other's foreign correspondents. Moreover, she innovatively proposes that government spokespersons in their press briefings should be open to taking questions, virtually or orally, from journalists across the border. Subramanian considers that such a practice could be an important mechanism of de-escalation in crisis situations.

Implementing the above recommendations from both sides of the conflict would be aimed at decommissioning enemy images. All the essays in this collection highlight the pernicious operation of a Holsti's 'bad faith model' in India-Pakistan interactions and the urgent need to find ways of presenting the adversary in a better and more positive light that challenges the mutual identity blaming driving the conflict. As Professor Rabia Akhtar and Ruhee Neog highlight in their jointly written conclusion (a notable example of India-Pakistan cooperation and cross-border scholarly collaboration), this compendium, and the BASIC-ICCS Nuclear Responsibilities Programme more generally, are important contributions towards this objective.

'All the essays in this collection highlight the pernicious operation of Holsti's 'bad faith model' in India-Pakistan interactions and the urgent need to find ways of presenting the adversary in a better and more positive light that challenges the mutual identity blaming driving the conflict.'

I. The Perils of (Not) Communicating in the Absence of Trust in a Dangerous Nuclear Dyad

By Ejaz Haider[19]

Introduction

Pakistan and India are nuclear-armed states outside the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But just like the five Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) legitimated by the NPT, Pakistan and India are, by virtue of their possession and development of nuclear weapons, normatively — and in some cases, legally — bound by certain responsibilities. Their civilian nuclear programmes are under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. India, which has a 123 Agreement with the US under the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement,[20] has been trying to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and is already a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime.[21] Pakistan, for its part, has constantly argued against discriminatory approaches to non-proliferation and disarmament. While supporting efforts on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT), Pakistan continues to argue for a standardised approach to these multilateral arrangements at the Conference on Disarmament. It has also flagged the requirement of regulating the emergence of new technologies, including hypersonic missiles, lethal autonomous weapons, cyber security, military uses of artificial intelligence, and quantum computing.[22] However, despite having individual responsibilities, common ground for implementing shared nuclear responsibilities in the bilateral context is elusive. There is an urgent need for the two sides to find ways to initiate talks to rebuild a minimum level of trust to prevent the relationship from further deteriorating and communicate to manage crises.

The Elusive Common Ground

There are two sets of problems in finding common ground. One is, of course, the nature of relations between India and Pakistan. The other is India's perception of itself as a regional power that must find a place at the high table.[23] A good example of that, among others, is India's bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations

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[19] Ejaz Haider is a journalist interested in security and foreign policies. He tweets @ejazhaider. This essay reflects the author's view and does not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

[20] For details, see US Department of State Archive, 'US - India: Civil Nuclear Cooperation'. https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/c17361.htm

[21] 'India joins elite missile control group MTCR', *BBC*, 28 June 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-36648279. Pakistan has shown its desire to join MTCR but has not submitted an application so far.

[22] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan's Policies on Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament issues*. https://mofa.gov.pk/acdis/

[23] This is further supported by the United States that looks at India as a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific. The US National Security Strategy put out in October 2022 describes India as a major defence partner. The fact that the US wants India as a countervailing force to China has been extensively written about in the US policy community. See The White House, *National Security Strategy* (October 2022). https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf; Jeffery D Graham, 'Building an Enduring US-India Partnership to Secure a Free, Open, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region', *Joint Force Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (October 2022). https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-107/Article/Article/3197210/building-an-enduring-us-india-partnership-to-secure-a-free-open-and-prosperous/

Security Council (UNSC).[24] This desire, coupled with India's tense relations with China, means that India is unwilling to accept a broader bilateral arrangement with Pakistan that could hamper the development of its conventional and nuclear military capabilities in relation to China.[25]

> *'Just like the five Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) legitimated by the NPT, Pakistan and India are, by virtue of their possession and development of nuclear weapons, normatively — and in some cases, legally — bound by certain responsibilities.'*

The second problem has been highlighted by BASIC-ICCS in their 2022 report of a track 1.5 dialogue around shared nuclear responsibilities with participants from ASEAN countries, Australia, India, and Pakistan.[26] The report highlights that there are differing perceptions of nuclear responsibilities among different states. India distinguishes – and, therefore, differentiates – between the responsibilities that it owes to 'self' and to 'others'. Indian dialogue participants cited India's nuclear doctrine[27] as the source of their responsibilities to 'others' – i.e., as the document that, according to India, mitigates the tension between the two sets of responsibilities. This position is problematic because there is much evidence that India has come a long way since the 2003 doctrine and is no longer actually wedded to a No First Use (NFU) policy.[28] Additionally, as scholars have noted,[29] it is very difficult to verify commitments to NFU declarations. In view of the evolving Indian military thinking, Pakistan has no option but to consider India's 2003 NFU as merely a declaratory policy without military-operational significance.

For Pakistan, as is clear from the BASIC-ICCS report referenced above, the most important responsibility is to ensure continued deterrence against India – i.e., eradicate the causes of conflict and to ensure peace by preventing India from undertaking a military adventure. This requirement situates nuclear responsibilities in a broader bi- and multilateral context and underscores the imperative of addressing the causes of potential conflict between India and Pakistan. While Pakistan has also, on a number of occasions, suggested many nuclear risk-reduction measures, including a nuclear restraint regime in South Asia, none of these proposals

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[24] 'India has strongest chance of getting permanent seat at UNSC if new members added: Survey', *The Times of India*, 10 January 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-has-strongest-chance-of-getting-permanent-seat-at-unsc-if-new-members-added-survey/articleshow/96879843.cms

[25] Pravin Sawhney, 'The Chinese Military Threat is Not a 'Border Dispute', It's Time for India's Leaders Realised This', *The Wire*, 03 June 2021. https://thewire.in/security/the-chinese-military-threat-is-not-a-border-dispute-its-time-indias-leaders-realised-this; Sameer Patil, 'How India is trying to tackle China's military challenge', *Observer Research Foundation*, 28 February 2022. https://www.orfonline.org/research/how-india-is-trying-to-tackle-chinas-military-challenge/; Manoj Joshi, 'India and China caught in vicious cycle to secure the Himalayan heights', *Observer Research Foundation*, 10 February 2023. https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-and-china-caught-in-vicious-cycle/

[26] See Cervasio and Paul, *Different Perceptions, Shared Understandings*.

[27] Rajesh Rajagopalan, 'India's Nuclear Doctrine Debate' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2016). https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/india-s-nuclear-doctrine-debate-pub-63950

[28] Rabia Akhtar, 'First Strike Stability and Credibility of Pakistan's Nuclear Deterrence', *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2022): 1775-1787. http://pjia.com.pk/index.php/pjia/article/view/677

[29] Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, 'India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities', *International Security* 43, no. 3 (2019): 7-52. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00340

have been accepted by India.[30] Another important issue relates to asymmetry of capabilities between India and Pakistan. Since India is the stronger adversary, Pakistan has to ensure that it develops certain capabilities – conventional and nuclear – to offset any attempt by India to coerce it.

Given this elusive common ground, nuclear responsibilities, even while the two sides adhere to them in their unilateral context, can hardly be translated into shared responsibilities in the bilateral context.

Accidents, Incidents, and Crises in the Absence of Communication

The conflictual nature of India-Pakistan relations and the lack of communication during accidents, incidents, and crises can result in terrible miscalculations. The latest incident of an accidental launch of a cruise missile from India which landed in Pakistan is one such case of the absence of communication. There are lessons to be learnt by both sides that could inform new shared nuclear responsibilities.

On 9th March 2022 at 6:43pm, Air Defence Operations Centre of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) picked up and began tracking a high-speed flying object that had been launched from near Sirsa (in India's Haryana state). The object, as per Indian media sources and defence experts, initially followed a trajectory towards the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges, but after flying for some time inside the Indian airspace, it sharply changed course and manoeuvred towards Pakistani territory. It violated Pakistan's air space and ultimately fell near Mian Channu in Pakistan's Khanewal district in the Punjab at 6:50pm.[31]

The next day, the Director-General Inter-Services Public Relations, the Pakistan military's media wing, briefed the Pakistan press about the incident stating that:

> PAF continuously monitored the complete flying path of the object, from its point of origin near Sirsa in India to its point of impact, near Mian Channu. It [the PAF] initiated requisite tactical actions. It is important to highlight that the flight path of this object endangered many international and domestic passenger flights — both in Indian and Pakistani air space — as well as human life and property on ground. Whatever caused this incident to happen, it is for the Indians to explain. It, nevertheless, shows their disregard for aviation safety and reflects very poorly on their technological prowess and procedural efficiency.[32]

The Indian government kept silent for two days after the missile went awry. A day after the information was put out by Pakistan, India publicly confirmed that one of its missiles had been accidentally launched while

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[30] For a history of CBMs and NRRMs see Imran Hassan, 'Strategic Stability and Restraint in South Asia', *South Asian Voices,* 22 July 2021. https://southasianvoices.org/strategic-stability-restraint-in-south-asia/; Anwer Iqbal, 'Offer of Strategic Restraint still on table, Pakistan tells UN', *DAWN,* 16 October 2020. https://www.dawn.com/news/1585312; Feroz Hassan Khan, 'Strategic Restraint Regime 2.0' in *Deterrence Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia*, eds. Michael Krepon and Julia Thompson (Washington DC: Stimson Center, 2013), p.167.

