

# Stanton Nuclear Security Fellows Seminar

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## PANEL 1: Nuclear Challenges in Asia

### 1. Sannia Abdullah, CISAC

#### *Flirting with the Bomb: Pakistan's Nuclear Learning Between Deterrence and Defiance*

##### **Q.no.1 On what issue are you working and why is it important?**

I am studying whether nuclear learning worked in case of Pakistan i.e. what Pakistan has learnt from the Cold War and its own 20-year experience of nuclear deterrence and crisis behavior, about effective nuclear doctrine and operational war plans. The study will utilize the theories developed about nuclear learning to see if they apply to Pakistan.

The geographical congruity between India and Pakistan, nascent early warning and reconnaissance capabilities with advanced ballistic/cruise missile programs, Pakistan's *First-Use* doctrine, and India's exponential increase in its naval capabilities all suggest that South Asia's peace is more fragile than ever before. Pakistan's strategic modernization plans do not seem to factor in organizational maturity as part of nuclear learning and the military bureaucracy does not seem to take false alarms as a real possibility during crisis situations.

##### **Q.no.2 What is the big question that you are seeking to answer about that issue?**

My big question is to study Pakistan military's organizational learning about the role of nuclear weapons and deterrence stability. i.e. Pakistan military's parochial interest to use nuclear weapons to induce risk for deterrence purposes. By studying the organizational patterns, I hope to provide lessons that might apply to other states seeking or acquiring nuclear weapons.

##### **Q.no.3 How are you going to answer your question? What methods will you use and what evidence or cases will you explore?**

I am testing my proposition by employing qualitative research methods using two theoretical approaches organizational learning and cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance explains Pakistan's ambivalent behavior towards deterrence stability, terrorism and nonproliferation on rhetoric and reality.

**CASES:** I will keep focus on two cases to explain the organizational learning of Pakistan's military: 1) its interpretation of Cold War lessons, the U.S. experience of nuclear weapons and *First-Use* doctrines in Europe 2) the imprints of Kargil within the organization, what lessons are learnt and if there is any change in the institutional mechanism afterwards.

**METHODS:** To explore learning, I would be interested to know what courses are taught to military cadets and the articles published in military journals by officers. Also, I would like to probe into the promotion patterns within military to observe if there is a space for opposing opinions that challenges the dominant

narrative. What is the level of internal debates on issues of doctrines and plans for operational readiness, and to confirm if it is strictly compartmentalized and confined to a handful decision makers with the military establishment.

**SOURCES:** The literature available on Pakistan's crises, nuclear doctrine and behavior draws strength from sources published in English only. I will instead analyze the literature written both in English and in Urdu by former military and civilian officials, scientists and politicians, local newspaper columns and will also add information through many interviews.

**Q.no.4 What is your answer to the question you are asking? That is, what is your argument or conclusion even if it is still tentative at this point?**

My tentative conclusion is that the nuclear learning in case of Pakistan remains impaired. Pakistan is a weak state with one strong institution (military) that guides its strategic culture and ultimately its state behavior into a defiant mode of deterrence. The military-ideology nexus in Pakistan serves the organizational interests of Pakistani military, making it politically dominant among other state institutions, and ultimately in controlling the public opinion. Since Pakistan acquired the latent nuclear capability, its state behavior does not fall in line with deterrence logic e.g. A.Q. Khan's proliferation acts, crisis behavior (including Kargil, 2001-02 Crisis, 2008 Mumbai) and offensive strategic force posture under *First-Use* doctrine.

**Q.no. 5 How does your work fit into the existing work on your subject?**

**a) What alternate arguments or explanations exist and why is your answer superior?**

The alternate arguments related to nuclear learning rests with deterrence optimists which include Robert Jervis who toe the line with Bernard Brodie and Thomas Schelling. Jervis argues that nuclear revolution limits the use of such weapons due to their destructive capabilities. Deterrence is an automatically induced behavior when states acquire nuclear weapons.

