



INDIA'S DETERRENCE GOLDBLOCKS PROBLEM IN SOUTH ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The previous twenty years have seen a significant change in the world. Developing nations have made military and economic strides and are now pursuing their national interests with greater vigour. China and India, the two largest of these nations, have been at odds for many years due to border disputes. In addition, China's efforts to encircle India and its closer ties to Pakistan have put the two nations on a collision course, which the United States, which sees China as a rival great power, would be well-positioned to take advantage of. This is a challenging task, though, due to the nuclear standoff between Pakistan and India. According to Vipin Narang's writings, even in the face of terrorist acts like the 2008 Mumbai attacks, Pakistan has taken an asymmetrical nuclear escalation posture that successfully dissuades India from exerting pressure on it. In my research, I aim to highlight the special Goldilocks problem that India faces in balancing China and Pakistan and explore how closer Indo-American cooperation is the most effective strategy to prevent regional instability and a potential nuclear exchange. This article looks at the need for a closer US-Indian partnership in the future to help India find a Goldilocks solution.

THE DETERRENCE GOLDBLOCKS DILEMMA

Deterrence during the Cold War was comparatively simple: have enough nuclear weapons and strategically placed ground forces to make sure your adversary felt constrained in what they could do against your side. Although the world's economic integration has grown significantly over the past 30 years, political integration and alliances have lagged behind in comparison to the bipolar world of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. As a result, our current multipolar international system is much messier, or G-Zero, as defined by author Ian Bremmer. In this situation, "no country or bloc of countries has the political and economic leverage to drive an international agenda."

The Goldilocks problem is one of the difficulties that this new normal provides to states in the area of deterrence. When anything must be "just right," that is, neither too much nor too little, this is known as the Goldilocks principle. This is impossible to achieve in the Goldilocks problem, which is a balancing issue. When two pressures combine to produce an environment where getting things "exactly perfect" is unattainable, you either need more to solve one issue or less to solve another.

As more nations reach nuclear breakout and the structures change to a more multipolar paradigm, this deterrence conundrum will become a more frequent problem than it was during the more structurally bipolar Cold War. Recently, the United States and its Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia is a prime example of a state dealing with this conundrum. On the one hand, by guaranteeing that no local

nuclear battle at shorter range could leave the United States undisturbed, this treaty helped maintain strategic stability with Russia and boosted European faith in American assurances. However, China was not obligated to abide by this agreement and currently has 2,650 land-based missiles, which would be against the agreement if Beijing were a signatory. To establish strategic stability and reassure its allies in East Asia, the United States felt the need to counterbalance these weapons with resources that were prohibited by the treaty. Thus, following a verbal exchange with Russia over Moscow's adherence to the treaty, Washington withdrew from the agreement on August 2, 2019, only to immediately reverse course and test its own medium-range missile on August 20.

The United States came into the issue as a result of two opposing forces acting against it and undermining Washington's deterrence strategies. America is not unique in this regard, though, and its situation is stable when compared to others'. The prize for least effective deterrence India is in a difficult position because it has to deal with two rivals: China, a rising regional power with territorial claims on parts of India, and Pakistan, a nuclear-armed revisionist nation that is paranoid about its security and frequently supports terrorist attacks across the border. India faces a dilemma where New Delhi must decide between stability on one front and deterrence on the other, similar to the American dynamic. Even worse, either decision will have disastrous effects on India's future.



QUADRILATERAL NATURE OF THE SOUTH ASIAN SECURITY SITUATION

Kashmir is the main contributor to the security situation in South Asia. There has been hostility between India and Pakistan ever since the brutal partition of India that took place in 1947. The Hindu-Muslim split that Partition intensified resulted in a situation that was destined to bring war and strife notwithstanding the shared language and cultural history. India was not a cohesive country when it attained independence, and the several Princely States and their rulers theoretically had the option of joining either India or Pakistan. Ten million people died in the ensuing chaos, and fifteen million people were forced to relocate. Sardar Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister of India and the man dubbed the Bismarck of India for his tireless efforts to unite the country politically, was able to force all but three states into the Union. Patel used force in the latter half of 1947 to compel Hyderabad and Junagadh, both of which had Muslim rulers, to join the Union. However, when Pakistan and Kashmir's Muslim-majority population rejected this, the 1947 Indo-Pakistan War broke out, dividing Kashmir in two. On the other hand, Kashmir's Hindu ruler had voluntarily decided to join. Due to their territorial disputes, Pakistan and India are perpetually at odds and can never have close relations.