[31] See reporting and analysis from a few Indian sources: Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'The Many Unanswered Questions About India's Missile Accident', *Observer Research Foundation*, 25 March 2022. https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-many-unanswered-questions-about-indias-missile-accident/; Rahul Bedi, 'A Military Whodunnit: India's Inquiry Into the Missile Launch Calamity Needs To Be Swift', *The Wire*, 13 March 2022. https://thewire.in/security/indias-missile-pakistan-iaf-security-diplomacy; Kuldip Singh, 'Indian Missile in Pakistan: What Led to the 'Accidental Firing'?', *TheQuint*, 12 March 2022. https://www.thequint.com/opinion/indian-missile-in-pakistan-what-led-to-the-accidental-firing; Nirupama Subramanian, 'Pakistan seeks joint probe after India misfires missile', *The Indian Express*, 13 March 2022. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/day-after-india-cites-technical-malfunction-for-missile-firing-pakistan-joint-probe-7816730/

[32] ''India to explain what happened in Mian Channu', says DG ISPR after Indian projectile falls in Pakistan', *Dawn*, 10 March 2022. https://www.dawn.com/news/1679289

undergoing 'routine maintenance' and that it crossed into Pakistan. The Indian Ministry of Defence called the incident 'deeply regrettable' but also expressed relief that no lives were lost.[33] On 15th March, six days after the incident, speaking at the Indian parliament, the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh admitted to an 'inadvertent release of a missile… during routine maintenance and inspection'.[34] He reported that: 'It was *later known* that the missile fell in Pakistan's territory. The incident is regrettable. But it's a relief that no losses happened. I'd like to inform the House that the Government has taken this matter very seriously and [an] official order for a high-level probe has been given'.[35] From Singh's statement that it was 'later known' that the missile landed in Pakistani territory,[36] it is obvious that while the missile was in flight, and even after it had gone off course, India did not inform Pakistan either because it failed to monitor the missile's flight or deliberately withheld the information. The incident is indicative not just of India's inability to handle sensitive technology, but also of the deeply worrying communication gaps between India and Pakistan, a contiguous nuclear dyad locked in a conflictual paradigm.

'The conflictual nature of India-Pakistan relations and the lack of communication during accidents, incidents, and crises can result in terrible miscalculations.'

In another crisis, during the PAF's Operation Swift Retort on 27th February 2019, while there was a dogfight going on over the skies along the LoC, Indian ground air defence shot down one of its own Russian Mi-17V5 'Hip' medium lift helicopters, killing six service officials and one civilian.[37] In two other incidents, 'India's indigenous Arihant [nuclear] submarine [was left] out of commission for many months in 2018; and a fire and explosion on board an Indian Kilo-class submarine in 2013…killed 18 crew members.'[38] These incidents reflect India's mishandling of strategic/technical issues, a trajectory of incidents, accidents involving various aerial and naval platforms, and the reluctance to communicate.

A number of unresolved issues within the Indo-Pak conflict environment make the situation highly destabilising. In the duo's latest Pulwama-Balakot crisis in 2019, India upped the ante by threatening missile strikes, matched by Pakistan's counter threat. Had the second round of escalation ensued, it would have been

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[33] Asif Shahzad, Krishna N. Das, and Gibran Naiyyar Peshimam, 'India says it accidentally fired missile into Pakistan', *Routers*, 11 March 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-seeks-answers-india-after-crash-mystery-flying-object-2022-03-10/

[34] Nonika Sharma, 'Budget LIVE Updates 2022: Rajnath Singh Addresses Rajya Sabha On Accidentally-Fired Missile That Landed In Pakistan', *NDTV*, 15 March 2022. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/budget-session-live-updates-2022-rajnath-singh-to-address-parliament-on-accidentally-fired-missile-that-landed-in-pakistan-2823197

[35] Sharma, 'Budget Session LIVE Updates 2022: Rajnath Singh Addresses Rajya Sabha'.

[36] Sharma, 'Budget Session LIVE Updates 2022: Rajnath Singh Addresses Rajya Sabha'.

[37] A release Court of Inquiry report 'determined that the Identification of Friend or Foe or IFF system on board the Mi-17V5 was, in an inexcusable operational lapse, switched off, resulting in it being shot down by an Israeli Spyder quick reaction surface-to-air missile operated by the IAF's ground air defence unit that mistook the rotary craft as the enemy'. Bedi, 'A Military Whodunnit'; Abhishek Bhalla, 'Budgam Mi17 crash: IAF chief admits big mistake, says our own missile hit chopper', *India Today*, 10 February 2022. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/budgam-mi-17-crash-iaf-chief-admits-big-mistake-1606217-2019-10-04

[38] Dinakar Peri and Josy Joseph, 'INS Arihant left crippled after 'accident' 10 months ago', *The Hindu*, 08 January 2018. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ins-arihant-left-crippled-after-accident-10-months-ago/article22392049.ece; Maseeh Rahman, 'India's submarine tragedy leaves navy facing awkward questions,' *The Guardian*, 14 August 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/14/india-south-and-central-asia

the first instance of missile exchanges in a nuclear dyad.[39] To say that a resort to missilery is a highly destabilising act is to state the obvious. There is no known technology or verification mechanism that can identify or guarantee that an incoming missile is carrying a conventional and not a nuclear warhead. In theory, a nuclear-armed state under missile attack from another nuclear-armed state would operate on the assumption that one or all incoming missiles carry a nuclear warhead. It would likely respond with its own strategic strike.

Further, given the very short flight time between India and Pakistan, there's almost no time to de-escalate or call off a strike. With more research and development going into hypersonic glide vehicles, the flight time, given contiguity, will be reduced to a few minutes, perhaps even seconds, depending on the distance between the missile launchpad and the target.

In the India and Pakistan context, therefore, in addition to the absence of communication during a crisis, several other factors such as the fog of war and lack of realisation that de-escalation is a shared nuclear responsibility threatens the already fragile strategic stability sans bilateral off-ramps.

'The latest incident of an accidental launch of a cruise missile from India which landed in Pakistan is one such case of the absence of communication. There are lessons to be learnt by both sides that could inform new shared nuclear responsibilities.'

Confidence-Building Measures and Hotlines

Like the Cold War, given the adversarial relations between India and Pakistan, there is an obvious need to undertake verifiable measures to reduce the risk of a conflict that can escalate from lower-order conventional fighting to advertent or inadvertent escalation to a nuclear level. This is not a hypothetical fear. The threat of missile strikes during the 2019 crisis, even though neither side made any overt statements about escalating to the nuclear level, could have led to grave miscalculation given the instability inherent in missile exchanges in a nuclear dyad.

But at this point one gets caught in the paradox that attends CBMs: they work the least when you need them most. Salvador de Madariaga, once chairman of the League of Nations Disarmament Commission, put it most poignantly: 'the trouble with disarmament was (and still is) that the problem of war is tackled upside down and at the wrong end…Nations don't distrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they distrust each other.'[40]

And yet, there is no option, given the dangers identified here, for India and Pakistan to agree on a minimum of measures that can help reduce graver possibilities of escalation. There are already a number of CBMs: military hotline; hotline between prime ministers; declarations on non-use of force and settlement of disputes through peaceful means; reducing the risks from nuclear accidents; ballistic missile flight-test pre-notification;[41] agreement on prior-notification of exercises (also includes the distance to be maintained from the border);

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[39] Sitara Noor, 'Pulwama/Balakot and the Evolving Role of Third Parties in India-Pakistan Crisis' (Stimson Center, March 2020). https://www.stimson.org/2020/pulwama-balakot-and-the-evolving-role-of-third-parties-in-india-pakistan-crises/

[40] Salvador de Madariaga, *Mornings without Noon: Memoirs* (Westmead, UK: Saxon House, 1973), pp.48–49.

[41] On this, Pakistan has been vocal on the need to revise the agreement to also include cruise missiles.

non-intrusion of airspace; non-attack of nuclear facilities; bilateral accord on chemical weapons; and non-harassment of diplomatic personnel.[42]

However, while some of these agreements have been partially respected, most have not. Hotlines are not used as stipulated in the agreements and used, if at all, only when a crisis has erupted. There have been increasing reports of harassment, mistreatment, and intimidation for diplomatic staff posted in each country.[43] Pakistan could not get a comprehensive agreement on nuclear risk reduction measures because India continued to bring China into the equation. Given the nature of relations, as also China's own perception of its position vis-a-vis India, there is no possibility of Beijing agreeing to become a party to any tripartite agreement with India and Pakistan.

Since the unilateral and illegal revocation by the current Indian government in August 2019 of the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, relations between India and Pakistan have continued to nosedive. Past experience indicates a direct link between deteriorating relations and the higher probability of conflict. While there have been some backchannel approaches,[44] there has been no breakthrough.

'But at this point one gets caught in the paradox that attends CBMs: they work the least when you need them most.'

Conclusion: The Stalemate

Currently, there is not much space between India and Pakistan for new workable CBMs informed by a shared nuclear responsibilities approach to crisis communication.

As the situation stands, India does not seem to have much appetite to engage with Pakistan. India's logic is that given its economic growth and diplomatic outreach, it can wait Pakistan out. Put another way, India believes that it can create such distance between itself and Pakistan that the latter, when the time comes, will have to make peace with India on New Delhi's terms. Pakistan, on its part, has shown the desire to resume the normalisation process but has conditioned it on India's reversal of its decision to revoke Article 370 which accords special status to the territory of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Constitution. However, political instability and economic woes in Pakistan leave little room for any government to reach out to India and offer any concessions. In the foreseeable future, there does not seem to be much space for a serious dialogue on nuclear risk reduction measures.

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[42] For details of various agreements as well as their official texts, see 'Confidence-Building Measures and Nuclear Risk-Reduction Measures in South Asia' (Stimson Center, June 2012). https://www.stimson.org/2012/confidence-building-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-measures-south-asia/

[43] Vandama Menon, 'For India & Pakistan diplomats, harassment is the old normal', *The Print*, 15 March 2018. https://theprint.in/theprint-essential/for-indian-pakistani-diplomats-harassment-is-the-old-normal/42225/

[44] 'India, Pakistan engage in 'back channel' talks to break stalemate: Report', *Gulf News*, 30 May 2022. https://www.gulftoday.ae/news/2022/05/30/india-pakistan-engage-in-back-channel-talks-to-break-stalemate-report; 'UAE Helped India and Pakistan In Easing Tensions, Says Senior Diplomat', *Outlook*, 16 April 2021. https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-uae-helped-india-and-pakistan-in-easing-tension-says-senior-diplomat/380349

The current stalemate necessitates that both parties seek avenues for discussions to rebuild a basic level of confidence in each other's intentions and potentially the elusive promise of trust, thus preventing future deterioration of their relationship and successfully coping with any crises that arise.

II. Media Coverage for Mutual Understanding: What Way Forward for Indian and Pakistani Journalists?

By Nirupama Subramanian[45]

Introduction

In this essay, I bring together my personal experiences as a foreign correspondent of a major English-language Indian daily newspaper based in Pakistan for four years from 2006 to 2010, and the predilections of the media on both sides in their coverage of each other's countries, as I have observed and understood over the last 17 years.

