Limited War and Nuclear Escalation in South Asia

V.R. RAGHAVAN

Lieutenant General V.R. Raghavan was India's Director General of Military Operations from 1992 to 1994. He is currently a Director at the Dehli Policy Group. Raghavan is the author of a number of books and articles, including ***India's Search for Strategic Balance*** (*Dehli Policy Group, 1996). This paper was written while the author was a visiting fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University.*

The status of India and Pakistan as declared nuclear powers with growing nuclear arsenals has raised the risks of a nuclear exchange between them, if the two countries engage in a large military conflict. The political leadership in both countries does not seem to have fully grasped the implications of nuclear weapons in relation to the ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. This conflict could lead to a limited war, as it has triggered three wars in the past. The risks involved in fighting a limited war over the Kashmir issue and the potential for such a war to escalate into a nuclear exchange are at best inadequately understood, and at worst brushed aside as an unlikely possibility. Despite this official stance, however, a close examination of Indian and Pakistani military and nuclear doctrine reveals elements that could contribute to the rapid escalation of a limited war to include nuclear weapons.

Strikingly, India and Pakistan have not revealed war-fighting doctrines for the post-1998 condition of nuclear weapons readiness. It is not clear, for example, what threats to its security would compel India to declare a state of war with Pakistan. There is also no indication of the circumstances that would induce Pakistan to seek a larger war with India. The political objectives that a limited war might seek to achieve have also not been articulated in official and public discourse in the two countries.

This article examines the possibility of limited war between India and Pakistan, and the potential of such a conflict triggering a nuclear war. It examines the considerations that could push each of the two countries to fight a limited war. It discusses how such a war might be waged and the circumstances that would likely precipitate an escalation to a nuclear exchange. The doctrinal beliefs and decisionmaking processes of the two countries are examined to trace the likely escalatory spiral towards a nuclear war. The article concludes that the probability of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan is high in the event the two countries engage in a direct military conflict.

NUCLEAR DIMENSIONS TO OLD CONFLICTS

India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998 and surprised everyone by the arguments they respectively advanced to justify the action. There was never any doubt that both countries had the capability to make nuclear weapons at short notice. It was already widely known that both countries possessed untested nuclear weapons. To justify its tests, India points to China as a nuclear neigh-

bor with whom India fought a war in 1962. It is widely acknowledged that China has also assisted Pakistan with missile and nuclear weapons technology.[1] The Indian government's response to Pakistan's nuclear tests, however, was indicative of a deeper belief. There was hope in New Dehli that with a declared nuclear weapons capability, Pakistan would no longer be concerned with the strategic asymmetry that had long prevailed in India's favor. This line of analysis indicated that a nuclear Pakistan would find it possible to build a stable relationship with India. Nuclear weapons were expected to enhance stability by removing Pakistani anxieties about superior Indian conventional military capability.

The Lahore initiative, launched during a February 1999 visit to Pakistan by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, was largely driven by the belief that the two nuclear states could develop a new relationship based on new confidence levels. The Lahore Declaration issued at the conclusion of that meeting by Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif affirmed that belief. It recognized, "that the nuclear dimension of the security of the two countries adds to their responsibility for avoidance of conflict between the two countries."[2] The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries at the Lahore meeting also acknowledged the risks inherent in the nuclear weapons capabilities of the two countries. In it, the two countries pledged "bilateral consultations on security concepts, and nuclear doctrines, with a view to developing measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at avoidance of conflict."[3] The short but intense military conflict in the Kargil area of Jammu and Kashmir during the spring of 1999, just months after the Lahore Declaration, effectively destroyed the prospects of stability that the declaration had offered. More than that, Indian confidence in Pakistan's ability to abide by mutually agreed accords was badly dented. New Delhi also realized that there was no consensus within Pakistan on normalizing relations with India, since the military and the prime minister had taken contradictory actions after the Lahore meeting.

The military conflict in Kargil commenced following Pakistani intrusions into Indian territory. Pakistan army and armed irregular forces occupied areas across the Line of Control (LC) in Jammu and Kashmir stretching over 100 km. This infiltration was carried out covertly during the winter of 1998-1999. Preparations in Pakistan for these military intrusions would therefore have commenced immediately after the nuclear tests of May 1998.

The conclusions drawn in New Delhi from the Kargil experience are significant. Instead of seeking a stable relationship on the basis of nuclear weapons capabilities, Pakistan used nuclear deterrence to support aggression. Kargil indicated that armed with nuclear weapons, Pakistan had increased confidence that it could raise the conflict thresholds with India. It demonstrated a willingness to take greater risks in conflict escalation. Instead of seeking nuclear stability, Indian analysts concluded, Pakistan demonstrated a greater propensity to sustain instability, by seeking a military conflict.[4] In short, the neutralization of military asymmetry by nuclear weapons had made Pakistan seek higher levels of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. The stability-instability paradox generated by nuclear weapons had come into play.

The end of the military conflict in Kargil caused political turmoil in Pakistan. Dissension surfaced in Pakistan regarding who should be held responsible for the military embarrassment of Kargil. The military leadership in Pakistan felt that they were denied a victory, as Prime Minister Sharif agreed to a withdrawal of Pakistani forces in his July 4, 1999, meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington.[5] Attempts by Pakistani civilian leaders to blame the military for the withdrawal from Kargil and an effort to summarily dismiss the Chief of the Army, triggered a military coup in October 2000. Even before the coup, Pakistani military leaders had expressed discomfort with the strategy of Prime Minister Sharif. Addressing a two-day seminar organized by the *Jang* Group of newspapers in July 2000, Pakistani General Pervez Musharraf, who would lead the coup, said the Lahore Declaration did not serve the Pakistan's interests, as the Indian Prime Minster never wanted to discuss Kashmir.[6] The installation of the military government in Pakistan has been followed by a substantial rise in violence and killings in Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistan-based armed militants. There was also December 1999 hijacking of an Indian airliner, in return for whose safe return India was forced to release individuals imprisoned for terrorist actions in Jammu and Kashmir. After being released these individuals returned to Pakistan and rejoined the armed conflict.[7] These developments further reinforced the conclusion in New Dehli that Pakistan was deliberately raising the level of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, assuming that nuclear weapons would effectively deny India the option of a military response.