Beijing's claims to northeast Kashmir and other regions of North India added China into the fight in 1962, when Chinese troops invaded Indian-held territory in the Sino-Indian War, while the rest of the world was preoccupied with the Cuban missile crisis. Later that year, in order to put an end to the disagreements and improve relations with Beijing, Pakistan relinquished the area China asserted it owned in Kashmir. This marked the beginning of the two nations' "All-Weather Friendship," which India perceived as the formation of an anti-Indian alliance. Later, under the Nixon administration, Pakistan would help to foster ties between China and the United States. The biggest military ally of Pakistan now is China, which has referred to Pakistan as "our Israel."

However, the United States, which in the past supported Pakistan in exchange for Islamabad's assistance in Afghanistan, has gradually switched to a strongly pro-India attitude since 2000, is now in India's corner. Washington views India as a natural democratic ally who can assist it preserve its influence in the Indo-Pacific and significantly thwart Chinese attempts to exert hegemony and control. As a result, since President Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia," Washington has sought to improve ties with New Delhi. As of right now, the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) from 2012 and the Declaration on Defense Cooperation from 2014 have both been ratified by the United States and India. Later, during India's 66th Republic Day, President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi met and worked out a framework for the US-India defence relationship as well as a shared strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific region as well as four projects for the DTTI. From the US's perspective, everything worked to strengthen the alliance with India. One indication of the strength of this new alliance is how it has developed throughout the Trump administration, despite

deteriorating ties between America and most of its other key allies.

The United States is seen by India as a welcome outsider whose assistance could somewhat swing the balance in India's favour. India is significantly less militarily and economically developed than China, and Beijing has slowly built relationships along India's borders using its financial resources, which has caused New Delhi to be uneasy and sceptical of China's "peaceful rise." Apart from the ongoing territorial disputes that have existed since 1962 and that were made worse by the Doklam Standoff in 2017 and the ongoing situation in the Galwan Valley, Chinese support for Pakistan's military, nuclear program, and participation in international organisations has become an intolerable thorn in India's side. India is currently a defensive power under intense pressure from China on one side and a nuclear-armed, revisionist Pakistan on the other. The fact that India is warming up to the United States not out of a sense of brotherhood among democratic states but rather out of need and a shared interest in maintaining the status quo in South Asia is something Washington does not often take into account. Which gets us to the article's major argument: How can the US and India collaborate to help India find the perfect balance?

In order to respond to this query, it is important to have a thorough understanding of both sides of India's Goldilocks situation as well as the dynamics at play that have led the nation that launched the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to align itself with the US. The first is what New Delhi can do to prevent China from invading Indian territory and its sphere of influence more successfully. The South Asian nuclear dyad is the second, and much trickier, problem. Narang's research indicates that Islamabad has already taken an asymmetrical nuclear escalation posture, which effectively discourages India from exerting pressure on Pakistan but also raises the possibility of nuclear theft and accident launch. This indicates that Pakistan has made use of its nuclear arsenal to threaten India with a first strike should a conventional conflict break out between the two countries. Since the events of the 1971 war, Pakistan has been extremely sensitive to the relative power dynamics between itself and India. As a result, Indian grand strategy plans have been consistently hampered by Pakistan's nuclear programme. As a result, India has tried a variety of deterrence-reinforcing measures that have only served to fuel more instability. As a result, India must raise its capabilities to make Chinese decision-makers fear it without alarming Islamabad, which puts New Delhi in a Catch-22 situation. Therefore, maintaining stability with or discouraging Pakistan while simultaneously freeing up enough resources to be able to discourage China is the key to India's Goldilocks conundrum. A very challenging task for India alone.

DETECTING CHINA

Detering China from further action and expansionism along the Indian border, in terms of both claimed land and measures to restrict New Delhi's relations with India's neighbours, would be one of the key objectives of a US-India



alliance, especially from the perspective of India. I find it most beneficial to keep in mind the line from Doctor Strangelove while trying to grasp and conceptualise deterrence: “Deterrence is the art of instilling in the mind of the opponent... the fear to attack.” The enemy’s thinking is what matters most in this situation, thus we must understand what China thinks of India. Since I lack the Mandarin language skills necessary to do this properly, I have relied on the research of Xiaoping Yang of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and more recent work by Yun Sun of the Stimson Center’s East Asia Program for this section of my paper.