While the media may not be essential to the formulation of India-Pakistan policy, it has been used as an instrument for opinion-building during key moments in the mostly hostile relationship. Especially during times of crisis, this instrumentation is geared towards media nationalism in which professional journalism takes a back seat, and is replaced by outright jingoism. A war-like atmosphere is created, growing the conviction in the public mind that further escalation and aggression is the only resolution to any crisis, and that the best leaders are those who promise this. This is good for vote winning, but makes it difficult for an elected political leadership to dial down the heat. When the state wants the heat lowered, the media also lowers its tone and pitch.

> *'Especially during times of crisis, this instrumentation is geared towards media nationalism in which professional journalism takes a back seat, and is replaced by outright jingoism.'*

Nationalism in South Asian Media

The Indian media, and more broadly, the South Asian media, is shaped by the colonial experience.[46] This provides important background to understand the role of the media in the India-Pakistan relationship.

When India was divided at independence to create Pakistan, the press got divided too. In the newly independent India, the nationalist press became a champion of Indian democracy. The nationalist press, which after Independence became broadly identified as the 'liberal' or the 'secular' press (as opposed to the right-wing press that broadly fell into the 'loyalist' category during the period of colonial rule) saw itself as an important player in the task of nation-building. The relationship was not entirely tension-free.

The first big setback between the press and the Indian state came during the state of emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. Fundamental rights were the first to go. The press had to

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[46] N Ram, 'The Changing Role of the News Media in Contemporary India.' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72, PART-II (2011): 1289-1310. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44145741

submit itself to censorship. Thousands of journalists were arrested. With honourable exceptions, the press surrendered. 'You were asked only to bend, but you crawled',[47] was the observation by L.K. Advani, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; then Jan Sangh) leader who took part in the political opposition to the Emergency, and was later India's home minister.

In the 1980s, the media, still upset over the Emergency, was combative, especially when the Rajiv Gandhi government tried to introduce anti-defamation legislation. But even through this period, in the security crises that continued to plague India, the Indian media, still in nation-building mode, kept to statist narratives.

Kargil, the first India-Pakistan conflict a year after the two sides went nuclear, established television—the government had permitted private TV just a few years earlier—as a medium through which the state, and government could mobilise public opinion. It was known as India's 'first televised war'. Newspapers too offered wall to wall coverage, as nationalistic as television's.

'A war-like atmosphere is created, growing the conviction in the public mind that further escalation and aggression is the only resolution to any crisis, and that the best leaders are those who promise this.'

Government-Media Cooperation and the Media's India-Pakistan Coverage

From the get go, the governments of India and Pakistan both knew that the press in each country could play a role in India-Pakistan relations and that this required some degree of co-option of the media.

In April 1950, Prime Ministers Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan of Pakistan arrived at an agreement known as the Liaquat-Nehru Pact.[48] The massive and violent transfer of Hindu and Muslim populations at Partition was still not behind the two countries. Communal elements on both sides, including in the press, were actively stoking the fires through warmongering.[49]

It was against this background that the two prime ministers signed the 1950 agreement to ensure that the minority citizens in their respective territories (Muslims in India; Hindus in Pakistan) had a 'full sense of security.' Among the provisions in the agreement was a section asking the two sides to prevent dissemination of news and mischievous opinion calculated to rouse communal passion or against the territorial integrity of the other or warmongering. Following the Nehru-Liaquat Pact, a Joint Press Code[50] was adopted in June 1950 by the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference and the Pakistan Newspaper Editors' Conference.

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[47] Mohan Sundar Rajan, 'Remembering the Emergency', *Deccan Herald*, 21 June 2021.
https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/right-in-the-middle/remembering-the-emergency-999631.html

[48] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Agreement Between the Governments of India and Pakistan Regarding Security and Rights of Minorities (Nehru-Liaquat Agreement)', signed on 08 April 1950.
https://mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/PA50B1228.pdf

[49] Pallavi Raghavan, 'India-Pakistan's 1950 Code on Media Portrayal of Each Other Is Relevant Even Today', *The Wire*, 15 January 2017. https://thewire.in/culture/india-pakistan-press-code-media-portrayal

[50] Avtar Singh Bhasin, *India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007: A Documentary Study (Set of Ten Volumes)* (New Delhi: Geetike Publishers, 2012). https://mea.gov.in/Images/pdf/India-Pakistan-std.pdf

Notably, the editors suggested that the code would be implemented better if 'the two governments' worked 'more closely in the endeavour to manoeuvre the coverage on either side towards the desired ends'.[51] One of the editors, Pir Ali Muhmmad Rashidi of the *Sindh Observer*, suggested that two members from the Ministry of Information could participate in its deliberations.[52] This co-operation between the press on both sides however was short-lived. What has remained though is the idea of co-option of the media by the government, with the objectives turned on their head, or at least, the 'desired ends' of the co-operation not as clearly defined as they were in 1950.

The objectives are now a moving target. They depend on the temperature of India-Pakistan relations at any particular moment. In a rare period of relative peace from 2003 to 2008, mainstream Indian media found much to praise in Pakistan. After the 2008 Mumbai attacks, there was a 180-degree turn.

> *'Following the Nehru–Liaquat Pact, a Joint Press Code was adopted in June 1950 by the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference and the Pakistan Newspaper Editors' Conference.'*

2016 was another major turning point for India-Pakistan relations. It began with the Pathankot attack, which India traced to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed, a designated terrorist group.[53] An attack by terrorists on a military garrison in Uri on the LoC in September led to a cross-LoC response by the Indian Army, popularised by the government through media as a 'surgical strike' inside Pakistan. Since then, war cries against Pakistan have taken over coverage of India-Pakistan relations in television and much of mainstream media.[54]

Pulwama-Balakot

On 14th February 2019, a suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden car into a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy in Kashmir's Pulwama district. Forty-four personnel of the paramilitary force were killed. It was the worst attack in Kashmir since 2016 and was claimed by the Jaish-e-Mohammed. Parliamentary elections were coming up in April-May 2019. In 2016, the government had claimed that the surgical strike had demonstrated that the era of talking to Pakistan was over, and had been replaced by an era of 'fitting response'.[55]

With the precedent of the 'surgical strike' in 2016, the government's 'commitment trap' meant it could not afford to be seen as not responding in a 'fitting' way. As the government pondered its options, the media asked no questions about the security failure that allowed the ambush to take place, but called for retaliation, and

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[51] Pallavi Raghavan, 'India-Pakistan's 1950 Code on Media Portrayal of Each Other Is Relevant Even Today', *The Wire*, 15 January 2017. https://thewire.in/culture/india-pakistan-press-code-media-portrayal

[52] Raghavan, 'India-Pakistan's 1950 Code on Media Portrayal of Each Other Is Relevant Even Today'.

[53] United Nations Security Council, *Sanction* (2023). https://scsanctions.un.org/h34n7-en-all.html

[54] Michael Safi, ''Blasting and breathless': fears over India's fledgling 24-hour news media's march to war', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/24/hype-india-march-to-war-media-24-hour-news-culture-coverage-pakistan

[55] Gerard de Souza. 'Surgical strike showed era of talks is over, we now hit back at terror: Shah', *Hindustan Times*, 15 October 2021. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/surgical-strike-showed-era-of-talks-is-over-we-now-hit-back-at-terror-shah-101634205230658.html

declared war on 'terror-apologists' in the country.[56] India retaliated with a strike at Balakot in Pakistan on 26th February.

In an unattributable conversation with this writer, a senior security official conceded that the missiles might have missed their target and no one was killed but said it was providential as 'images of dead and bleeding children on television' could have played into Pakistan's hands and been a disaster for India.

In the war-like frenzy, Indian media pushed to the back the story of a helicopter crash at Budgam on the outskirts of Srinagar on 27th February after initial speculation that it was hit by Pakistani missiles.[57] Six IAF personnel were killed in this crash. Only weeks later would it emerge that the helicopter was hit by 'friendly fire'. *The Economic Times*, which broke the story, carried a two-column report on an inside page with this obtuse headline 'Budgam: Indian missile fired before Mi17 V5 chopper crash'.[58]

'The government's 'commitment trap' meant it could not afford to be seen as not responding in a 'fitting' way.'

The Brahmos Episode

On 10th March 2022, Major General Babar Iftikhar, the head of Pakistan's Inter-Service Public Relations, the media arm of the Pakistan military, announced in a press conference that on the previous day, an unarmed Indian supersonic missile had landed within Pakistani territory.[59] There were no casualties. Iftikhar said Pakistan believed it was an accident, but called attention to technical lapses on the Indian side that led to this incident.[60]

India's statement issued on 11th March noted that the 'accidental firing' was 'deeply regrettable' and an inquiry into the incident would be instigated.[61] Indian TV channels that have a surfeit of military experts on their panels who are wheeled out in every crisis with Pakistan, were strangely quiet about this episode despite all its serious ramifications. TV channels reported more robustly India's dismissal of Pakistan's demand for a 'joint

[56] Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, 'TV channels' idea of 'revenge' for Pulwama: Quizzing Army veterans and declaring studio war', *Scroll.in,* 16 February 2019. https://scroll.in/article/913429/tv-channels-idea-of-revenge-for-pulwama-quizzing-army-veterans-and-declaring-studio-war

[57] 'IAF missile brought down Mi-17 aircraft in Budgam, says probe', *The Indian Express*, 23 August 2019. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/iaf-chopper-budgam-crash-hit-by-indian-missile-probe-report-balakot-airstrike-pulwama-pakistan-5931776/

[58] Manu Pubby, 'Budgam: Indian missile fired before Mi17 V5 chopper crash', *The Economic Times*, 01 April 2019. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/budgam-indian-missile-fired-before-mi17-v5-chopper-crash/articleshow/68623744.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

[59] AYR News, 'Important News Conference of DG ISPR Major General Babar Iftikhar', 10 March 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBgeuoRrdbo

[60] AYR News, 'Important News Conference of Major General Iftikhar'.