In response to Pakistan raising the level of violence, and abandonment by the Pakistani military leadership of the Lahore Declaration, the Indian government declared in January 2000 that it did not rule out a war with Pakistan. In statements made almost simultaneously, Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes and Indian Chief of Army Staff General V.P. Malik declared that India would not hesitate to fight a limited war with Pakistan, regardless of its nuclear weapons capability.[8]

Overall, nuclear weapons have had an adverse impact on the continuing conflict between India and Pakistan. The threshold of conflict has gone up in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan-based militant groups have expanded their operations into other parts of India. Bomb blasts and killings have occurred as far as in Tamil Nadu, in southern India. Even New Delhi has experienced such blasts on occasion. Threats have also been made of armed action against the Indian political leadership. Kargil, increased violence, attempts to derail the peace process, and continued Pakistani support for militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir had created an explosive situation. These developments prompted calls in India for action against Pakistan.[9] Some circles in India now argue that Pakistan's problems of governance, its economic decline, and internecine conflicts in its society have made it vulnerable. Those who take this view believe that hopes for a stable, united Pakistan that seeks a peaceful relationship with India are unlikely to be met in the near future. As one commentator declared in late 2000:

> it is now conceivable that India could take the conflict into Pakistani territory, first covertly and then overtly, with the explicit goal of hastening the process of Pakistan's disintegration.[10]

The combination of escalating conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, the belief in Pakistan that nuclear weapons have constrained Indian response options, and the belief in India that a limited war against Pakistan can be fought and won despite the presence of nuclear weapons, is, to say the least, a potentially dangerous condition.

NUCLEAR REALITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Existing nuclear weapon capabilities and their means of delivery have insured both India and Pakistan against nuclear blackmail by the other state. India is estimated to have around 65 nuclear warheads, while Pakistan is believed to have about 40 nuclear warheads.[11] In addition to nuclear-capable combat aircraft, India has short-range Prithvi and medium-range Agni missiles for delivering nuclear weapons. Between these delivery systems, most of mainland China and all of Pakistan are covered. Pakistan has its Hatf and Ghauri missiles that cover most of the Indian mainland. Arguments that the Ghauri and Agni are not yet fully operational do not take into account that they can still be fired. A nuclear warhead on them, however primitive, is a distinct possibility, and represents a catastrophic capability in itself. The two countries therefore have a basic, simple, and credible capability to protect their respective security interests in terms of nuclear deterrence.

Questions have been raised about whether the two countries have weaponized their respective nuclear deterrent forces and deployed them. Weaponization is generally defined as the process of developing, testing, and integrating warhead components into a militarily usable weapon system. Deployment is defined as the process of transferring bombs and warheads to military units, for storage and rapid mating with delivery systems at military bases.[12] It can be safely be said that weaponization is complete and under continuing refinement in both India and Pakistan. Neither side would accept the risks of non-weaponized deterrence. This point remains clear notwithstanding doubts raised by some scientists from outside the region, who mainly base their claims on analysis of the yields obtained by India and Pakistan in their 1998 nuclear tests. It also seems reasonable to anticipate that warheads, triggers, cores, and missiles have not been mated, in keeping with the non-deployment assurances given by the two governments. This approach helps ensure that the risk of accidents is reduced and effective command and control is retained, until the absolute necessity arises of using nuclear weapons. In this sense, the nuclear deterrent forces of India and Pakistan are not deployed.

Three contrasting images of nuclear conflict are simultaneously sustained in India and Pakistan. The first is of pride and confidence in being a nuclear weapon state. The attention India has received since declaring itself a nuclear weapon state, and the way its actions and positions are being applauded internationally, has given a boost to Indian national confidence. There has been a realization in the West that India is "pursuing a security logic based on the same sort of power politics that have guided the approach of the existing nuclear weapons states." [13]

The second image is of reassurance and nuclear stability, which is promoted by the Indian and Pakistani leadership. This image conveys the impression that there is no risk of war. Prime Minister Vajpayee and General

Musharraf have both ruled out nuclear war between their two countries. In interviews given in March 2000, Vajpayee asserted that India was more secure as result of its 1998 nuclear tests and the minimum credible nuclear deterrent now available to New Dehli. He "completely ruled out he possibility of a nuclear war." As for General Musharraf, he "did not think it [Indian-Pakistani tension] would get out of control," since India knows "there is a deterrent in place on our side." Musharraf had earlier been quoted by CNN as saying that the acquisition of nuclear weapon capability by India and Pakistan had reduced the chances of "open conflagration between the two countries on the Kashmir issue."[14] In stark contrast to these statements, however, Pakistan reportedly alerted its nuclear forces during the 1999 Kargil conflict. India is also reported to have done the same.[15] Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was reported at the time to have threatened the use of "ultimate weapon" and warned India of "irreparable losses" if Indian forces crossed the Line of Control.[16] Indian Defence Minister Fernandes responded by stating that the Pakistani threat should not be taken casually.[17]

One can, however, notice a different emphasis in the two leaders' statements. While Vajpayee ruled out a nuclear war, Musharraf emphasized that nuclear deterrence would constrain India from going to war over Kashmir. The implication, which can be read into Musharraf's statement, is that the ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir can now be pursued without fearing a larger Indian military response. It was soon after these statements that the Indian Defence Minister and Chief of Army Staff spoke of Indian readiness to fight a limited war, despite the nuclear capabilities of the two countries. The Indian belief in limited war is counterbalanced by Pakistani belief that the low intensity war being conducted in Jammu and Kashmir is cushioned against the risk of a larger military response by Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. The linkage between nuclear risk reduction and the Kashmir issue is a recurring theme in Pakistani policy statements. That Pakistan considers nuclear weapons as instruments that can help force a political resolution to the Kashmir question has been illustrated by the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, Maleeha Lodhi. Ambassador Lodhi has stated that for Pakistan, Kashmir's

> status quo is the problem. It cannot be part of the solution….India maintains the world's fourth largest military machine…my country's modest efforts to replace and modernize its worn out conventional weapons have been seriously affected by U.S. sanctions. In this growing asymmetry, Pakistan will be increasingly forced to rely on strategic capabilities. Meanwhile, the Kashmir dispute remains a flash point of tensions between the world's newest nuclear powers. Risks of escalation through accident and miscalculation cannot be discounted.[18]

The suggestion that nuclear risks would be left unattended until the Kashmir issue is resolved is clearly an attempt at leveraging nuclear weapons to compel a settlement.

The third image is of readiness to engage in conflict. There is an ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. Indian security forces regularly engage the militant groups, who attack military posts and convoys, slaughter innocent civilians, and threaten political opponents. Indian declarations about fighting a limited war are part of this third image, where risk-taking, raising conflict thresholds, and making threats are a common occurrence. The conflict-seeking approach is particularly disturbing in its potential for a military confrontation.

In response to international pressures, India and Pakistan have both committed themselves to a series of actions aimed at maintaining nuclear discipline. They have declared a moratorium on further nuclear tests; committed themselves to not deploying nuclear weapons; pledged not to transfer nuclear technology to third countries; expressed support for negotiating a regime to restrict the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons; and stated they plan on continuing a dialogue to resolve bilateral issues. Pakistan has urged the establishment of a strategic restraint regime with India. For its part, India has pointed to its no first use commitment and its desire to limit its nuclear capability to a minimum and credible deterrent. These commitments, however, do not in any way hinder either side from carrying the ongoing Kashmir conflict into the other's territory. The danger is also not reduced by Pakistan blurring the distinction between conventional military conflict and subconventional conflicts through the use of irregular forces. Such a maneuver was attempted by Pakistan in the Kargil conflict. In a future conflict, where irregular and military forces work in a seamless mosaic, decisions about where irregular forces operations end and regular military operations begin would be difficult to reach.