The fact that Beijing is unconcerned with New Delhi and does not see India as a security threat is my main and most important takeaway from Yang’s study. This way of thinking is motivated by two factors in particular. The first is that China has a capability advantage over the other country, especially in terms of technology. The second factor is the no-war bottom-line threshold, which simply states that Beijing must avoid bringing any issue to that point because China believes neither side wants war. The foundation for all of this is the idea that China does not have to react to India as a nuclear state. Again, this assumption is based on two factors. One is that New Delhi’s claim that the weapons were created in order to deter China is not entirely accepted in Beijing. Beijing acknowledges that the Sino-Pakistani alliance puts India under strain, but the Chinese leadership believes that since China’s nuclear arsenal is focused on the United States, India’s concerns are unfounded. Chinese strategic circles, however, hold the view that New Delhi did not actually intend to pose a threat to China and instead went brazenly nuclear for political pride reasons. Due to New Delhi’s “no first use” policy and limited nuclear arsenal, China is also unconcerned about India’s nukes. Once more, Beijing does not think that India will actually use its nuclear weapons against it. Essentially, Beijing does not see a scenario in which the two nations will engage in a full-scale war, either conventional or nuclear, which is at the heart of Beijing’s threat perception of India.

The Initiatives that India launched as a partner of the United States were seen by China as taking a further step in the wrong way. The next step was India’s creation of a special border force designed to handle border concerns involving Tibet and China. Finally, the launch of India’s nuclear submarine, the Arihant, in 2016 was another step that raised the possibility of a future crisis while not alarming China due to the ship’s lack of technological sophistication. Once more, China does not currently consider India to be a security threat, but Beijing is unhappy with the course that New Delhi is taking.

PAKISTAN’S FULL-SPECTRUM DETERRENCE AND NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities are the issue on the opposite side of the Goldilocks conundrum, which Narang’s book thoroughly outlines. Pakistan has operationalized its nuclear arsenal to establish an asymmetric escalation posture, in which a state, historically a state that is conventionally weaker

than its adversary, operationalizes its nuclear arsenal so that it can launch a first strike, thereby discouraging the use of both nuclear and conventional capabilities against itself. This posture needs to include some level of delegation of authority and be coupled with the state’s military forces in order to be credible in the event that an opponent launches an assault. This is to make sure that no matter how the opponent may try to create misunderstanding, every aggressive move is likely to result in a nuclear reaction. This also means that in order to maximise deterrence, this posture partially depends on the state being clear about its capabilities and deployment.

Due to the stark contrast between India’s and Pakistan’s conventional forces in terms of strength, only Pakistan currently uses this posture. The memory of Pakistan’s humiliating defeat in the 1971 war, when India split Pakistan in half in just 13 days and declared Bangladesh to be an independent nation, is ingrained in the minds of all Pakistani commanders. Despite Pakistan’s preference for some form of strategic restraint regime with India that would restrict conventional and nuclear forces, Islamabad is aware that this is impossible given India’s security concerns towards China. In addition, Pakistan does not see stability as a possibility until New Delhi demonstrates that India is serious about resolving territorial disputes, which is highly improbable given India’s privileged position. The current Pakistani strategy of full-spectrum deterrence, which threatens nuclear first use in conventional conflict through its nuclear posture, is the result of this perception of an increase in Indian capabilities coupled with the belief that diplomatic solutions are a pipe dream.

However, using subconventional attacks has made India frustrated and desperate for retaliation, and New Delhi has tried strategies like Operation Cold Start which it believes will allow India to strike Pakistan in a limited manner without crossing the nuclear red line. This has led to an even greater escalation and instability in the region. This did not deter Pakistan, though, and it is likely that New Delhi was compelled to violate some aspects of India’s no-first-use policy in order to restore deterrence. It is very likely that India is developing the intelligence and military capabilities to launch a preemptive counterforce strike that could credibly destroy Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities, as Narang’s more recent work suggests. This strategy is extremely unstable because it would induce Islamabad to use all of its nuclear weapons in the event of a crisis out of concern that it might lose them. In order to maintain the credibility of Islamabad’s deterrent against Indian conventional forces, this will also cause Pakistan to delegate even more power, disperse its arsenal, and increase the risk of accidental use and theft. According to Narang, this will put the region on an ongoing state of crisis as both nations engage in increasingly risky brinkmanship.