[61] Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 'Statement on accidental firing of missile', 11 March 2022. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1805148

inquiry'[62] into the lapse. Later in the year, three IAF officers were sacked after a court of enquiry found them responsible for the incident.[63] The details of the enquiry have not been made public.

Ultimately, there can be no climb down on Pakistan by the media – not until there is a need to build a different kind of consensus. Given this, a softer line on Pakistan may also affect the particular media organisation's ratings. Politicians fear the same about their ratings.

An Indian Journalist in Pakistan: A Personal Story

I arrived in Islamabad in May 2006 as *The Hindu*'s foreign correspondent in Pakistan. Through an informal agreement between the two countries dating back to the mid-1990s, both sides allowed two resident journalists from the other side to be based in their capitals. For India, it was *The Hindu* and the wire service, *Press Trust of India*. From Pakistan, state run organisations took the two spots in Delhi: *Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation* and the *Associated Press of Pakistan*.

A part of the period of my assignment (2006-2010) was the best phase in recent memory in India-Pakistan ties. Yet as I have written elsewhere, I was suspect in Pakistani official eyes, and was hauled up once for not staying within 'red lines', though I was never told what those red lines were.[64] I left Pakistan in 2010 as my visa was not renewed. The two sides discontinued the practice of resident journalists in each other's countries in 2013.

From my own experience in Pakistan, I can say with confidence that posting foreign correspondents in each other's countries is a valuable way of understanding the other side. It helps communicate to the reading audience aspects of the country they may not get from official narratives, and to governments, what they might miss if they only rely on official interactions.

At the time, the terms of an Indian journalist's visa were more restrictive than those of other foreign correspondents in Pakistan. I was to be based in Islamabad, and my visa permitted visits to Karachi and Lahore. I struggled every year to have my visa renewed, until 2009, when I was told to leave the country in two weeks with no reasons given for the visa cancellation. After a flurry of correspondence between *The Hindu* and the Pakistani government, it was agreed that I would stay for a further six months until February 2010, when the newspaper would be able to send a replacement.

Men from the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) tailed me all the time. It was an in-your-face instrument, intended to intimidate me, and discourage people from interacting with me. Those who did, received calls from blank numbers asking what their business with me was. Those who visited me were questioned as they left.

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[62] 'Pakistan calls India's action over missile incident 'inadequate', redemands joint probe', *The Hindu*, 25 August 2022. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pakistan-calls-indias-action-over-missile-incident-inadequate-redemands-joint-probe/article65808554.ece

[63] Dinakar Peri, 'IAF sacks 3 officers in missile firing case', *The Hindu*, 23 August 2022. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/accidental-missile-firing-three-iaf-officers-responsible-services-terminated/article65802000.ece

[64] Nirupama Subramanian, 'A Foreign Correspondent in India as Suspect in Pakistan', *Nieman Reports*, 08 September 2010. https://niemanreports.org/articles/a-foreign-correspondent-from-india-as-suspect-in-pakistan/

‘From my own experience in Pakistan, I can say with confidence that posting foreign correspondents in each other's countries is a valuable way of understanding the other side.’

Yet, the nearly four years I spent in Pakistan helped me understand the country better, and learn and unlearn many aspects of the relationship between the two neighbours. Seeing India through Pakistani eyes—a mix of resentment and envy—was an educational experience. I made many friends, and my wide-ranging interactions helped my reportage in ways that, whatever the merits of social media communication, would have been impossible without being physically present in the place.

During the Mumbai 2008 terror attacks, I was alerted to the breaking development by a friend in *Pakistan Television Corporation* (PTV) late on the night of 26th November. I observed in real time how the Pakistani government, the security establishment, and the media worked to project Pakistan as the victim of the attacks.[65] In January 2009, when Pakistani authorities were still in denial that the terrorists were Pakistani, a shocked Pakistani media reported that the Pakistani national security adviser had told Indian media that Ajmal Kasab, the lone gunman captured alive, was a Pakistani.[66] He was sacked by Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani.

At the height of the crisis, a top Indian diplomat in Pakistan briefed a select group of Pakistani journalists[67] that President Asif Ali Zardari had been hoaxed by an unidentified caller pretending to be the Indian foreign minister. Furious at the briefing, the Pakistani government denied it was a hoax, and said it had been traced to a verified official number of the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi. The briefing was unusual—the two Islamabad-based Indian journalists (including myself) were not invited—because of the Indian decision to reach out to Pakistani media at a time of extreme media polarisation. It had never happened before, and to the best of my knowledge it did not happen again.

At a time when the Indian government seemed to believe that General Pervez Musharraf remained strongly placed as the country's leader,[68] my reportage of the lawyers' agitation against him, and the developments thereafter, suggested that he had bitten off more than he could handle.[69]

I was also the only Indian in the Lahore court room that was hearing Hafiz Saeed's plea against his preventive detention following his designation by the UNSC in December 2008, and was able to report extensively on the

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[65] Nirupama Subramanian. 'Pak Media Declare War on Their Indian Counterparts', *The Hindu*, 01 December 2008. http://www.hindu.com/2008/12/01/stories/2008120155891300.html

[66] 'Ajmal's nationality confirmed', *Dawn*, 08 January 2009. https://www.dawn.com/news/856680/ajmal-s-nationality-confirmed

[67] This is private information to the Author.

[68] B. Raman. 'Mushy About Mush', *Outlook*, 03 February 2022. https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/mushy-about-mush/236251

[69] Shubha Singh. 'The Indian media's Pakistan obsession', *The Hoot*, 26 March 2007. http://asu.thehoot.org/story_popup/the-indian-media-s-pakistan-obsession-2517

proceedings.[70] I was a witness to Saeed's brother-in-law, the recently designated Abdul Rehamn Makki, threatening India from a public platform in Islamabad.[71]

Being based in Islamabad allowed me to write about not only India-Pakistan relations, but also about people, art, culture, music, and life in general in Pakistan.[72] While the issue of terrorism is important and has more impact on bilateral relations, I felt it was important to dispel the notion in India that every Pakistani is a terrorist or a terrorism sympathiser.

'The nearly four years I spent in Pakistan helped me understand the country better, and learn and unlearn many aspects of the relationship between the two neighbours. Seeing India through Pakistani eyes – a mix of resentment and envy – was an educational experience.'

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

What can India and Pakistan, and the Indian and Pakistani media, do as ways forward? I make three recommendations:

1. The Indian and Pakistani governments must give visas freely to journalists from the other country. This should include resident visas to enable longer tours of duty. There should be no restrictions on numbers.

2. On India-Pakistan issues, both sides must reach out to journalists on the other side regularly and take questions from them, particularly during crises. Regular government briefings and press conferences should be open to all foreign correspondents (assuming that Indian and Pakistani journalists will get resident visas in each other's countries at some stage). In Pakistan, I was invited to the regular Foreign Office briefing but not to the ones in the other ministries.

3. Indian and Pakistani journalists should set up formal mechanisms for sharing news and views, such as an India-Pakistan news agency. The Mumbai Press Club and Karachi Press Club established a formal link in 2011, and facilitated visits by their journalist members to each other's countries until visas became difficult to obtain.[73]

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[70] Nirupama Subramanian, 'Lahore HC quashes two cases against Saeed', *The Hindu*, 12 October 2009. https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/Lahore-HC-quashes-two-cases-against-Saeed/article16886282.ece; Nirupama Subramanian, 'Two courtrooms and a peace process', *New Age Islam*, 23 May 2009. https://www.newageislam.com/current-affairs/nirupama-subramanian/india-pakistan-peace-process-hinges-decisions-lahore-high-court/d/1423

[71] Nirupama Subramanian, 'JuD vows to take Kashmir by force', *The Hindu*, 17 November 2021, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/JuD-vows-to-take-Kashmir-by-force/article16812831.ece

[72] See, for example, Nirupama Subramanian, 'Pakistan's Ajoka theatre told not to come to India', *The Hindu*, 12 January 2009. https://eoi.gov.in/eoisearch/MyPrint.php?2225?000/0017; Nirupama Subramanian, 'Cross-border project to save a Pakistani art treasure', *The Hindu*, 17 October 2009. https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/Cross-border-project-to-save-a-Pakistani-art-treasure/article16887142.ece

[73] 'The Press Club of Mumbai holds 'Karachi week'', *Aman ki Asha*, 23 September 2012. https://amankiasha.com/the-press-club-of-mumbai-holds-karachi-week/

III. Restoring Responsible Communication as a Key to Trust Building Between India and Pakistan

By Salma Malik[74]

Introduction

The October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis has been a textbook example of how the leadership of two rival superpowers, realising the intensity of the problem they were facing, chose prudence and caution at a time when the slightest miscommunication or error in judgement could have resulted in catastrophic consequences – not only for the US and the Soviet Union, but for the entire world. What saved the day was the establishment of a communication thread between the US president John. F. Kennedy and his Soviet counterpart Nikita Khrushchev, which proved extremely useful in de-escalating a situation that could have led to a nuclear war.

Less than two decades after the Second World War, the world that Kennedy and Khrushchev inherited was different, and predictably dangerous. With the inclusion of nuclear weapons into the steadily growing deadly arsenal, supported by formidable doctrines that helped create an environment reinforced by propaganda, policies such as containment and strategic as well as conventional arms racing further deepened the hostilities creating an international order that was dominated by two enemy blocs. In such an environment, the Cuban Missile Crisis could very easily have led to actual conflict, involving the possibility of an exchange of nuclear weapons. But this apocalyptic outcome was averted because of effective crisis communication. The compilation of 120 letters exchanged between Kennedy and Khrushchev[75] provides the necessary insight into how fundamental is the need to have responsible communication at the required time between the main stakeholders that can help diffuse major crises. India and Pakistan should realise that responsible communication and narrative building is the first and foremost responsibility of the state.

India-Pakistan Communication Mechanisms: Responsible Leadership for Responsible Communication

Establishing a trustworthy communication linkage between adversaries remains a cornerstone of responsible crisis behaviour. The Cuban Missile Crisis helped create a mechanism that during and after the Cold War became the lynchpin of crisis communication: the Dedicated Communication Linkage (DCL), known as 'The Hotline.' In the India-Pakistan's case, an initial hotline[76] between the DGMOs was established through the Simla process in June 1972. The Simla accords were brokered between the two South Asian neighbours, when they were facing one of the lowest phases in their bilateral relations. Yet the dialogue proved to open a new chapter in India-Pakistan relations. It not only sought to reverse the consequences of the Indo-Pakistani 1971

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[75] Thomas C. Fensch, ed. *The Kennedy - Khrushchev Letters* (New Century Books, 2001).