The reality of nuclear weapons is related to the extent to which the two countries deter each other. Nuclear deterrence between the two countries will operate best when

both fully understand each other's capability and decisionmaking processes. There is, on both these issues, more doubt and disinformation than clarity or transparency. It was reported last year that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is vastly superior to India's in quantitative and qualitative terms.[19] This report produced a response in India that Indian deterrent capabilities need to be projected more effectively.[20] Another report, from the Jane's defense analysis firm, confirmed this point in more specific terms. It highlighted the main difference in the perspectives placed on nuclear weapons in the two countries. According to this report, while India does not view nuclear weapons as possessing military utility, Pakistan's nuclear capabilities have been more fully incorporated into its military strategy. Pakistan believes its nuclear weapons give it the option of strongly supporting insurgency in Kashmir.[21] Doubts and mistrust combined with disinformation will force both countries to seek a deterrence advantage. The stability of deterrence between the two countries runs the risk of being affected by the uncertainty produced by clashing views about who is "ahead."

Nuclear reality between India and Pakistan is therefore of an uncertain quality. It is neither based on deterrence stability, nor on a desire to seek it. Pakistan appears to seek continued deterrence instability as a means of pressure aimed at achieving its desired political outcome in Kashmir. This uncertainty sheds light on the debate between nuclear optimists and nuclear pessimists. The optimists believe that the spread of nuclear weapons will reduce, and may even eliminate the risk of future war between India and Pakistan.[22] Nuclear pessimists are convinced that nuclear weapons will lead to crises, accidents and even nuclear war between India and Pakistan.[23] Despite repeated assertions by political leaders in the two countries about the improbability of war, the reality of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan is one of considerable instability.

LIMITED WAR AND SOUTH ASIA

After the 1999 Kargil conflict, India introduced the notion of a limited war which can be fought and won despite nuclear deterrence. Indian Defence Minister Fernandes spoke on January 5, 2000, at a seminar, "Challenges of Limited War: Parameters and Options," organized by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) in New Delhi. In his address Fernandes stated:

> They [Pakistan] held out a nuclear threat to us on May 31, 1999, and did it again yesterday without absorbing the real meaning of nuclearization, that it can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not conventional war. … The issue is not that war has been made obsolete by nuclear weapons … but that conventional war remained feasible.[24]

Fernandes repeated this view at another seminar conducted by the IDSA later in January 2000.[25] At the same seminar, the Indian Chief of Army Staff, General Malik, added to this perspective by saying limited war can erupt anytime. He went on to say that India would have to

> remain operationally prepared for the entire spectrum of war—from proxy war to an all out war….Strategy adopted for Kargil, including the Line of Control constraints, may not be applicable in the next war. In all limited wars the only commonality would be the national aim and objectives.[26]

These statements raised serious doubts about the understanding of the limited war concept amongst the Indian leadership. As Raja Mohan pointed out at the time, such statements revived concerns about South Asia as a nuclear flash point. Mohan concluded: "It is in India's interest to elaborate in greater detail, its compulsions in adopting a strategy to fight a limited war and commitments to maintain nuclear restraint."[27] The ill-informed references to limited war by Fernandes and General Malik also drew a sharp response from other Indian strategic analysts.[28]

As if in response to criticism about Indian limited war policy, in October 2000 the IDSA elaborated on the meaning of limited war as understood by the Indian leadership. The IDSA journal, *Strategic Analysis*, carried an article by IDSA Director Jasjit Singh on the subject. Singh argued that "it is necessary to define…what we mean by limited war. The context is of regular military operations by a state against regular military of another state."[29] This statement implied that the two states involved would be in a declared state of war. Singh went on to state that the nature of war has undergone a change in recent decades:

> If nuclear war and total global war are no longer viable propositions as an extension of politics by other means, the only choice available to states to use destructive forces for political purposes is through limited conventional war... The overall result has been a reducing [of the] po-

> tential of war down to limited wars, and from that point an expansion of opportunities for limited wars.[30]

The article then recommended that air power should be the primary means of forcing results in a limited war, owing to its capability to strike targets of critical importance at will. Superiority in the air, then, would be the key factor in deterring limited war. This explanation, however, creates more questions than it answers about the belief that a war between two nuclear adversaries can be kept limited, without a mutual understanding to do so. Studies during the Cold War and analysis of results from the many war games conducted by other nuclear powers have indicated that such restraint would be a near impossibility.[31] Even in the much smaller 1999 Kargil conflict, India started moving its major military formations towards their battle locations and its navy had put out to sea westwards towards Pakistan. In response to these steps, Pakistan had warned of a nuclear response, if the conflict widened.[32] The less than limited conflict in Kargil displayed the potential to turn a small war into a wider military conflict with the potential to reach the nuclear threshold.

India and Pakistan fought three wars before they declared themselves nuclear weapon states. These wars of 1948, 1965 and 1971 were fought with the full military power available to the two nations. They were fought without the appellation of either total or limited or general wars. The overt introduction of nuclear weapons on the subcontinent in 1998, quickly followed by the conflict in Kargil in 1999, forced Indian political and military leaders to assess the new dynamic of conflict with Pakistan. Indian leaders believe that in the Kargil conflict, Pakistan demonstrated its willingness to test the limits of military restraint placed on India by nuclear weapons. From this perspective, Pakistan worked on the assumption that India would not be able to resort to a general war in the face of a possible nuclear retaliation. The Indian response to Pakistani action in Kargil, which included not crossing the Line of Control and consequently accepting very high casualties in clearing the Kargil heights of militants, may have reinforced this Pakistani belief. The Indian political and military leadership, on the other hand, have obviously convinced themselves that a war can be fought and won without crossing the nuclear threshold. The assumptions behind these beliefs are not only unclear but they also underestimate the risks of nuclear escalation inherent in an Indian–Pakistani military conflict. While there is a divide between military contingency planning and political authorization for the implementation of such plans, there is no assurance that restraint will prevail in a future conflict under conditions in which one side feels forced to act in the face of grave provocation or military losses as in Kargil.

THE NATURE OF LIMITED WAR

At this point, it is worthwhile to examine the concept of limited war as it has been traditionally understood. The Indian understanding of the issue is better grasped in the light of the substantial body of thought on limited war that appeared at the height of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff during Cold War. This literature on limited war grew in the aftermath of the Korean War. The United States had entered that war with the predominant experience of total war. Its military doctrine was based on total victory. However, in Korea, the United States found that neither the use of total force nor total victory were feasible. The arrival of nuclear weapons had changed the nature of war.