Recent developments have brought attention to the problem of such South Asian brinkmanship. Pakistan launched the Nasr, a close-range ballistic missile with nuclear weapons capability, at the end of January 2019. In response to the Indian Cold Start doctrine, the Nasr was developed. Then, on February



14, 2019, the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed murdered 46 Indian soldiers in the Jammu and Kashmir district of Pulwama. In response, New Delhi launched an airstrike at Balakot on February 26, 2019, which resulted in the downing of an Indian jet and the capture of its pilot. India dramatically increased its tension in the ensuing confusion, and it was said that Prime Minister Modi threatened to employ missiles if the Indian pilot was not brought back to his country. It appears Pakistan flinched for the first time in this game of cat-and-mouse since gaining nuclear weapons, and Islamabad quickly returned the pilot. Furthermore, Pakistan used conventional airpower rather than nuclear weapons to counter the first Indian warplanes to violate line control since 1971. Even though it is a small victory for India, this small concession will undoubtedly help to solidify current plans to pursue a preemptive counterforce strike to deter Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, is not going to sit around and will probably be developing its own strategies to undermine Indian confidence in its abilities through improved weapon survivability and/or more sophisticated designs. The outcome seems to be more unpredictable than the majority of the Cold War, with no clear winners, and it is obvious that other solutions must be found to resolve the issue.

THE LUKEWARM PORRIDGE: OF THE UNAPPETIZING OPTIONS, A FORMAL US-INDIA ALLIANCE IS THE ONLY VIABLE CHOICE

After taking into account the problems India has at both ends of its Goldilocks situation, it is evident how the two pressures combined to cause New Delhi to ally with the US. The magnitude of the transformation for the nation that established the NAM during the Cold War merits reiteration. Even though this is a significant start, it is still insufficient to help India resolve its Goldilocks problem. The US-India alliance is fragile, which means it doesn't do much to discourage Beijing or limit Chinese activity in the area. While this is going on, the nuclear relationship between Pakistan and India has only grown more shaky, with India barely managing to secure what seems to be a fleeting pyrrhic victory. The relationship between the Modi and Trump administrations has become stronger. Even though it may be unappealing, a formal treaty alliance is New Delhi's best chance at resolving India's Goldilocks problem. However, this hasn't yet happened.

India currently has three options for escaping its predicament, according to New Delhi. The first course of action is the one that is currently being taken, in which New Delhi keeps trying to resolve the situation using India's own resources while maintaining some neutrality and only forging tactical alliances when it suits its purposes. As we can already see, however, this course of action does not work to stop China from taking action against India, and the preemptive counterforce strategy will only lead to further crisis instability and is extremely unlikely to permanently restore deterrence with Pakistan. In fact, it is almost guaranteed to lead to an arms race that will increase regional risk, deplete resources needed to

compete with China, and stop the presently faltering Indian economy's growth engine. In other words, we already know that this path won't succeed.

A second option would be to try and resolve these problems with China rather than the US. Sun's research, however, indicates that this course of action would probably end in failure. China is frustratingly pushed in two different directions when it comes to India. On the one hand, Beijing genuinely wants to keep things peaceful so it can concentrate on its conflict with the United States in the Indo-Pacific region and avoid shifting resources to its front with India. Indian and Chinese plans and visions for South Asia, however, are incompatible and a source of conflict. This is made worse by the fact that South Asia is China's secondary theatre while India's primary one, resulting in an imbalance in demands and actions. As was previously stated, China only requests that India maintain its neutrality, while India requests of China actions that Beijing could not undo and that would help India's position in the region. Beijing, which considers the demands to be excessive and contributing to India's internal politics, finds this intolerable. Beijing believes that granting India any kind of victory would only give New Delhi more confidence. It is obvious that diplomatic efforts to find solutions to New Delhi's Goldilocks dilemma will be stalled by China, whose main goal is Indian passivity, as China's core interest in this situation is that India continues to struggle to control South Asia and remain neutral in China's conflict with the United States. It is, in essence, a waste of time.