The existing knowledge on nuclear learning suggests following important explanations: 1) States rationally learn through trial and error that changes their behavior. In such case failures lead to improvement and success as explained by Scott Sagan. 2) Vicarious learning - where states being a unitary rational actor gets the opportunity to learn and improve from the failures of other states - the proposition shared by Joseph Nye, Alastair Iain Johnston and Russell Leng. 3) Scholars like T.V. Paul and Feroz Hassan Khan argue that learning in states like India and Pakistan is taking place slowly but fails to produce desired outcomes. Naeem Salik (former director ACDA and brig. retired from Pakistan Army) mentions in his latest book *Learning to Live with the Bomb: 1998-2016* about the lessons and adaptations since 1998, calling it 'gradual maturity of ideas.' In his view to which I disagree for pro-military bias, Pakistan's learning is 'simple, factual, inferential, experiential, perceptual and imitative.'

Most often the nuclear learning literature assumes that state is a unitary rational actor expected to follow normative trends of strategic restraint and deterrence stability with technological maturation. Also, domestic politics within each state is an important variable to determine nuclear behavior (as analyzed by Scott Sagan, George Perkovich and Peter Lavoy).

**b) How does your work add to or change our understanding of the issue you are studying?**

I have a different explanation to nuclear learning where military and civilian leadership might be learning different lessons at the same time. In most states, civilian oversight through checks and balances re-evaluate the lessons learned and impose their learning on the military but this is not the case with Pakistan. Pakistan military has distinct role in nuclear decision making, therefore, I am taking organization as a unit of analysis to find the lessons learnt by military and its effect on nuclear learning.

**c) What do you think is your most important contribution?**

I am reconceptualizing the concept of nuclear learning by assessing it with organizational learning. Learning is assessed through behavior therefore, we cannot determine 'right' or 'wrong' in learning unless behavior demonstrates it. In case of Pakistan there is no 'unlearning.' Pakistan military, since the beginning, has learnt 'wrong' lessons because it served the organization's parochial interests. Therefore, now when told to do 'right' by other factions in state and society, military's response is defiance. Pakistan's case reveals that over the course of acquiring nuclear weapons, it evolved under a peculiar strategic culture that incentivized the decision makers to opt for unique policy options. The concept of nuclear learning is relatively new and has not been through great deal of hypothesis building, therefore, I am using Pakistani case studies for theory testing.

**Q. no. 6. What policy implications flow from your work? What concrete recommendations can you offer to policymakers?**

Pakistan's defiant state behavior will set the precedence for other nuclear weapon states giving a reputation cost to the nonproliferation regime. In order to achieve its force goals by leaps and bounds Pakistan has blocked the talks on FMCT at Conference on Disarmament since May 2009. I am analyzing nuclear learning in case of Pakistan. If I am right about my hypothesis then this study would give insights about other states particularly North Korea and Iran (if it acquires nuclear weapons). The domestic atmosphere and historical trends suggest interesting overlaps between these three countries. First, all these states have undergone internal crises that deeply impacted their histories and added unshakeable resolve as part of their strategic cultures. Second, ideology and its connection with military remains a common driving force in understanding their nuclear behavior. Third, nuclear weapons are promulgated as a symbol of nationalism - a factor of national unity. Fourth, the proliferation nexus within these countries and a looming threat of safety and security. Fifth, defiance to the nonproliferation regime in one way or the other.

**Q. no. 7. What do you think is the weakest or most vulnerable aspect of your study and what sort of feedback would be most useful to you?**

The challenge to work on case studies like Pakistan is access to information and archives. In fact, for countries like Pakistan it is a 'taboo' for civilians to challenge the official narrative or give policy input on nuclear issues. Therefore, in such a case I have no choice but to conduct a range of interviews (an exhaustive list) to draw conclusions on my hypothesis. The inherent problem with interviews is that they are subjective accounts. While doing my PhD, I was conducting interviews to military and civilian establishment. I found a lot of blame game on both sides for wrong decisions taken in past. At some point I felt that it was easy for civilian bureaucracy to absolve itself from wrong doings by putting the onus on military. For instance, when I asked Abdul Sattar on A.Q. Khan's proliferation act, he said it was not a state crisis, in fact Musharraf called it a 'crisis' and he mishandled the entire situation. For Abdul Sattar, it was not a serious issue or at least he claims that, while serving at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It would be very helpful for me to know how other scholars in similar situation have dealt with this issue. How they managed to prove their findings of research by overcoming the subjectivity.