Four major themes concerning limited war emerged from the debate that followed and continued into the 1960s. First, there was the question of limited objectives. Bernard Brodie, in widely quoted writings, made the essential argument that weapons of unlimited capacity had made it necessary to find some way to fight without using the full military power which was then at hand. He went on to add that regardless of the need to limit warfare, it would be impossible to do so, unless both Americans and Russians agreed on the concept of war limitation.[33] Robert Osgood and Henry Kissinger both defined limited war as having limited political objectives.[34] They argued that local wars could stay limited if both adversaries had well-defined political objectives. This view was contested by others, who believed that in a war between two systems for supremacy—like the Cold War conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States—war cannot be limited in its objectives.

The second theme in the limited war debate concerned possible limits on resources to be applied in war. Should war be fought for unlimited objectives or for limited objectives with unlimited resources? The first was unlikely to gain victory as in Korea, and the other was counterproductive in the response it might evoke from a nuclear adversary. The third theme concerned the role of bargaining with the adversary, in arriving at limits for limited war. This point implied that either before, or certainly during the limited war, the two sides would have to settle on the

limits to which they would pursue their objectives. One of the earliest writers on the subject was Thomas Schelling. He made the persuasive argument that the limiting points or "saliencies" should be distinct and known to the adversaries. Examples would be geographical limits or on the kind of weapons to be used.[35]

The fourth theme concerned the relationship between limited war as the instrument, and the desire to achieve the goals of arms control. It was felt at the time, and later substantiated in U.S.-Soviet negotiations, that limits on nuclear weapons could be introduced through the concept of limiting wars by mutual understandings regarding limited objectives. Kissinger's famous comment that limited war provides a middle road between stalemate and total victory was a dominant theme for some time. A critique of this thinking came from Albert Wohlstetter.[36] He argued that fighting a limited war significantly increases the likelihood of total war through escalation, and he cautioned against the use of nuclear weapons. Limited war, he thought, was neither likely to be short nor small. It could prove protracted and require the mobilization of significant national resources. This pattern would tend to escalate the conflict into unpredictable dimensions and generate an escalatory spiral leading to a nuclear exchange.

In the 1970s, after the Vietnam War ended, ideas about limited war again surfaced. Robert Osgood believed winning the Vietnam War was beyond U.S. capabilities. Osgood felt that the perceived national security needs of the United States:

> became more sweeping and generalized than U.S. vital interests warranted….The doctrine of limited war not only exaggerated the efficacy and underestimated the costs [of conflict]… but also exaggerated the U.S. security interests and the nature of threat to them.[37]

Osgood pointed out that while rapid escalation to win the war would probably risk wider conflict, gradual escalation would involve the United States in a protracted and costly war. He offered no solutions, but effectively pointed out the fallacy of getting into the Vietnam War without a clear purpose.[38] Perhaps the most important analysis of Vietnam came from Harry G. Summers. Summers' main argument concerning limited war was that in Korea, while the United States limited its objectives, it did not limit its means to attain those objectives. It used every resource available other than nuclear weapons. On the other hand, in Vietnam, the United States reversed the equation and consequently paid the price of a long war and eventual defeat.[39]

That raises the question of how to define victory in limited war. If victory is negotiable, constraints would have to be placed on the operational needs of the military. These constraints can have serious consequences, if limited military operations are perceived as weakness by the opponent. Such constraints can also lead to ineffective application of military force. On the other hand, the idea of limited war reflects the principle that war continues to be an instrument of policy, in which the primacy of political purpose remains paramount. Victory in such circumstances cannot therefore be defined in military terms, even as the military remains the more visible and dramatic instrument of policy.

The fact remains, however, that limited war is not yet a fully developed idea, even at the turn of the 21st century. In many countries, the military does not like the restrictions imposed on military operations, while political leadership has few ideas on how a given conflict can be kept limited. Even in Kosovo, where the NATO alliance was not directly threatened, and the war did not threaten the national survival of NATO members, NATO came close to introducing ground troops and widening the limits it had set for itself. The dilemma of applying massive military power in asymmetric situations—against terrorists, for example—is evident both in the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and in the many years of Indian military efforts in Kashmir. The reality of limited war is that the limits set on it make it difficult to gain a military victory, and war termination without a victory closely resembles a defeat.

INDIA, PAKISTAN AND LIMITED WAR.

Limited wars can be limited in more than one way. First, setting limits on political and military objectives will certainly limit the war substantially. Second, geographic limits on the war zone can limit the war to specific areas. Third, war can also be limited by placing restrictions on the type of weapons to be used. Such a limit would reassure the adversary about controlling possible escalation. Fourth, a time limit can be placed on the war by stating that military operations can be called off when the adversary complies with certain demands. It is worth noting that the wars that India and Pakistan fought in the past exhibited, with one exception, none of these limits. The

exception was India's terminating the 1971 war immediately after Pakistan's forces laid down arms in Bangladesh. In previous wars, India has reserved and exercised the right to take the battle into Pakistani territory in response to an attack on Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian Air Force has attacked targets deep into Pakistan as part of that policy just as Indian strike corps attacked and seized territory in Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh provinces. All available resources, including the navy, were employed in the previous Indian-Pakistani wars.[40] All weapon systems were utilised. Neither country imposed a time ceiling on the war. Neither side threatened civilian populations while the wars were fought. A significant factor in these conflicts, however, was that neither country posed an existential threat to the survival of the other. The overt acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan has altered the context of military conflict between them. It has substantially raised the threat of a nuclear conflict, if another war is fought by the two countries.

How would the political and military leadership in India and Pakistan plan and conduct limited war against each other? Can they unilaterally limit political and operational objectives? The answers to these questions remain uncertain, as one side's limited political and military objectives could be viewed as unlimited and unacceptable by the other. If a nuclear first strike from Pakistan is to be avoided after a limited war is begun, how are Indian political and military saliencies to be conveyed? If Pakistan wishes to avoid escalating a limited conflict with a nuclear strike, how would it cope with an outcome which is militarily or politically unfavorable? Indicating the geographical limits of war would detract greatly from operational needs, while identifying political limits will allow the adversary to better plan his response. Under these circumstances, how would victory be quantified in political and military terms?

In Kargil, a conflict on much smaller scale than a limited war, India was able to define its geographic salience by announcing that its forces would not cross the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir.[41] That immediately placed serious limits on operational plans. It forced a high casualty rate on the Indian Army. A number of former senior military officers were publicly critical of the government's self-imposed limitation at the cost of military casualties.[42] This criticism placed the government under pressure and it started moving its major combat forces to operational locations, as preparation for widening the conflict, if it became necessary. That in turn placed the Pakistani military leadership under pressure. The escalation ladder had thus been placed against the wall. It was fortuitous that the Kargil conflict ended when it did. It is true that the conflict ended by a combination of graduated military measures taken by India, which placed the Pakistani leadership in an increasingly untenable position. But it was also equally likely that a beleaguered Pakistani leadership could have perceived the situation as one warranting extreme decisions.