The extension of American security guarantees could be the most potent deterrent that India could hope for against Beijing. The third option is a formal alliance between the United States and India against China. China may believe that its capabilities are far superior to those of India, but Beijing is aware of how far behind the US it is. Furthermore, as was already mentioned, this would make China deal with a new front and divide its forces, giving both India and the United States a better chance in the area. An Indo-American alliance gives a number of options for handling Pakistan. First, it poses a challenge for Islamabad because India would fall under American nuclear protection, whether formally or informally (since the United States would never permit a nuclear attack on its troops to go unpunished), making Pakistani threats that could escalate to attacks on Indian territory less credible. More significant would be the potential for India to expand its options for imposing sanctions through the US alliance network to raise the cost of Pakistan's unconventional attacks. The last option is that a stronger Sino-Pakistan alliance may develop in response to a US-India alliance. Naturally, this scenario has drawbacks, but there may also be two significant advantages. First off, since the war would take on a bipolar character and split into two unified fronts, it would put an end to the Goldilocks conundrum. The second is that this bipolar scenario could lead to some real strategic stability in the area and would more readily allow for treaties to stop nuclear arms races. All things considered, it is not a given that India would be able to escape the Goldilocks



situation through a formal alliance, but it does give New Delhi the best chance of deterring Beijing and new tools for dealing with Islamabad.

Despite this, there are significant speed bumps that need to be taken into account and resolved before New Delhi and Washington can forge a formal partnership. With the renaming of US Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command, Trump has meaningfully advanced cooperation and demonstrated a readiness to collaborate more closely. His stance on immigration and his immigration policies, however, have not been well received in New Delhi. Additionally, it has been challenging for the United States to work toward interoperability and position some of its most sensitive technologies in India due to India's purchase of Russian missile defence systems and other weapons, according to Narang. These purchases were made to enable India's new counterforce posture. These are some of the quirks in the relationship between the US and India, which is still developing. To maintain the partnership, New Delhi will have to pay a price, namely giving up its counterforce strategy against Pakistan and the Russian missile defence system that is a crucial component of it.

In addition, given the current circumstances, it is debatable whether the United States would benefit from this alliance. There are significant domestic issues that India is dealing with, and it's not clear whether New Delhi will be able to live up to the expectations that US policymakers have for it. Despite the fact that both countries are democracies, US interests are very much on the periphery of Indian domestic politics. Historically, this hasn't produced the kind of positive relations that it did in the West. Fast economic growth in India is accompanied by significant income inequality, underemployment, a brain drain, and drought. India is spending a lot of money and manpower on its armed forces because they are mainly concentrated on Pakistan and Kashmir. Even though India would prefer to break away from the India-Pakistan rivalry, the Kashmir conflict and rising nationalism keep forcing New Delhi to return to a conflict that Washington would much rather avoid. The hesitation on both sides to forge a defence alliance is based on some significant obstacles that will take time to overcome, but given that opening a second front against China is America's and India's best option for resolving the Goldilocks problem, Washington should keep pushing for a treaty alliance.

Last but not least, given that American strategy clearly wants the Indo-Pacific to play a significant role in its future plans to counter China, supporting India might be the price Washington is willing to pay to create a new front in this new Cold War against China. A strategy to restore strategic stability by switching the conflict from multipolar to bipolar is one that is worth considering given the current status of Pakistan's and India's nuclear forces as well as the fact that China will be as useless in resolving this crisis as it has proven to be with North Korea.

CONCLUSION

India is in a Goldilocks Dilemma where New Delhi needs to improve its capabilities in relation to China, but Islamabad is also pressuring and limiting India. Pakistan is attempting full-spectrum deterrence against India by using its nuclear arsenal to establish an asymmetrical escalation posture. By doing this, Islamabad has brought about a security situation that poses hazards to both the region and the global community. In this post, I've made the case that India's sole practical choice for achieving both of its goals is a formal alliance with the United States. New Delhi would never be able to escape the Goldilocks situation by adhering to the previous Indian policy of nonalignment since India lacks the power to do so on its own. It is impossible to resolve the problem by bringing India and China together because Beijing sees India as a rival that needs to be subjugated in order to maintain Chinese hegemony due to New Delhi's influence and position in South Asia. Beijing's goodwill is constrained since it just wants to keep things peaceful with India while still having to worry about the United States. These factors have already compelled India to support America; the question now is whether India and the United States can reach an agreement on the formal alliance required to oppose China. If not, New Delhi is merely delaying an inevitable conflict with China over the Indo-Pacific, possibly until a time when Washington and its allies may not be there to support the maintenance of Indian borders and territorial waters as they are at the moment.

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