## 2. Patricia Kim, CFR

### *Searching for Consensus on the Future of the Korean Peninsula: The First Step in the Push for Denuclearization*

#### *The Issue*

The North Korean nuclear crisis that we face today is not just about the immediate threat of nuclear weapons in the hands of a rogue regime. It is, at its core, a struggle over the regional balance of power. Beijing's deep fear of destabilizing the Kim regime and facing the rise of a unified, pro-U.S. Korean Peninsula at its doorstep, continues to hold it back from fully unleashing its coercive leverage over North Korea. Washington has yet to persuade Chinese leaders why joining the United States to pressure Pyongyang, even at the risk of the Kim regime's collapse, will not sway the regional balance of power in a manner that undercuts China's fundamental interests. Instead, the Trump administration has adopted a dubious transactional approach, calling on Beijing to do more on North Korea in exchange for favorable trade policies, which has failed to sway Chinese leaders. In the meantime, the gap between the United States and China has only benefited North Korea, which continues to rapidly expand its nuclear capabilities.

While the immediate denuclearization of North Korea is unlikely to be realized in the short term, negotiating a freeze, and ultimately denuclearization, will require all of the major powers of region to stand together and present the Kim regime with a stark choice—nuclear weapons or regime survival—through economic pressure and diplomatic assurances. But the rapid, lockstep coordination that is necessary to present North Korea with such an ultimatum will remain elusive unless the parties involved, especially United States, China and South Korea, can first agree upon mutually acceptable scenarios for the future of the Korean Peninsula. Until each is assured that working together to pressure North Korea will not harm its fundamental interests, whether Pyongyang finally gives into the pressure and agrees to set aside its weapons, or ultimately collapses, opening the opportunity for a restructured Korean Peninsula, a tightly coordinated diplomatic campaign among the key regional players will be impossible.

#### *The Questions*

Given this necessary first step in the push for the denuclearization of North Korea, I will ask the following questions in this project:

- What kind of framework for the Korean Peninsula would the powers of the region find acceptable?
- What are the minimum demands of each state, and what type of compromises and assurances will need to be made by whom?
- Assuming a framework can be agreed upon, how will it be implemented? What kind of individual and joint efforts will be required of each party at the regional level and in their respective domestic arenas?

### *Methods and Cases*

I plan to answer these questions by both looking back in history to learn from analogous cases, as well as interviewing American and Asian leaders about their minimum demands and vision for the future configuration of the Korean Peninsula.

In the first part of the project I will examine the history of the United States and Russia's joint efforts to denuclearize Ukraine. While the Ukraine case differs in many fundamental aspects with the North Korean case, there are also relevant parallels and lessons to draw from. At the end of the Cold War, Ukraine found itself a small country next to a threatening great power, and saw the nuclear weapons left on its territory as a means to obtain economic rewards and security guarantees, just as North Korea first viewed its nuclear program (although the possession of nuclear weapons has become an end itself in recent years.) I will assess how the United States and Russia were able to work together to provide Ukraine with the guarantees that it sought to persuade it to denuclearize. And more importantly, I will draw lessons from the failed Budapest Memorandum to understand the challenges of enforcing multilateral security agreements that are extended in such negotiations, and apply these insights to think about whether and how a credible and durable framework on the Korean Peninsula might be worked out between the regional stakeholders.

The second, larger part of the project, will involve interviewing American, Chinese, South Korean, Japanese and Russian elites from various sectors to understand their fundamental concerns and interests with regards to the Korean Peninsula. I will ask what they believe it would take for their leaders to agree to engage in discussions about a new framework for Korea, what minimum demands their state would likely bring to the table, and what they believe would be the challenges of implementing a framework, assuming one can be agreed upon. After assessing all of the interviews, I will determine whether any mutually acceptable frameworks exist, discuss the challenges and opportunities of moving toward any such framework, and how the framework can be used as both a foundation for tighter coordination on pushing North Korea to denuclearize, and as a blueprint for the Korean Peninsula in the case of North Korea's collapse.