[76] The DGMOs hotline is the principal forum of military communication between the two militaries, where operational level matters are discussed. See Rajat Pandit, 'India, Pakistan DGMOs Hold Talks on Ceasefire Violation and Terrorism,' *Times of India*, 30 May 2018. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-pakistan-dgmos-hold-talk-on-ceasefire-violation-and-terrorism/articleshow/64372018.cms

war, but it was also an attempt to chart a comprehensive framework for friendly and harmonious relations and the establishment of a durable peace in the sub-continent.[77]

> *'India and Pakistan should realise that responsible communication and narrative building is the first and foremost responsibility of the state.'*

The DCL between the respective DGMOs of the two countries was later improved to have fortnightly (regular) exchanges of information along with its usage in case of a crisis outbreak. During the 1986-87 Brasstacks crisis, this hotline was used in the initial stages of the crisis with limited effectiveness. However, later bilateral meetings proposed similar contact points between respective air forces and navies as well as sector commanders across the LoC as and when required. In 2004 and 2011, respectively, communication linkage between the foreign secretaries[78] and a 'terror hotline'[79] were established. However, the jury is still out on how effective these hotlines actually have been during crises between India and Pakistan.

Mutual affinity and a reciprocal commitment for peace was at play between the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and his younger Pakistani counterpart, Mian Nawaz Sharif, during the 1999 Lahore Process. The Memorandum of Understanding signed between India and Pakistan on 21st February 1999 was the first historic document on reducing the risks of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons under their respective controls.[80] However, the Lahore process, which promised a new beginning in India-Pakistan's bilateral relations post-nuclearisation, was soon derailed by the Kargil war in May 1999, and the subsequent Twin Peaks crisis in 2001-2002.[81] Fortunately, leadership in both countries actualised a sense of responsibility towards peace in a nuclearised South Asia, which paved the way for both countries to consider off-ramps. Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf extended the historic 'hand of friendship' to Vajpayee at the 2003 SAARC summit, acceptance of which was very significant in the backdrop of the Kargil war and the Twin Peaks crisis. The revival of relations resulted in seven successful rounds of bilateral discussions (2004-2012) on arms control and strategic issues, which germinated out of the 2004 Composite Dialogue Process – nuclear CBMs were an important bilateral outcome of this process.

This took place during the initial decade post-1998 India-Pakistan nuclearisation, which was a fragile period for crisis stability where both countries experimented with limited war under the nuclear umbrella. However, the learning early on about the perils and complexities of the stability-instability paradox – a concept whereby the presence of nuclear weapons can paradoxically create incentives for low-level conflicts and provoke instability

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[77] Peace Agreements Digital Collection, United States Institute for Peace, 'Agreement Between the Government of India and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Bilateral Relations (Simla Agreement)', signed on 02 July 1972. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/ip_simla_07021972.pdf

[78] 'Nuke hotline for India, Pakistan: Nuclear testing ban extended'; see also 'Agreement between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Reducing the Risk from Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons'.

[79] Popularly referred to as the "terror Hotline". On March 28 2011, a hotline was established between the home secretary of India and the interior secretary of Pakistan to facilitate real-time information sharing with respect to terrorist threats. 'India, Pakistan agree to 'terror hotline'', *Express Tribune*, 29 March 2011. https://tribune.com.pk/story/139313/india-pakistan-agree-to-terror-hotline

[80] United Nations Peacemaker, 'Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of India and Pakistan', signed on 21 February 1999. https://peacemaker.un.org/indiapakistan-memorandum99

[81] For a detailed account of the Twin Peaks Crisis see Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, *US Crisis Management in South Asia's Twin Peaks Crisis: Report 57*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: Stimson Center, September 2014). https://www.stimson.org/2006/us-crisis-management-south-asias-twin-peaks-crisis/

– made them realise the limits of their brinkmanship, pushing both countries to explore confidence building measures. However, this learning has not ushered in a period of long-term peace. Locked in a perennial conflict, the discourse in both countries on nuclear weapons has been prefaced with emotional rhetoric signalling the threat of use, crisis after crisis. A discourse on nuclear responsibilities is required for their mutual nuclear learning to find its anchor and inform future policies. The absence of a conversation in academia, policy circles, and social media in India and Pakistan on their unilateral and shared nuclear responsibilities has resulted in a different form of narrative which has popularised and normalised the presence of nuclear weapons in both countries.

> *'Locked in a perennial conflict, the discourse in both countries on nuclear weapons has been prefaced with emotional rhetoric signalling the threat of use, crisis after crisis. A discourse on nuclear responsibilities is required for their mutual nuclear learning to find its anchor and inform future policies.'*

Raminder Kaur's writing on the intricate entanglement of nuclear discourse with religious ethos and its permeation among wider population is a fascinating view, where gods from the epic Mahabharata are shown giving their blessings to nuclear power for national welfare.[82] Raminder refers to this notion as the 'sanctification discourse', that in combination with the legacy of national strength and nuclear swadesh (self-reliance) is most critical in countering the threat of the external others. According to Kaur, creating a threat perception of 'the other' sitting right outside the door has not only enhanced a sense of insecurity and provided an 'extra boost to nuclear armament', but also enhanced salience of the changing nature of the other. Having both internal and external constituents, this narrative has found a strong domestic constituency inside India.[83] Similar glorification is to be found in the public discourse in Pakistan, where nuclear weapons have been considered as the solution to all of Pakistan's problems when it comes to its conflict with India. Even though there is no official patronage for such populist narrative and jingoism in Pakistan, there has also been no official censure by both sides when religious thought leaders, be they in Pakistan,[84] or political leaders in India, stir public sentiment through their passionate speeches, making nuclear weapons a weapon of public currency and, in so doing, lower the psychological threshold to use.

Responsible communication and narrative building around the non-use of nuclear weapons, reinforcing the nuclear taboo, is the first and foremost responsibility of the state. Such communication is not only critical between two nuclear adversaries, but also within each country with their populace. As home to one fourth of humanity, the leadership on both sides must encourage a dialogue on nuclear responsibilities, unilateral and shared, in a move away from 'otherness'.

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[82] Raminder Kaur, 'Gods, Bombs, and the Social Imaginary', in *South Asian Cultures of the Bomb Atomic Publics and the State in India and Pakistan*, ed. Itty Abrahim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 150-155.

[83] Kaur, 'Gods, Bombs, and the Social Imaginary', pp. 150-155.

[84] John Cody, 'Use that atom bomb' - Top Islamic scholar calls for Pakistan', *Remix News*, 02 November 2020. https://rmx.news/article/use-that-atom-bomb-top-islamic-scholar-calls-for-pakistan-to-drop-nuclear-bomb-on-europe-over-prophet-muhammad-slanderers/

Conclusion: What's Next For India-Pakistan Nuclear Responsibilities?

In the nuclear arena, responsible behaviour warrants state actors to communicate, both during peacetime and even more so during a crisis. However, in the case of India and Pakistan, effective communication has often become the first casualty of crisis. Despite having functional DCLs during the crises in recent years, none have been properly utilised when the situation so demanded. This was evident in the 2022 broken arrow incident of the Indian BrahMos cruise missile which apparently went off course and landed inside Pakistani territory. For both countries, this could have been a good opportunity to re-initiate discussions on key strategic issues. Under the 1999 Lahore MoU and the 2004 Composite Dialogue, both countries had reaffirmed establishing communication linkages, seeking bilateral consultations on security concepts and nuclear doctrines, avoiding conflict and working towards developing conventional and nuclear CBMs. They had also agreed to notify each other in advance of their ballistic missile tests and to provide flight path information. Though there is no formal bilateral agreement, there is a unilateral commitment by both sides towards reducing nuclear dangers and risks and strengthening their command, control and communications system against sabotage and cyber-attacks.

'Responsible communication and narrative building around the non-use of nuclear weapons, reinforcing the nuclear taboo, is the first and foremost responsibility of the state. Such communication is not only critical between two nuclear adversaries, but also within each country with their populace.'

In a rapidly transforming world order, as India and Pakistan chart their independent trajectories and New Delhi especially seeks a much bigger role for itself, the question of responsible behaviour and leadership becomes more critical. The DCL of the Cold War may still be exhibited as a red colour telephone set in museums, yet the entire notion has become much more nuanced especially when there is little trust between adversaries. In contemporary times, any statement posted from an official twitter handle is taken very seriously. In the age of Artificial Intelligence and platforms such as ChatGPT, do we have the tools to combat fake news and disinformation which has real potential to influence decision making during a crisis?[85] Perhaps a rethink is a must. DCLs or similar arrangements provide space for direct, dedicated and uninterrupted communication away from public censure or rhetoric. Above all, it provides the interlocutors time to calm down, take stock of the situation, read, analyse and make pragmatic choices and responses instead of indulging in political point scoring amplified by the media during the crisis.

Both India and Pakistan have unilateral responsibilities to ensure the safety and security of their nuclear arsenals, which includes prevention of the proliferation of nuclear materials and technology. Given the history of their crises since overt nuclearisation in 1998, they also have a responsibility to not take any actions that could escalate tensions and lead to the use of nuclear weapons. Between 2010-2016, both India and Pakistan participated in the Nuclear Security Summits (NSS) and participated in activities to strengthen global nuclear security. Regional security is their shared responsibility and along the lines of the NSS, a bilateral regional nuclear security summit can be explored with India and Pakistan taking the lead.