At the moment, both official pronouncements and published doctrine fail to clarify how the two sides will limit a future conventional war. There is also no perceptible change from past patterns in Indian and Pakistani approaches to fighting a conventional war. The way the two countries fought previous wars throws some light on how any future conflicts might unfold, and suggests how they could escalate to the nuclear threshold.

The Pattern of Past Indian-Pakistani Wars

The phrase "offensive defense" sums up the approach India adopted in past wars with Pakistan. This approach involved a strong defensive line in areas of importance, with adequate forces to break up enemy forces that might manage to penetrate the defenses. These formed the dissuasive elements of the force structure. They comprised infantry divisions for control of territory, mechanized infantry for shifting positional operations like counterpenetration, and some tank elements for counterattack operations. In addition, substantial forces have been created that are equipped to conduct offensive operations in enemy territory. These consist of armored forces and supporting infantry, with strong artillery support. The Indian Air Force favors the Second World War approach of winning the air war before coming in to fully support the ground war. As the official Indian Air Force doctrine states, "in the doctrine of the Air Force, the fight for control of air or air superiority gets first priority in every case."[43] According to some Indian defense analysts, this doctrine reflects "conceptual confusion between 'favourable air situation' and 'air superiority.'"[44] The sequential development in Indian Air Force doctrine of air operations through the ladder of counterair operations, interdiction operations, and finally in support of ground operations has led to inadequate synergy in the conduct of war. It has also meant the Indian Air Force conducting operations deep inside Pakistan, while land forces objectives were more limited.

In the two wars of 1965 and 1971, offensive operations were conducted in the form of armored thrusts into Pakistan over a wide front. The Indian Navy also played a part by attacking the ports and forcing a partial blockade from the sea. The mountains of Jammu and Kashmir form an important component of the war zone. A combination of mountain divisions and infantry divisions operate in this area. Indian war doctrine against Pakistan leans heavily towards the offensive, after the weight of Pakistan's offensive is measured. The basis of Indian Army's planning is to " await in a defensive posture the start of a war by Pakistan. After Pak[istan]…had launched its offensive, a multipronged Indian offensive would be launched."[45]

Pakistan has fought previous wars with India by taking to the offensive first. These offensives were led by its air force striking at Indian airfields. Its overall plan always included a substantial military offensive in Jammu and Kashmir. This offensive included both conventional military offensives and large-scale infiltration by irregular forces into and behind Indian positions. Pakistan also launched airborne forces behind Indian lines in an attempt to disrupt communications and command facilities. Seizing territory was and remains the criteria for success. In the scenario of a future Indian-Pakistani war, a victory for Pakistan would mean the seizure of land, and it would be logical for the Pakistan Air Force to wrap its operations around the land plan. In all its wars with India, there was a major operational emphasis by Pakistan on severing communications links between Jammu and Kashmir to rest of India. The Indian response, not unexpectedly, was both violent and extensive.

The emphasis on a ground offensive defines the operational doctrine of both India and Pakistan. In the past, Pakistan used its air power to support the ground offensive while the Indian Air Force used its superiority to cripple Pakistani military facilities, including air bases deep inside Pakistan. The defining emphasis on offense by both sides is the central pattern of their previous wars. This pattern is unlikely to change in a future war. Indian plans are firmly based on taking a future war into all Pakistani territory, even if the conflict commences in Jammu and Kashmir. This almost existential response reflects both the military and political principles of Indian planning. Since 1965, when Indian forces crossed the international border to take the war into Pakistan's Punjab province, an attack on Jammu and Kashmir has invoked the doctrine of an Indian military response against Pakistani territory outside Jammu and Kashmir.[46]

Pakistan's nuclear doctrine of first use in the event of Indian conventional attack explicitly anticipates this eventuality. If vital Pakistani territory were taken by an Indian offensive, Pakistan could retaliate by initiating first use of nuclear weapons. Indian restraint in not crossing the Line of Control during the Kargil conflict reflects Indian awareness of this nuclear reality. As a result, considering the need to avert a nuclear first strike from Pakistan, future Indian operational doctrine can be expected to aim at seizing vital Pakistani territory in the earliest phase of a future war, before a Pakistani decision to escalate could be made. This strategy could, however, inadvertently encourage a more rapid—and possibly less considered—nuclear response from Pakistan. Indian attempts to avoid a nuclear attack from Pakistan, by attaining military objectives with a powerful and rapid offensive, could in fact hasten a Pakistani nuclear response.

Wars are not generally started casually or by a cavalier attitude about the possible consequences. This observation applies equally to India and Pakistan. The possibility of a war has been dismissed by Indian and Pakistani political leaders, as discussed above. It has also been discounted by some outside observers. In a 1997 study of stability in South Asia, RAND analyst Ashley Tellis characterized the situation as one of "ugly stability."[47] The RAND study based its conclusion on the inability of the two countries to obtain a decisive outcome through a conventional military conflict. Nevertheless, the study cautioned that " ugly stability" could collapse if Pakistan were affected by an internal power struggle and if the Indian quest for great power status were to make good progress. This situation could "unnerve Pakistan and cause it to initiate military action—as it did in 1965—to secure outstanding territorial claims before it is too late."[48] The study also noted what it termed the "implausible" possibility of India embarking on a war to "solve the Pakistan problem."[49]

The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests were conducted in 1998, and the Kargil conflict commenced just months afterwards. Pakistan apparently intended to bring about a situation which would force the Indians to negotiate from an unfavorable military position. Pakistan's argument that its operations in Kargil were a response to Indian actions in the Siachen glacier area was no more than an afterthought, voiced only after Pakistan was forced to give up

on Kargil. The Kargil conflict led to the assumption of power by the military in Pakistan, led by officers who had planned and conducted the Kargil operation. Violence levels went up in Jammu and Kashmir in 1999, and Indian political and military leaders declared a readiness to fight a limited war over Kashmir. It would not be entirely incorrect therefore to infer, that the "ugly stability" of 1997 has been replaced by an "ugly instability" that rests much more openly on nuclear weapons.

DECISIONMAKING DYNAMICS

In an unstable conflict situation, decisionmaking processes assume a special importance. The processes and assumptions that influence decisionmaking can be critical elements in conflict management and escalation control. Decision processes in India and Pakistan operate on different premises. In India, decisionmaking has undergone a shift from a collegial and consensus-based process to decisions arrived at by a small group of individuals based in the prime minister's office. The decisions to conduct the nuclear test of 1974, authorize nuclear weapons related research during the 1980s, and embark on an integrated missile program were all made without forging a national consensus. Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh has described the current national security decisionmaking apparatus as a transitional system and has said he would prefer an institutionalized decision making arrangement.[50] While political control over military matters in India remains a reassuring fact, the growing tendency towards major decisions being taken by the more risky individual, rather than the more considered collective process, is cause for concern.