### *Tentative Answer to Questions*

As the nature of this project is to assess American, Chinese, South Korean and other regional players' perspectives, as opposed to make an explicit argument, I do not have an answer yet as to whether a framework that all parties would find mutually acceptable exists and can be implemented. However, what I can say with confidence is that any such framework will require substantial changes in the existing structure and, almost certainly, the movement toward a neutralized Korean Peninsula. The U.S.-ROK alliance will need to be fundamentally modified, if not terminated, in order for China to buy into a post-Kim Korea. But would the U.S. be willing to part with its second most important Asian ally? Would American leaders want to give up access to bases and the ability to deploy military assets in and around ROK territory, all of which are a significant part of the United States' ability to project power and wield influence in the region? Another challenge is how one might enforce any agreements with China, a rising power with expanding interests that may be tempted to encroach upon, either directly or indirectly, its smaller neighbor in the future. And finally, South Korea will undoubtedly want meaningful security guarantees and augmented military capabilities, although to what extent regional powers are willing to commit to provide such goods is undetermined. But if these challenging questions can be addressed, the rise of a strong, independent, and neutral Korean Peninsula that enjoys balanced relations with both the

United States, China and other regional powers would be an asset to regional stability and a marked improvement from the situation that exists today.

### *Existing Research and My Contributions*

I believe my project can contribute to the existing debates on North Korea in several ways. First, much of the conversation among experts and in the media in the last two years have focused rather narrowly on North Korea itself—such as whether or not the Kim regime will give up its nuclear weapons, whether engagement or economic sanctions should be used, etc., which is understandable given the crisis situation. Furthermore, most observers start their analysis from the premise that China will never agree to fully pressure Pyongyang because it does not want to lose a buffer state nor face the risks of instability, without questioning what it would take to change China's calculus.

My project's biggest contribution will be providing an analysis that approaches the nuclear crisis as a balance of power problem, and takes a step back to systematically assess each key player's perspectives and minimum demands for the configuration of the Korean Peninsula. This is not the first study to undertake such a task, and other similar endeavors have been conducted by think tanks and independent scholars. But many of the existing studies are several years old, if not older, and therefore do not account for the quick escalation of the North Korean nuclear crisis in past two years and its impact on the regional powers' perspectives and political will for a new approach. Furthermore, many studies, especially those that exist in the Korean-language literature, often start with the South Korean vision for unification, and do little to discuss the expected demands and role of other regional players.

### *Policy Implications*

Through this project I hope to be able to advise the policymaking community at the very least on how Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Russian leaders view the Korean Peninsula, beyond just the immediate situation. More importantly, I hope to have an answer on whether or not there is some grand bargain to be struck between the key players on a future framework for Korea, which can serve as a foundation for greater coordination on a diplomatic approach to solve the current crisis.

### *Problematic Aspects and Requests for Feedback*

General comments and suggestions on the premise and structure of the project would be most welcome. Also, suggestions on other historical cases to study and draw lessons from would be useful.

I anticipate the greatest obstacle to this project will be eliciting honest answers from interviewees, and in some cases, securing interviews given the sensitive nature of the topic. I would greatly appreciate advice on and/or support with connecting with officials and experts to interview, and tips on how best to approach the interview sessions for the most useful results.

On a purely logistical level, I will need to travel abroad to conduct interviews, in addition to tapping into the DC community. Any guidance on acquiring adequate funding to conduct the project would be appreciated.

### 3. Frank O'Donnell, Belfer

#### *Unplanned Escalation Risks in the Sino-Indian Nuclear Rivalry*

##### ***On what issue are you working and why is it important?***

India and China are nuclear rivals, but both adhere to no-first-use policies and structure their nuclear forces according to minimum deterrence concepts. Both experience strong domestic pressures to maximize economic growth and thus prevent or limit conflicts that could threaten economic stability. While New Delhi is engaged in land territorial disputes with Beijing and experiencing growing Chinese incursions close to Indian territorial waters, it appears unlikely that these disputes presently contain an immediate nuclear trigger.