In 2011, India and Pakistan took part in a regional workshop on nuclear security held by the IAEA. The workshop aimed to improve communication and collaboration among South Asian countries on nuclear

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85 Arbab Ali and Nadeem Sarwar, 'ChatGPT Has Been Sucked Into India's Culture Wars', *Wired*, 07 February 2023. https://www.wired.com/story/chatgpt-has-been-sucked-into-indias-culture-wars/

security challenges. Furthermore, both India and Pakistan are members of the worldwide Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), a non-binding multinational collaboration aiming at improving worldwide cooperation and capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to nuclear terrorism. India and Pakistan have taken part in GICNT activities to improve nuclear security, including workshops, training, and information sharing. Efforts to strengthen nuclear security communication and cooperation are steps in the right direction toward building trust and reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism and proliferation. Their participation at such forums also reflects the duo's nuclear responsibilities approach which often goes unacknowledged and can be used as an example to inspire more confidence to increase bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Going forward, as part of their nuclear responsibilities approach, both India and Pakistan can explore the following policy proposals:[86]

1. Establishing bilateral Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers for coordinating crisis management, promoting communication, and reducing the risk of misunderstandings that could lead to accidental or inadvertent use of nuclear weapons.

2. Add cruise missile test launches to the already existing ballistic missile pre-notification agreement.

3. Explore an agreement for a moratorium on attacking each other's command-and-control systems.

4. Cooperate on cybersecurity issues by securing their nuclear facilities against cyber threats and sharing information on cyber incidents.

5. Explore more CBMs to reduce the risk of conflict and promote stability in South Asia. Once the current stalemate is broken, both countries can resume high-level dialogue, academic and cultural exchanges, to build public awareness and support for peace and cooperation.

The need for India and Pakistan to return to the negotiating table and chart a means to reactivate communication linkages to avoid new mistakes and learn from their past ones, is the necessary first step towards building a culture of trust and responsibility.

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[86] Some of these policy proposals have been discussed at another track 1.5 BASIC-ICCS Nuclear Responsibilities dialogue with participants from India, Pakistan, and a number of other states from the Asia-Pacific. See Spilman, Cervasio, and Repussard, *Exploring Nuclear Risk Reduction Pathways in Southern Asia through Nuclear Responsibilities.*

IV. The Shared Responsibility of Reading the 'Other' Right

By Kamal Madishetty[87]

Introduction

In a high-stakes geopolitical environment among adversarial countries – particularly one that is placed in the shadow of nuclear weapons—an accurate understanding of the other assumes special significance. While there is a wealth of India-Pakistan expertise in both our countries, dominant discourses rely on statist, militarised conceptions of security. This can, and does, limit how we understand each other. An effective way to address such limitations of understanding is the strengthening of area studies, which can ensure there are scholars on both sides equipped to exercise 'realistic empathy'.[88]

Holistic epistemic communities can feed into better decision-making, guard against excessive use of rhetoric, and increase the likelihood of finding convergences. It is therefore in both India and Pakistan's interest to invest in the *tools* that would enable a better reading of each other. Further, this is a two-level responsibility: that of the government, but also of the two countries' scholarly elite, in universities, think-tanks, and the media. This critical investment can contribute to better crisis management, and also help New Delhi and Islamabad better discharge their 'responsibilities' – to themselves and to each other.

'In a high-stakes geopolitical environment among adversarial countries – particularly one that is placed in the shadow of nuclear weapons – an accurate understanding of the other assumes special significance.'

Area studies as a shared responsibility is contextualised in the BASIC-ICCS *Nuclear Responsibilities Approach*, which recommends breaking away from a culture of blame and embracing a conversation about responsibilities.[89] It is also in keeping with the ancient Indian debating tradition of *purva paksha*, which emphasises the need to first thoroughly examine and accurately reproduce the other side's position before offering one's own rebuttal.[90]

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[88] Ralph K. White, 'Empathizing with the Rulers of the USSR', *Political Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1983): 121–37. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791177

[89] Sebastian Brixey-Williams and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Nuclear Responsibilities: A New Approach for Thinking and Talking about Nuclear Weapons* (London and Birmingham: BASIC and ICCS, 2020). https://basicint.org/report-nuclear-responsibilities-a-new-approach-for-thinking-and-talking-about-nuclear-weapons/

[90] Andrew Sheng, 'The Asian Values Debate Returns', *Project Syndicate*, 02 March 2018. https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/the-asian-values-debate-returns-by-andrew-sheng-2018-03

Why Area Studies?

Area studies in international relations refers to the interdisciplinary study of a particular region or country, examining its history, culture, politics, economics, and society. It provides insight into the complexity of relationships within and between countries, as well as the challenges and opportunities that may be unique to different actors.

Area studies expertise enables policymakers and scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the domestic context of a particular region or country. Such knowledge can help design effective strategies to engage with other states, ranging from finding economic complementarities to resolving ongoing conflicts. Further, such depth of understanding can contribute to smarter decision-making. Policymakers and scholars can be empowered to see beyond surface-level disagreements and conflict, and understand the underlying factors that drive state behaviour. It can lead to finding common ground and more effective negotiations to address conflict and build mutual trust.

One of the most notable examples in recent years was the successful negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. It was based on a deep understanding of Iran's domestic context, including its political system, regional alliances, and strategic interests. In particular, the interpersonal, trust-based relationships that the leading negotiators from Iran, the European Union (EU) and the US developed was an important enabler of such engagement.[91] By understanding each other's concerns and motivations, the negotiating parties were able to identify areas of common interest and find a mutually acceptable nuclear compromise.[92] Another case-in-point is the African Union (AU), an organisation that has greatly benefited from area studies expertise. The AU was created in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the mandate of promoting peace, security, and economic integration in Africa. Area studies experts played a key role in advising the AU on issues such as conflict resolution, economic development, and regional integration, helping to shape the organisation's policies and strategies.[93]

'Area studies expertise enables policymakers and scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the domestic context of a particular region or country. Such knowledge can help design effective strategies to engage with other states, ranging from finding economic complementarities to resolving ongoing conflicts.'

How do India and Pakistan Study Each Other?

For decades, the India-Pakistan relationship has been weighed down by an uneasy history. India-Pakistan communications, whether during crises or peacetime, are fraught with severe challenges, most of them seemingly irreconcilable. Still, whether politically acceptable or not, both countries must continue to find ways to exercise control over factors that could push each other to the brink. An important shared responsibility in

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[91] Roula Khalaf, 'John Kerry and Javad Zarif set an example in the Middle East', *Financial Times*, 20 January 2016. https://www.ft.com/content/c3527314-bf57-11e5-846f-79b0e3d20eaf; see also Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp. 284-6.

[92] Gary Samore, ed. *The Iran Nuclear Deal: A Definitive Guide* (Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2015). https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/iran-nuclear-deal-definitive-guide

[93] F. Wafula Okumu and Samuel M. Makinda, *The African Union: Challenges of Globalization, Security, and Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

this regard is via the development of communities of expertise that holistically understand each other's socio-political landscapes and domestic drivers of decision-making. By itself this obviously is not sufficient, but it is certainly a necessity that demands greater attention than it currently receives, especially given the high degree of political polarisation today.

To be sure, there has probably been more interest and appetite to discuss Pakistan in India and vice versa, over the decades, compared to any other neighbour of either of the two countries. This is evidenced by the significant number of writings and discussions on India-Pakistan that are produced in both countries, not least in the media, although social science research and teaching institutions fall relatively behind.[94] The fundamental problem however with the state of area studies in both countries is that it is exclusively dominated by strategic and defence studies. Social, economic, political, cultural, historical, or any other trends, even if studied, are all primarily analysed from the national security standpoint. This blinds observers from appreciating or at times even comprehending many internal dynamics of the other country, creating the possibility for misperception.

Area Studies as a Foreign Policy Tool

The digital era we live in provides great oxygen to polarisation, where misperceptions push people – and states – into greater hostility. This poses serious risks of miscalculation and/or unintentional escalation of both rhetoric and crises. Moreover, the state or media on one side may misrepresent the other's political positioning, security interests, economic realities, or ideological motivations. This can result from deliberate attempts to stoke acrimony or a genuine lack of understanding of each other's context. Both misleading *and* misinformed rhetoric can raise tensions and, consequently, nuclear risks, too.

Area expertise, deployed as a useful stabilising force, can discourage needless rhetoric and political mischaracterisation. It can enable, for example, the public discourse in Pakistan to better discern the significant shifts in India's political, economic, and societal landscape that have been underway over the past decade, particularly since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ascension to power in 2014. It would invite genuine understanding and not a demonisation of the 'other', as the Pakistani political and security analyst Shahzad Chaudhry has argued.[95] Similarly, it could encourage Indian politicians and public at large to acknowledge the diversity of voices within Pakistan, and this could diminish the predominant lens of viewing the country as a monolith – as pointed out by the Indian artist Javed Akhtar following his visit to Lahore in February 2023.[96]

Knowledge development on Pakistan in India and vice versa is also essential for epistemic communities to become more indigenously rooted and less dependent on the Euro-American fundamentals that inform global knowledge production.[97] Such knowledge, which in turn informs decision-making, is itself an important tool of communication, and a manifestation of responsible behaviour.

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[94] S. Akbar Zaidi, 'A Conspicuous Absence: Teaching and Research on India in Pakistan', *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 38 (19-25 September 2009): 57-61, 64-68. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663571

[95] Shahzad Chaudhary, 'On India', *The Express Tribune*, 13 January 2023, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2395510/on-india-1

[96] 'Javed Akhtar says Pakistani audience applauded viral 26/11 attackers remark: 'They agreed with me'', The Indian Express, 22 February. 2023, https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/javed-akhtar-on-his-viral-26-11-attackers-remark-says-pakistan-audience-had-clapped-8459612/

[97] Ahmed W. Waheed, 'Knowing' Pakistan: knowledge production and area studies', *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2019): 707-724, doi: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1699401

'The state or media on one side may misrepresent the other's political positioning, security interests, economic realities, or ideological motivations. This can result from deliberate attempts to stoke acrimony or a genuine lack of understanding of each other's context. Both misleading and misinformed rhetoric can raise tensions and, consequently, nuclear risks, too.'

Area expertise – an India expert in Pakistan, or a Pakistan expert in India, who also understands India/Pakistan through its own eyes – can also help find convergences of varying scope. It can be a valuable tool for states seeking to build bridges with their adversaries by identifying opportunities for cooperation. This can be particularly realised through scholarly exchanges among such adversarial states. Of course, this approach requires willingness for constructive engagement and stepping away from the vicious cycle of hostility.