Decisionmaking in Pakistan has traditionally been influenced by the burden of dealing with a stronger and larger adversary. The "pathology of decision making" in Pakistan has been largely influenced by the military.[51] When the Pakistani military is in power it has tended to ignore or brush aside advice based on political and international realities. Past experience has shown that when the military leadership in Pakistan is in full political control of the country it has preferred to choose the military offensive even in a situation of a military asymmetry. Military governments are more likely to favor war irrespective of the prevailing strategic situation. In the military-dominated government of Pakistan, the absence of strong representation from other key government departments, particularly the foreign and domestic ministries, gives the central decisionmakers the illusion that they are operating without political limits.[52]

In addition, decisionmaking in Pakistan has not been free from "cultural discounting." The phenomenon of cultural discounting describes the belief that the adversary is culturally inferior and therefore can be defeated despite his real quantitative advantage. That Pakistan's military has taken decisions based on such assumptions has been convincingly demonstrated.[53] One example of a similar analysis from Pakistan demonstrates this point. In his article "Four Wars and One Assumption," former Pakistani cabinet minister, biographer and columnist Altaf Gauhar, wrote that Pakistan's four wars with India , including the one in Kargil, were "conceived and launched on one assumption: that the Indians are too cowardly and ill-organized to offer any effective military response."[54]

How India would wage a limited war against Pakistan is not explained in either official statements or in the analysis put out by the quasi-governmental think tanks like IDSA. As one commentator put it, Indian restraint in the Kargil conflict was

> at least in part dictated by the reading that Pakistan would not now take a humiliating defeat of the kind it experienced in 1971, without resorting to desperate measures including the possible use of…nuclear weapons capability. The reality of a post-nuclear India…has come to roost.[55]

On the other hand, Indian restraint has been tested to the extreme. The talk of a limited war by Indian leaders is therefore not to be lightly dismissed. India would like to limit a future war with Pakistan to the level of conventional military forces. It must therefore secure its political and military objectives in a rapidly conducted operation, without giving Pakistan the the opportunity for nuclear retaliation. This approach would require a proactive military operation to seize carefully considered territorial objectives. The traditional approach of bringing the adversary's forces to battle and destroying them in a long series of battles would be counterproductive for India under current circumstances. The territory seized must be of critical importance to Pakistan. The military offensive to obtain that outcome would have to be extremely powerful. These two Indian requirements are likely to combine to provoke a violent response from the Pakistani high command. If the Indian offensive gains ground in critical areas, Pakistan would be forced to exercise the nuclear option or the threat of its use.

The Indian-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971 offer examples that confirm the possibility of the nuclear option coming into play sooner rather than later in a limited war. In 1965, the Indians launched an offensive into Pakistan's Punjab province. The Indian forces reached within miles of the major metropolis of Lahore only hours after the commencement of the offensive. If that were to occur now, Pakistan's military high command would be faced with a very serious dilemma. In military terms, the more time the Indian forces had to consolidate, the greater would be the difficulty of dislodging them. An offensive by Pakistan elsewhere into Indian territory would weaken the defense around Lahore. The Punjabi heartland of Pakistan having been breached, and the Indian offensive threatening to make deeper inroads, recourse to a nuclear strike would become a necessity. In political terms, the leadership would be under immense pressure to retaliate quickly. International pressures to broker a ceasefire would mount by the hour. A nuclear strike would seem to offer many advantages to a beleaguered Pakistani leadership. As this scenario shows, an escalation from a conventional to a nuclear war, within one or two days of the the outbreak of war, is not implausible.

In the 1971 Indian-Pakistani War, an Indian heliborne and ground forces offensive succeeded in making a small but meaningful thrust into Pakistan's desert sector towards Rahimyar Khan. If a larger armored and mechanized forces thrust had been made in this weakly defended "waist" of Pakistan, there was a risk of the country being strategically split. Pakistan could certainly have used nuclear weapons in this situation, had they then been available . It can be argued, of course, that the overt presence of nuclear weapons now precludes such offensives being launched. On the other hand, from the Indian perspective, the post-Kargil need to engage in limited war could motivate even stronger and more decisive thrusts to forestall Pakistani attempts to manipulate the nuclear threshold. It is difficult to determine which dynamic—the attraction of a conventional offensive, or the fear pf a potential nuclear riposte—might actually prevail in such circumstances. The high probability of a rapid escalation from conventional to nuclear engagement cannot, however, be ignored.

A transition from the ongoing low-intensity war between India and Pakistan, to a limited war, and then quickly to a nuclear exchange is a possibility. This scenario has been anticipated by a recent Pakistani analysis. The presence of extremist militant organizations in Pakistan could create added pressures on the Pakistani military high command. The presence of armed militant groups in Pakistan and their influence in the military is a factor that can contribute to escalation. As one Pakistani analyst said:

> the principal danger lies in escalation of low intensity war into a nuclear conflict. This is a serious possibility. On the Pakistan side this threat has a deeper connection with militants, who are a smaller group but enjoy greater support in the country's armed forces. [56]

NUCLEAR DOCTRINES

As noted earlier, India and Pakistan have both listed a number of measures they intend taking to ensure nuclear stability. They have each declared a moratorium on further testing; asserted that they intend to have no more than a minimum nuclear deterrent; committed themselves to not deploying nuclear weapons; pledged not to export nuclear technology; and said they will join negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on stopping further production of fissile material. Pakistan has made it abundantly clear that it will use nuclear weapons, if its survival is threatened by Indian military action. While Pakistan has not brought out an official document defining a nuclear doctrine, the essential elements of a doctrine can be surmised from various Pakistani writings on the subject. India has stated that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but will respond with massive nuclear retaliation if nuclear weapons are used against it. Its draft doctrine states, "any nuclear attack on India or its forces shall result in punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons, to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor."[57]

In doctrinal terms, the critical difference between the two countries rests on the question of first and second nuclear strikes. India will do everything to maintain a second strike capability. If Pakistan must use nuclear weapons first to halt an Indian offensive on its territory, and hope to avoid an Indian nuclear strike, it will be faced with extremely difficult choices. It will either have to be ready to bear the impossibly high costs of a massive Indian nuclear response, or limit its own nuclear strike to Indian forces on Pakistani territory.[58] The collateral costs of the second option would also be heavy and would still not entirely guarantee Indian restraint.

