
BTTN Journal

p-ISSN 2958-1214

e-ISSN 2958-1222



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence Stability in South Asia

Author: Devin T. Hagerty

Publication Year: 2020

Publisher: Palgrave Mcmillan

Reviewed by: Areeba Azhar¹

According to the author, the issue of strategic stability in South Asia can be traced back to the 1998 nuclear tests by India, followed by Pakistan. Since then, deterrence in South Asia has been debated, particularly in terms of the inter-state rivalry. In South Asia, deterrence has played a crucial role in preventing nuclear escalation between the two nuclear weapon states. Concerns about deterrence instability have risen with the advent of the Indian Army's planning for "proactive" limited-war options, followed by Pakistan's development of the Nasr tactical nuclear weapon system.

The book consists of five chapters. It takes a comprehensive view of the mutual mistrust between the two nuclear-armed archrivals of South Asia and scrutinizes the longstanding history of the antagonistic relationship and crises between the two countries. It states that the arms competition between India and Pakistan is contributing to the challenging security environment of the world. It also discusses the outstanding dispute of Kashmir which acts as

¹ Areeba Azhar is Research Assistant at the Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS), Karachi.

one of the sources of destabilization. The author suggests Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) for strengthening and enhancing regional stability and explains existential deterrence along with nuclear doctrines as a stabilising factor in the region. He also sheds light on the US efforts to manage the crises between Pakistan and India.

In chapter one, *Introduction of the India-Pakistan Arms Competition*, Hagerty provides a brief overview of the arms race in South Asia, comparing the regional situation with the Cold War between the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union. The author highlights that both the South Asian states are concerned about their survival due to the second strike capability of the adversary. His overarching theme is that the India-Pakistan strategic equation today is characterized by “ugly stability,” a mixture of stabilising and destabilising elements. Nuclear deterrence has reduced the possibility of conflict escalation from low level conflict to a high level warfare. However, nuclear arms competition has elements of both stability and instability.

Chapter two, *India-Pakistan Crises (1999-2016)*, and chapter three, *Explaining Indian Moderation during Crises (1999–2016)*, provide a comprehensive overview of India-Pakistan crises between 1999 and 2016. The author states that the primary restraining factor in the region has been nuclear deterrence. He notes that India’s options were limited against Pakistan because of the undeniable fear of escalation with nuclear undertones. He further states that, the nuclear competition between India and Pakistan underscores the need for crisis management.

In chapter four, *Deterrence Stability in South Asia Today*, the author explains that February 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis reflected a deep political mistrust between Pakistan and India. But he refrained from reflecting on the gravity of Indian cross-border air attack. He also elaborates that countervalue

doctrines (hitting soft targets) would add more to enhance deterrence stability between the foes, rather than counterforce doctrines (hitting military targets), because the latter can initiate preemptive temptations in which one state might prefer to use nuclear weapons [p. 85]. The Kashmir issue will remain “the bleeding wound” between the two states and possibly a source of future conflict escalation in the region. He highlighted the theoretical analysis of regional existential deterrence which underpins India and Pakistan capabilities with respect to nuclear weapons, command and control systems and their nuclear doctrines.

In the last chapter, *Enhancing India-Pakistan Deterrence Stability*, Hagerty recommends normative measures and pragmatic initiatives for both the states to reduce tensions and promote stability in the South Asian region. Pakistan and India are entangled in a security competition that has become a threat to the international environment. The author also mentioned that despite its indisputably ugliness, nuclear deterrence is and will continue to be a crucial factor in India and Pakistan relations. Hagerty’s suggestions to prevent conflict between the two states include, inter alia, resuming bilateral negotiations to resolve the outstanding Kashmir dispute. As India and Pakistan have no options for reversing their nuclear trajectories, deterrence is the best substitute to promote or enhance stability in South Asia.

Hagerty’s book makes an interesting reading. However, the book appears to be favoring India and ignoring Pakistan’s point of view. With India, which has a conventional military advantage of 2.5:1, Pakistan has no option but to ensure strategic stability by producing effective countermeasures. In addition to this, he did not mention India’s belligerence and hostile activities against Pakistan such as conducting false-flag operations for aggression against Pakistan, fomenting terrorism in Pakistan and refusal

to resolve Kashmir dispute peacefully through negotiations in accordance with the UNSC Resolutions.