What Are the Obstacles to Dialogue? How Can Area Expertise Beyond the Security Paradigm Help Overcome Them?

An enabling environment for area expertise beyond the security paradigm is possible if both sides recognise the political convergences and windows of opportunity that exist in the relationship. For example, in the long term, both India and Pakistan face fundamental climate challenges. There is much to gain if the two parties can build upon the very obvious convergences that they share in this regard: from holding the historical polluters accountable to securing green finance to serve the interests of the developing world.

Another opening, in the immediate term, could be Pakistan's current economic crisis. Observers have often attributed Pakistan's economic difficulties to the pre-eminence of the military and its interests within the Pakistani state, which has pushed the country towards increased confrontation with India.[98] An expression of interest in dialogue, such as re-opening cross-border trade, could eventually positively address Pakistan's spiralling inflation, food crisis, and so on.

Nevertheless, the current political environment is too fractious for any positive moves to be made. Bilateral ties are fraught with acrimonious discourses, and despite its dangers, mischaracterisation remains an overused political tool between the two sides. From an Indian perspective, the most recent and perhaps most illustrative in this context are the aggressive verbal attacks by Pakistan's top political leadership against the Indian prime minister and his political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

During his tenure as prime minister, Imran Khan made multiple statements, on platforms ranging from public rallies to social media, attacking Modi, his party, the BJP, and its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Referring in part to the Modi government's moves in Kashmir, such as nullification of the provisions of Article 370, Khan accused Modi of having the 'mindset of Hitler' and claimed these moves were driven by RSS ideology, which he likened to one 'inspired by Nazi ideology'.[99] More recently, Pakistan's incumbent foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto speaking at a UN forum echoed a similar line of

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[98] Ayesha Siddiqa, 'Why Is Pakistan Spending So Much Money on Defence Amid COVID-19?', *Al Jazeera*, 01 July 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/1/why-is-pakistan-spending-so-much-money-on-defence-amid-covid-19

[99] 'J&K events unfolding as per Nazi-inspired RSS ideology: Imran Khan', *India Today*, 12 August 2019. https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/j-k-events-unfolding-as-per-nazi-inspired-rss-ideology-imran-khan-1579932-2019-08-12

argument and specifically targeted Modi, calling him the 'butcher of Gujarat'[100] – ostensibly referring to the unsubstantiated allegations of inaction by Modi as Gujarat chief minister during the 2002 communal riots,[101] a charge that has been rejected multiple times by India's Supreme Court.[102]

Apart from setting a dangerous precedent, incendiary political rhetoric and slander preclude the possibility of official dialogue. Moreover, Pakistani politicians have often tried to single out the current Indian prime minister, and hold the misplaced view that there cannot be cooperation between Pakistan and India as long as Modi is in power.[103] It is pertinent, in this context, to recall that while similar views were expressed before Modi came to power, he surprised many with his invitation to SAARC leaders – including then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif – for his swearing-in ceremony in 2014. Modi followed this up with an unprecedented visit to Sharif's home city of Lahore in 2015. Under this government, India has also strengthened its relations with a number of Muslim nations to levels hitherto unreached,[104] such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[105]

> *'Knowledge development on Pakistan in India and vice versa is also essential for epistemic communities to become more indigenously rooted and less dependent on the Euro-American fundamentals that inform global knowledge production.'*

Dialogue with Pakistan, on the other hand, has lost appeal, and not because of some ideological predisposition of the prime minister or the ruling party, but because of the intractability of cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.[106] This critical realisation is important if India and Pakistan are to truly find ways to arrest the cycle of hostility. The current environment of polarising and personalised rhetoric however has ensured that demonising narratives overshadow realistic assessments of the relationship. Such narratives are a needless distraction from addressing the fundamental challenges that actually cause divergences.

An effective way to counter such narratives, whether ill-informed or deliberate mischaracterisations, is to allow space for realistic assessments to co-exist in the public and policy discourse in both countries. Of course, proponents of mischaracterisation may point out that it has its own value for politicians, but any such short-term gain comes at the expense of the wider political environment. It runs the risk of irreversible derailment in

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[100] ''New Low, even for Pakistan': MEA on Bilawal Bhutto's remarks on PM Modi', *The Indian Express*, 16 December 2022. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/comments-new-low-pakistan-mea-bilawal-bhutto-personal-attack-on-pm-modi-8328492/

[101] Madhu Kishwar, *Modi, Muslims and Media: Voices from Narendra Modi's Gujarat* (Manushi Publications, 2014).

[102] 'SC dismisses Zakia Jafri's plea against clean chit to Narendra Modi in 2002 riots case: A timeline of how it played out', *The Indian Express*, 24 July 2022. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sc-zakia-jafri-plea-clean-chit-narendra-modi-timeline-7987980/

[103] 'Pakistan doesn't see a partner in PM Modi: Hina Rabbani Khar on peace with India', *The Times of India*, 19 January 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistan-doesnt-see-a-partner-in-pm-modi-hina-rabbani-khar-on-peace-with-india/articleshow/97142513.cms

[104] Chiranjib Sengupta, '6 reasons why UAE and India are closer than ever before', *Gulf News*, 08 February 2018. https://gulfnews.com/uae/6-reasons-why-uae-and-india-are-closer-than-ever-before-1.2170720

[105] Alvite Ningthoujam, 'India-Saudi Arabia Ties: Scaling New Heights', *The Diplomat*, 28 October 2019. https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/india-saudi-arabia-ties-scaling-new-heights/

[106] Vivek Katju, 'Junk the defensive mindset', *The Tribune*, 14 February 2018. https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/comment/junk-the-defensive-mindset-548699

the longer term. In the scramble to score shallow political points, back home or on an international platform, such rhetoric can close even the few windows of opportunity.

In fact, rhetoric of any kind carries the inherent urge to mischaracterize the other, even if the consequences may differ. Beyond those of the state, media narratives in both India and Pakistan have also often indulged in sensationalism that has hardened perceptions.[107] Both scholarly analyses and media narratives can be bereft of nuance and display a lack of expertise—which are unfortunately often passed off as authoritative explanations. The familiarity of language and cultural similarities between the two countries, which are usually viewed as a source of amity, has sometimes led to quite the opposite.

'An enabling environment for area expertise beyond the security paradigm is possible if both sides recognise the political convergences and windows of opportunity that exist in the relationship.'

Conclusion

The India-Pakistan relationship is a breeding ground for acrimonious rhetoric, uninformed analyses, and hostile media narratives. This in turn squeezes the space for potential future cooperation between the two countries. The options available to the political leadership on both sides to justify, to their domestic audiences, any positive bilateral overtures are similarly shrunk. Building area expertise beyond the national security lens can help address these negative factors and catalyse smarter decision-making. This can lead to even a simple acknowledgment of each other's stated positions first, before engaging with actual content and intent. It can keep the door open for a possible *modus vivendi* in the future, and more importantly, create an enabling environment to manage nuclear and other risks.

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[107] Ruhee Neog, 'Self-Referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises', in *Investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories*, eds. Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegeland (Washington DC: Stimson Center, 2018). https://www.stimson.org/2018/investigating-crises-south-asias-lessons-evolving-dynamics-and-trajectories/

Conclusion: *Tu Tu-Main Main*: Policy, Scholarship, and India-Pakistan Communications

By Rabia Akhtar[108] and Ruhee Neog[109]

This compendium is a product of the BASIC-ICCS dialogue 'Nuclear Responsibilities and Crisis Management: Exploring Communication Mechanisms between India and Pakistan'. The dialogue brought together Indian and Pakistani policy experts and journalists to discuss ways in which both nuclear armed countries can first, prevent crises through nuclear risk reduction measures, and second, manage crises, should they occur, through bilateral crisis management mechanisms, with minimal reliance on third parties brokering peace. This conclusion offers four primary observations around:

1. The utility of communication in the India-Pakistan relationship

2. The value of bilateral dialogue and scholarly collaboration

3. Managing disruptions to key tools of communication

4. The importance of self-reflection while being cognisant of the challenges in realising such an approach.

This essay arrives at these conclusions through a consideration of the dialogue's key observations; the patterns that emerge across the compendium's four essays (and Introduction); and broader research questions characteristic of scholarship on India-Pakistan relations.

The Utility of Communication

An actor can signal to posture or clarify intent, but it has little or no control over how the message is interpreted by the receiver. Even conciliatory signals may be discounted because of receivers interpreting them through the prism of enemy images and cognitive biases. Perception is thus key to the interpretation of communications, and is particularly germane to adversarial neighbours that are armed with nuclear weapons. In the interest of preserving its national security and protecting its citizens, managing these perceptions is in fact a responsibility that each country owes to itself first – before any consideration of what these state actors owe each other.

Historically, both India and Pakistan have a track record of blaming each other for the problems in the relationship and the downward trend in the absence of strategic dialogue between the two countries suggests that this situation will not see a reversal in the near future. However, as part of their shared nuclear responsibilities, both countries should work towards promoting responsible behaviour through mechanisms put in place which reduce the risk of nuclear war in their region, whether accidental, inadvertent, or intentional.

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[109] Ruhee Neog is Director of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), India, and an Associate with the Belfer Center at Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA, United States.

'In the interest of preserving its national security and protecting its citizens, managing these perceptions is in fact a responsibility that each country owes to itself first — before any consideration of what these state actors owe each other.'

The Value of Dialogue and Scholarly Collaboration

Dialogue is a key tool of direct communication in a polarised bilateral environment prone to nationalist discourses – particularly around the possession of nuclear weapons. There is, however, little likelihood at this juncture for India and Pakistan to resume official dialogue, with both deadlocked in an apples (cross-border terrorism)[110] vs. oranges (Kashmir and Article 370)[111] bottom-line as a necessary precondition for talks. An unfortunate collateral of this deadlock, and India and Pakistan foreign policy attention prioritising other pressing concerns, is a stagnation of indigenous scholarship on the relationship as well as a near annulment of even bilateral, track 2 dialogues.