India's challenge in engaging Pakistan in a limited war would be to ensure that Pakistan does not face circumstances in which a nuclear strike becomes necessary. The circumstances under which Pakistan would use nuclear weapons would therefore be dependent on the military and territorial losses it can sustain. The losses Pakistan can sustain would be of two kinds: actual losses as a consequence of combat, and potential losses as a consequence of Indian nuclear retaliation which would follow a Pakistani nuclear strike on India. It is difficult to believe that if India were to receive a nuclear strike from Pakistan, that it would refrain from retaliation in deference to international pressure or promises of reparations. Pakistan's decision on a nuclear strike would be heavily influenced by its military hierarchy and the decisionmaking dynamics discussed above. The dangers of escalation and the initiation of a spiral of negative action and reaction thus become apparent.

Pakistan has not yet announced a nuclear doctrine. However, on the subject of fighting a war when the adversaries have nuclear capability, there is a body of published Pakistani opinion written by senior military and civilian officials. Perhaps the most credible assessment has come in an article by three experienced Pakistani policymakers. In an article published in *The News* on October 5, 1999—a few days before the military government assumed power—they defined the red line that would trigger a Pakistani nuclear strike against India. One of the authors, Abdul Sattar, became the Foreign Minister in the military-led government, a position he still holds. The article listed three occasions before 1998 when nuclear deterrence, as applied by Pakistan, produced a restraining effect on India. The implication of this statement is that a nuclear threat was issued by Pakistan, through explicit or implicit means. The authors argued that a minimum deterrent would be adequate for Pakistan, and said it need not enter an arms race with India. The authors dismissed India's no-first-use declaration as,

> a cost-free exercise in sanctimonious propaganda. Renunciation only of first use of nuclear weapons seems like a subterfuge to camouflage the intention to resort to the first use of conventional weapons."[59] They went on to define the condition in which Pakistan would use nuclear weapons as a situation when, "the enemy launches a general war and undertakes a piercing attack threatening to occupy large territory or communication junctions."[60] Under these conditions, they concluded, "weapons of last resort would have to be involved."[61]

These views indicate the Pakistani tendency to extend the nuclear deterrent to different levels of military conflict. As was demonstrated in Kargil, the threat of a nuclear strike would be held out at the very beginning of small-scale conflict. The threat would be projected as part of a plan, which would attempt to gain political advantage through military action in Jammu and Kashmir. The threat of use of nuclear weapons would be exploited to contain a larger military response from India. This strategy would be in keeping with plans for the Pakistani nuclear deterrent to be used in influencing the outcome of armed political conflict. Once war is joined and major operations are begun, conditions for a nuclear first strike by Pakistan are clearly spelled out by a senior military analyst.

> In a deteriorating military situation when an Indian conventional attack is likely to break through our defences or has already breached the main defence line causing a major set-back to the defences which cannot be restored by conventional means at our disposal, the government would be left with no option except to use nuclear weapons to stabilise the situation. India's superiority in conventional arms and manpower would have to be offset by nuclear weapons.[62]

Pakistan's preferred option to escalate quickly to the nuclear level is indicated by another Pakistani analyst.

> It [Pakistan] should go for a one-rung escalation ladder knitted in tightly with a highly cohesive state-of-the-art tactical conventional military. This means that it must acquire sophisticated conventional technology at the tactical, theatre level while maintaining a posture of one-rung escalation in case of all-out strategic war. This becomes necessary because Pakistan lacks spatial depth and should not needlessly waste its resources in a static conventional war."[63]

DETERRENCE STABILITY

The Indian official position, indicating a readiness to fight a limited war, is an attempt to impose a higher military and political price on Pakistan without giving it cause for commencing a nuclear exchange. There is, however, no certainty that Pakistan's response to this strategy can be kept limited. The notion of nuclear deterrence is being

stretched by both sides to include non-nuclear conflicts. An escalatory process is inherent in the linkage being established between nuclear deterrence, and the perceived need to change territorial status quo through military action. This situation effectively creates deterrence instability between the two countries.

Deterrence stability depends on three requirements. First, it is necessary to avoid preventive war when one side has a temporary advantage; second, each side must have survivable second strike forces; and third, the adversaries must avoid accidental nuclear war. On each of these criteria, India and Pakistan face serious challenges. As far as ensuring that neither side takes advantage of a temporary advantage, the two sides have historically shown lack of concern for the risks involved in such ventures. If Pakistan acted with disregard for major strategic consequences in Kargil, India showed restraint by limiting the conflict to Kargil. When India demonstrated resolve to widen the conflict by moving forward its offensive forces, Pakistan was able to pull back from Kargil, albeit under powerful pressure from the United States. Both India and Pakistan are developing weapons systems and command and control structures to create a survivable second strike capability. Pakistan is in no doubt that a nuclear first strike would bring about a massive retaliation from India. Indian planners cannot be in doubt that a second strike, notwithstanding its size, is still likely to leave Pakistan with some residual nuclear capabilities. Indian planning must also take into account the possible response from other powers, which would be determined to bring the apocalyptic exchange to an end, by force if necessary. Not enough thought seems to have been given to these possibilities in India and Pakistan. As for avoiding an accidental nuclear war, the two countries have made tentative efforts at unofficial levels, but have yet to find common ground.[64] The balance, therefore, remains adversely weighed against deterrence stability.

The doctrinal contradictions analyzed above in the declared and undeclared nuclear policies of India and Pakistan have introduced serious difficulties in establishing nuclear stability on the subcontinent. In the absence of an official dialogue between the two countries, the emergence of a deterrence stability model remains problematic. Deterrence perceptions between two new nuclear states also need time to evolve. Past experience and models of the Cold War also do not always apply in their entirety to South Asia. India and Pakistan have thus become a, "test bed for nuclear deterrence theory." [65] Attempts by these two countries to extend the interpretation of nuclear deterrence and apply it to a wider spectrum of conflicts, does not augur well for deterrence stability between them. The risk of nuclear escalation is therefore further enhanced by the doctrinal differences between the two countries.

Deterrence Command and Control

Nuclear command and control arrangements in India and Pakistan are in a rudimentary stage of development. In India, nuclear command and control is more in the nature of a working arrangement. The Prime Minister, as the civilian head of government, retains complete authority on matters related to the use of nuclear weapons. There is, however, an unclear picture regarding delegation of authority, and about the chain of succession in a government of many coalition partners. The military is not involved in nuclear policy or decisionmaking. The relationship between the limited war concept and nuclear thresholds, or that between limited war objectives and nuclear weapons response in the event of a nuclear threat or use by Pakistan, remains wholly unclear. A non deployed, non-activated and de-targeted nuclear deterrent is operated by India.[66] The Indian government has recently taken a decision to restructure the higher defense management organization. In this context, a Chief of Defence Staff is likely to be appointed soon. In preparation for that major change, a Chief of Integrated Defence Staff has already been appointed. He will become the Vice Chief of Defence Staff once a Chief of Defence Staff is appointed. The need for involving the military high command in the management of the nuclear deterrent has also been emphasized regularly by analysts.[67] The Chief of Defence Staff would be entrusted with responsibility to coordinate the nuclear command and control system, and set up and command the Strategic Force, with the ultimate nuclear authority remaining vested in the Prime Minister.[68]