Nevertheless, there are indications that the stability of this dyad could deteriorate in future. A recent study suggested that Beijing may be unwilling to permit New Delhi to attain nuclear parity, creating the potential conditions for more direct nuclear competition.<sup>1</sup> India and China are presently debating their nuclear doctrines, with continuing interest in more flexible concepts of fighting limited nuclear wars. Both states are modernizing their conventional and nuclear missiles targeted at each other, and several have actual or potential dual-use missions.<sup>2</sup> The growing prominence of these delivery platforms increase opportunities for misperception of the mission of adversary forces being targeted, while they also render limited nuclear warfighting concepts more technically feasible. At sea, New Delhi and Beijing are fielding nuclear-armed submarines that could come into contact with rival vessels. There is little transparency and no nuclear strategic dialogue regarding mutual nuclear and missile program intentions.

##### ***What is the big question that you are seeking to answer about that issue?***

Given these conditions, the Sino-Indian dyad could host inadvertent escalation risks, involving the consequences of conventional targeting of nuclear forces or their supportive systems. Nor is it potentially devoid of accidental escalation risks, defined as an operational action that has unintended escalatory effects. This study will explore such risks as they could emanate from their contemporary nuclear and conventional force modernization, doctrinal developments and debates, and bilateral political and strategic interactions. Where such dangers are identified, the project will recommend risk reduction mechanisms to be instituted. The principal output is intended to be a journal article targeted at *International Security*.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Heginbotham, Michael S. Chase, Jacob L. Heim, Bonny Lin, Mark R. Cozad, Lyle J. Morris, Christopher P. Twomey, Forrest E. Morgan, Michael Nixon, Cristina L. Garofala, and Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China's Evolving Nuclear Deterrent: Major Drivers and Issues for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017) p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> For example, India's potentially nuclear-capable Brahmos hypersonic cruise missile is being assigned to its new China-facing Mountain Strike Corps, while China is introducing conventionally-armed variants of its DF-21 missile targeted at India.



***How are you going to answer your question? What methods will you use and what evidence or cases will you explore?***

The timeframe of study will commence in 1998 and terminate in the present day. The selection of this specific period reflects the contemporary focus of the project, while still incorporating Indian developments since its declaration of overt nuclear status in 1998.

The above developments will be evaluated with regard to how they could contribute to one or more of the three inadvertent escalation pathways established by Posen.<sup>3</sup> These consist of the natural offensive preferences of militaries; the security dilemma problem of misreading adversary actions as intentionally escalatory; and “fog of war” perceptual challenges.

Indian and Chinese official defense publications will constitute the primary data sources of this project. The project will also consult publications by other governments, such as relevant reports by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission and Department of Defense. I will furthermore seek semi-structured interviews with relevant Indian and Chinese officials. Secondary data sources will include semi-structured interviews with Chinese and Indian defense experts, and commentaries published by think-tanks and institutions close to official discussions on these topics. This will be complemented by national media reports. I will organize translation of salient Chinese-language sources.

***What is your answer to the question? That is, what is your argument or conclusion even if it is still tentative at this point?***

There are potential emerging unplanned escalation pathways that could add nuclear complications to crisis resolution and generate dangerous misperceptions salient to nuclear policy, even if not all of these pathways terminate in nuclear war.

Within the “fog of war” pathway, there are dangers that could emanate from the most probable dyadic scenario of fighting a localized conflict. New Delhi and Beijing are evincing interest in high-intensity, short-duration regional war planning. This form of conflict would elevate opportunities for misperception, especially involving preparation and use of dual-use missiles. Relevant dual-use targets could include local missile units and airfields. Such regional attacks would be unlikely to threaten the central integrity of nuclear arsenals, but could still erode nuclear strike capabilities while limiting options for continuing to wage conventional war. Combined with substantial adversary conventional advances, this scenario could provoke intra-crisis discussions (especially in India) regarding issuing a veiled nuclear warning. This outcome would necessarily bear escalatory risk and complicate crisis resolution. However, the danger of inadvertent escalation terminating in actual nuclear war would become most likely with deeper conventional strikes on major nuclear and conventional bases further inland.