Within this context, the BASIC-ICCS dialogue, this compendium – and particularly its conclusion, authored jointly by an Indian and a Pakistani scholar – are important commentary on the value of developing and retaining domain knowledge and cross-border scholarly collaboration. Dialogue, whether between governments or civil society actors, cannot wait for a crisis to occur (as the reportedly recent India-Pakistan backchannel talks demonstrate,[112] although this has not been officially confirmed, and there are conflicting accounts on whether it is ongoing).[113] Nor can actors rely on the misplaced confidence of being able to manage or de-escalate crises simply because of cultural commonalities, and the expectation that previous patterns of behaviour that managed crises in the past will repeat themselves in the future. At such times as India and Pakistan resume dialogue, native epistemic communities that 1) appreciate that politicised research can contribute to skewed foreign policy outcomes, and 2) understand India and Pakistan beyond a predominantly military lens, would ideally have the authority—and depth—to inform decision-making and public opinion.

'An unfortunate collateral of this deadlock, and India and Pakistan foreign policy attention prioritising other pressing concerns, is a stagnation of

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[110] 'India's Talks With Pakistan Not Possible Until Its Support To Terror: S Jaishankar', *Outlook*, 05 December 2022. https://www.outlookindia.com/national/india-s-talks-with-pakistan-not-possible-until-its-support-to-terror-s-jaishankar-news-242631

[111] 'Negotiations with India not possible until reversal of 'illegal action' on occupied Kashmir, PMO clarifies', *Dawn*, 17 January 2023. https://www.dawn.com/news/1732100

[112] 'India, Pakistan engage in 'back channel' talks to break stalemate: Report', *Business Standard*, 30 May 2022. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-pakistan-engage-in-back-channel-talks-to-break-stalemate-report-122053000475_1.html

[113] Omer Farooq Khan, 'No backchannel talks with India by Sharif govt: Pakistan minister', *Times of India*, 27 January 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/no-backchannel-talks-with-india-by-sharif-govt-pakistan-minister/articleshow/97359728.cms?from=mdr

indigenous scholarship on the relationship as well as a near annulment of even bilateral, track 2 dialogues.'

Third-party facilitated dialogues such as this one open ways for Indian and Pakistani participants to think broadly about each country's nuclear responsibilities, build on previous historical experience of workable CBMs, and chart ways forward for dialogue and communication between the two countries at various levels. The essays in this report from Indian and Pakistani authors reflect that there is a need for sustained and constructive dialogue between the two sides to help reduce the inclination to blame each other and take steps towards the building of trust.

As nearly all essays in this compendium note, communication has always been the first casualty of any crisis between India and Pakistan. Even though there are several CBMs that currently exist and are operational between India and Pakistan, there is a need for more robust and resilient lines of communication that are sustained not only during crises, but beyond crisis times.

'Dialogue, whether between governments or civil society actors, cannot wait for a crisis to occur.'

Managing Disruptions to Key Tools of Communication

Discussions around crisis communications in the India-Pakistan context often boil down to one tool – state-to-state hotlines. Expanding the framework therefore to communications in general, during crises but also peace-time, allows a better sense of the several established and emerging tools of engagement, some of them more prone to disruption than others.

While governments are the primary communicators, particularly during crises,[114] there is quite a significant diversity of actors that communicate, which challenges the generalised notion of state interactions as being primarily monolithic, or top-down. This is reflected in the essays in this compendium, which bring out the existence of different levels of communication with remarkable clarity – and interestingly, by chance. While this compendium's authors were consulted on the editorial guidelines, joint discussions between them, once they began writing, did not take place. Yet, they each focus on different layers of India-Pakistan communication: CBMs and hotlines, media narratives, track 1.5 and track 2 dialogues, scholarly exchanges, and public opinion. During crises, these tools and their potential disruption can both enable and/or disable policy manoeuvrability.

In that light, one broader objective of this dialogue was also to understand the role that electronic and social media could play in de-escalation of any future crisis between India and Pakistan. As the authors have suggested in their respective essays, social media has had both positive and negative impact on crisis dynamics between India and Pakistan. While social media rapidly disseminates information about a crisis as it is unfolding, it allows decision-makers to have access to real-time data and information to make informed decisions. Social media also has the potential to shape public opinion and thus can play a role in helping decision-makers to evaluate their response options and calculate the consequences of each option.

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[114] Ruhee Neog, 'Self-Referencing the News: Media'.

'Discussions around crisis communications in the India-Pakistan context often boil down to one tool — state-to-state hotlines. Expanding the framework therefore to communications in general, during crises but also peace-time, allows a better sense of the several established and emerging tools of engagement, some of them more prone to disruption than others.'

No side wants to lose public support especially during any India-Pakistan crisis and thus social media enables decision-makers to have a pulse on the public sentiment as a guide to better decision-making. Social media, however, is also a space for propaganda and misinformation, the spread of which can escalate the crisis instead of providing an off-ramp. With deep fake technology laced with false information and inflammatory speeches by leaders of both sides, the potential for fuelling tensions can reach new heights. If social media space is filled with propaganda and deliberate misinformation during a crisis, it will hinder crisis management efforts and sabotage any efforts for clear lines of communication between official Indian and Pakistan channels. As the essays indicate and the discussions during the dialogue revealed, there is a serious realisation on both sides about the dangers of social media if not used strategically to the advantage of diplomacy and crisis management.

As India and Pakistan enter the age of emerging technologies with disruptive tendencies, they need to make intelligent use of these technologies enabling them to de-escalate any future crisis between them. These emerging technologies can help both countries improve their existing means of communication to reduce the risk of misunderstanding between them. One such way is around the DGMOs and foreign secretaries hotlines, improving or resurrecting, as relevant, so that they are usable during crises.

While it may appear more a matter of 'political will' to use the existing hotlines when a crisis erupts, both India and Pakistan must make it a part of their bilateral shared nuclear responsibilities toolkit to ensure they are used during the crisis as a de-escalatory measure. Abandonment of communication via hotlines during a crisis should be discouraged as a norm. By using blockchain technology, both countries can make these hotlines more secure and information shared through them more confidential without the fear of hacking or interception.

'Abandonment of communication via hotlines during a crisis should be discouraged as a norm.'

Self-Reflection (and its Challenges)

Responsible behaviour, as the *Nuclear Responsibilities Approach* also enunciates,[115] involves putting oneself in another's shoes. This is a worthy examination, even — and particularly — for the pursuit of national interests. Understanding another's motivations, language, context, and behaviour makes for smarter policy-making and analytical rigour. Such self-reflection, however, is not without its challenges. The irony of course is that while

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[115] Brixey-Williams and Wheeler, Nuclear Responsibilities: A New Approach for Thinking and Talking about Nuclear Weapons.

self-reflection can be easy to disparage as being too 'soft' an approach for a 'hard' security environment, it is in fact far more difficult to challenge one's own biases rather than another's.[116]

The essays in this compendium reveal that India and Pakistan suffer from a chronic 'enemy image' problem, which is a central feature of the hostile relationship often used to rally public support during any crisis. Over a period of decades, this enemy image has perpetuated a negative cycle of behaviour which does not leave much room for open diplomacy thus making their reliance on back-channels all the more consistent. Participants of this dialogue and the authors of this compendium agree that this enemy image has been counterproductive and is responsible for both countries' relying on threats, knee-jerk reactions, and aggressive actions towards each other instead of using the hotline to defuse tensions as the first port of call when a crisis erupts. Trust building, therefore, becomes the most essential pillar of India-Pakistan nuclear responsibilities toolkit whereby they need to consciously stop the deliberate negative 'othering' of each other and replace the enemy image which has devastating consequences for the future of their bilateral relations and broader peace and stability in the region.

> *'Understanding another's motivations, language, context, and behaviour makes for smarter policy-making and analytical rigour.'*

Another obstacle is the information deficit environment that policy analysis – and media coverage, especially during crises – operate in.[117] As the four essays attest, there are at least two interpretations of how events are interpreted: an Indian and a Pakistani one. The Pulwama and Balakot incidents, for example, which have been referred to several times through this compendium, have been discussed using different accounts, as narrativised by official sources and subsequently reported by the media in both countries. While appreciating the reasons for government control of the media during crises, and its role as the only authoritative arbiter of information,[118] this conclusion also acknowledges that misinformation and information deficiency can hobble scholarly inquiry and hijack public opinion. These may be useful tools for narrative control in the short-term, but could well be detrimental to policy-making in the long-term by backfiring and limiting future policy options.

> *'As the four essays attest, there are at least two interpretations of how events are interpreted: an Indian and a Pakistani one.'*

Conclusion

Recommendations are as hard to implement as they are easy to make. Efforts such as this one must use policy praxis as a constant point of reference and focus on the possible; short of making policy proposals where the political environment is not feasible. They should also take note of the good, particularly bilateral CBMs and policy practices, some of which could certainly be replicated by other nuclear-armed adversaries. Significantly, this co-authored conclusion is a kind of CBM in itself; the result of a process of intellectual negotiation between scholars of two different nationalities.

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[116] Claire Yorke, 'Is empathy a strategic imperative? A review essay', Journal of Strategic Studies (2022). doi: 10.1080/01402390.2022.2152800.

[117] Neog, 'Self-Referencing the News'.

[118] Neog, 'Self-Referencing the News'.

As a manifestation of this trope of self-reflection, we – an Indian and a Pakistani who also study India and Pakistan – forgo the use of the third person to ask: if we were to 'other' ourselves to better understand what our own responsibilities might be, what would our scholarly and policy conclusions about the India-Pakistan relationship, and ourselves as bilateral communicators, look like? Could self-reflection treat routine investigations into how Islamabad and New Delhi communicate; the role of dialogue in policy practice and scholarship; and disruptions to key tools of communication; differently? And, crucially, if process is as important as outcome, do we think that the *Nuclear Responsibilities Approach* could help make meaningful contributions to South Asian strategic stability?

Like any great research, the dialogue on nuclear responsibilities, the essays in this compendium, and this conclusion, raises more questions than answers. As the discourse on nuclear responsibilities evolves and takes shape in nuclear South Asia, experts, scholars, and academics on both sides of the border need to come back to the themes explored in this compendium, asking the tough policy questions that are so crucial to preventing and de-escalating crises in this troublesome, yet not impossibly hopeless, bilateral.

'Significantly, this co-authored conclusion is a kind of CBM in itself; the result of a process of intellectual negotiation between scholars of two different nationalities.'

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