The security dilemma and offensive military bias pathways could also affect relations. The lack of mutual transparency regarding nuclear policy, missile development, and other nuclear-relevant programs

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<sup>3</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) pp. 1-4.

(including ballistic missile defense) could exacerbate strategic tensions in line with security dilemma dynamics. Salient military activities could include pre-planned nuclear or nuclear-capable exercises or force movements conducted in the midst of a crisis, and potentially without authorization by civilian leaders.

***How does your work fit into the existing work on your subject?***

This work will constitute the first substantive stand-alone study of inadvertent and accidental escalation risks in the Sino-Indian nuclear rivalry. This dyad has not experienced the same academic attention as the US-USSR, India-Pakistan, and latterly US-China rivalries.<sup>4</sup> Relevant Sino-Indian studies have only focused on evaluating contemporary force balances and some dual-use perceptual challenges of cruise missiles.<sup>5</sup>

***What alternative arguments or explanations exist and why is your answer superior?***

The lack of significant research on the Sino-Indian dyad with regard to accidental and inadvertent escalation could reflect an implied optimism regarding its continued stability. This project will interrogate this optimism by firstly exploring the growing salience of dual-use systems in conflict planning and as adversary targets. A second, related, concern is the simultaneous debates in both capitals regarding their nuclear doctrines, as they evolve the technical capabilities to underpin nuclear warfighting concepts. Finally, these above developments are occurring in an absence of bilateral nuclear strategic dialogue.

***How does your work add to or change your understanding of the issue you are studying?***

China and India, featuring minimum deterrence doctrines and assured retaliation nuclear postures, both appear to be models of “stable” nuclear weapons states. However, this work offers the opportunity to investigate sources of instability within the Sino-Indian dyad, potentially leading to a re-evaluation of their force developments and strategic relationship as more salient global concerns.

***What do you see as your most important contribution?***

The work will elevate the India-China dyad as a topic of focus within the inadvertent and accidental escalation literature. This can then enable future comparative study, leading to common policy recommendations that mitigate such dangers.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ibid; Caitlin Talmadge, “Would China Go Nuclear? Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States,” *International Security* Vol. 41 Issue 4 (Spring 2017) pp. 50-92; and Feroz Hassan Khan, “Reducing the Risk of Nuclear War in South Asia,” in H. Sokolski (ed.) *Pakistan’s Nuclear Future: Reining in the Risk* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2009) pp. 63-102.

<sup>5</sup> Kalyan Kemburi, “Recalibrating Deterrence Theory and Practice: The View from India,” in L. Saalman (ed.) *The China-India Nuclear Crossroads* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012) pp. 87-89; Arun Sahgal, “China’s Military Modernization: Responses from India,” in A. Tellis and T. Tanner (eds.) *Strategic Asia 2012-13: China’s Military Challenge* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012) pp. 277-305.

***What policy implications flow from your work? What concrete recommendations can you offer to policymakers?***

Policy implications will involve the formulation of measures to stabilize the Sino-Indian dyad, and which will be intended to be relevant toward other dyads. These could include the design and topics for mutual strategic dialogue to clarify intentions and reduce threat perceptions; structural segregation of conventional from nuclear delivery vehicle models and basing locations; data exchanges including pre-notifications for missile tests or major nuclear or missile exercises; and the development of protocols to manage encounters with a nuclear-armed vessel at sea.

***What do you think is the weakest or most vulnerable aspect of your study and what sort of feedback would be most useful to you?***

There is a lack of Sino-Indian disputes with a clear and rapid pathway toward nuclear conflict. This study could therefore yield results that focus more upon reducing misperceptions conducive to accidental escalation, including nuclear and missile risk reduction and confidence-building measures. In addition, interview targets may be reluctant to discuss these topics.

Feedback regarding the suitability of the proposed research sources toward answering the study's research questions would be especially welcome.