As for Pakistan, it has announced a command and control organization, which on paper looks balanced. The committees that will manage the command and control arrangement are all headed by civilians. There is, however, no clear indication that Pakistan has developed specialized command, control, communication and intelligence systems.[69] The reality, however, is that the nuclear button in Pakistan has always been exclusively under the control of the military. There is little prospect of that ar-

rangement changing in the foreseeable future. As a group of U.S. analysts concluded,

> it is not clear whether a Pakistani Prime Minister or President could prevent a battlefield use, or even a larger strategic strike, if senior military leaders were convinced (even though the Prime Minister and President were not) that the use of nuclear weapons was required to maintain the security of the state. When a member of the military heads the Pakistani government… these problems will be exacerbated. [70]

The two entirely different decisionmaking structures in India and Pakistan, coupled with their lack of transparency, do not improve the low level of confidence that the two countries can manage either the escalation to or the actual use of nuclear weapons. Given the past record of military decisionmaking in peace and war in Pakistan, and its military's habit of discounting the opinions of non-military segments of the government, the stability of the nuclear deterrent, low as it is, is further placed in doubt.

RISKS OF NUCLEAR ESCALATION

Can a war between India and Pakistan, even a limited one, be restricted to conventional weapons? Can the two countries wage a limited war, without nuclear escalation taking over? This was a major concern even in the confrontation between the nuclear super powers during the Cold War. The risks that were present then are not reduced by the smaller arsenals of India and Pakistan. The following essential question was posed at the end of Cold War by Barry Posen: "Can nuclear powers fight conventional wars with each other and avoid the use of nuclear weapons?"[71]

Posen argued that the possibility of nuclear escalation, even considering the long experience of managing competition possessed by the United States and the Soviet Union, remained significant. He emphasized that the question was equally relevant to future disputes between smaller nuclear powers. He answered the question by pointing out that states are unlikely to leave such effective weapons unutilized in a struggle for vital political interests. He even concluded that leaders of nuclear states who deliberately undertake conventional conflict would find that

> conventional weapons come into contact directly or indirectly with the nuclear forces of the adversary and substantially affect the victim's confidence in his future ability to operate these forces in ways that he had counted upon. A series of non-nuclear attacks that degrade one side's ability to use its nuclear forces in discriminate ways….would be perceived as a major problem, if that side had stressed this use of nuclear weapons in its pre war doctrine.[72]

This form of inadvertent escalation is built into the pattern of military engagement India and Pakistan have demonstrated in the past. The Indian Air Force's emphasis on deep strikes to engage and disable Pakistan's air power is the clearest example of this problem. Indian attacks on major Pakistani air fields which support Pakistani nuclear-capable aircraft, or attacks on locations which support Pakistani missile bases, could trigger an escalatory response by Pakistan. Preemptive strikes by the Indian Air Force have been part of the "offensive defense" doctrine for decades.[73] The Indian Air Force has particularly stressed this aspect of its operational plans.[74]

The risk of escalation is substantially greater if, as in India and Pakistan, early warning and command and control arrangements are inadequate, and create mixed signals and perceptions. If second strike capabilities are not fully developed or are vulnerable, and

> both sides perceive themselves and their adversary to have offensive advantages, it is very hard to imagine that serious full scale, conventional warfare could go on for long without one side or the other succumbing to the pressures and temptation of the situations and launching a nuclear preemption.[75]

Similar concerns were frequently voiced by many Cold War-era analysts of limited war.[76] The conflict between India and Pakistan, which is a marked by extreme political hostility and irreconcilable political objectives of the kind seen in Jammu and Kashmir, provides an environment completely suited to the unfolding of the scenarios discussed above.

Posen also suggested that unlike the superpowers, who instituted a number of arms control measures to offset the risks of nuclear conflict, new regional nuclear powers, a category clearly encompassing India and Pakistan, would have little reason to get involved in arms control negotiations. Arms control will be avoided by such regional powers, because they will continue to hope to fight and win a regional conflict. Reflecting these factors, the sense of vulnerability of the military high command in Pakistan regarding its nuclear capability remains very high. In his

nationally televised speech to the nation on September 11, 2001, General Musharraf listed protecting of nuclear assets as one of four strategic considerations that made him accede to U.S. demands that Pakistan join the "war against terrorism." He also placed the Pakistan Air Force on high alert, and warned India to "lay off." It is considered by some that this warning was a measure to respond to a possible Indian attack.[77] This sense of vulnerability could trigger a "use them or lose them" calculation, which in a limited war situation could further hasten nuclear escalation.

It is useful at this stage to examine the meaning of escalation. Escalation has been viewed by some as different levels through which a conflict can develop. Escalation is conceived as a ladder whose many rungs lead up to a nuclear war. [78] There are other studies which examine escalation on an empirical basis. This view attributes great importance to the role of stress and time pressure, which combine to reduce rationality in decisionmaking.[79]

There is a belief in India and Pakistan that escalation to nuclear conflict can be controlled and even halted at conventional levels. However, the relationship between the ends of war and the means to fight it is not a static but dynamic one. As fortunes in war rise and fall, both objectives and the means to achieve them not only change but tend to reach a higher threshold. War by its nature favors escalation. This is because of the potential present in war for an open-ended action-reaction sequence, where the consequences of the various steps interact to create situations that cannot be fully foreseen. Escalation thus becomes an ever present "need" and therefore a probability, something that requires more deliberate thought and action to stop or reverse than to start.

Even in the low intensity conflict being waged through Pakistan's support Jammu and Kashmir, escalation risks are always present. Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's October 2001 letter to President Bush following a major militant attack in Srinagar is reflective of the escalatory dynamic built into the Kashmir situation. The letter, among other factors, refers to public opinion and patience:

> Incidents of this kind raise questions for our security which, as a democratically elected leader of India, I have to address in *our supreme national interests.* Pakistan must understand that there is a limit to the patience of the people of India.[80]

The letter was a response to widespread and adverse public opinion in India about the government's passivity in the face of provocations from Pakistan. It has, however, lowered the threshold for a military conflict. While the current focus on the U.S. campaign against terrorism may dampen these trends for the moment, it will not eliminate them.

Escalation is inherent in war both because the desire to win, and the need not to lose. As one side takes measures to offset defeat or place a higher premium on winning the other side responds, which leads to the escalation spiral. This reciprocal or interactive escalation is always difficult to control. Escalation is regarded as

> consisting in the crossing of saliencies, which are taken as the defining limits of a conflict. As a war escalates, it moves upward and outward through a pattern of saliencies that are provided situationally. What defines a saliency is that it is objective, and hence noticeable by all parties, and that it is in some ways discrete and discontinuous.[81]

Escalation involves crossing saliencies that define the current limits of a war. Since there is no mutually agreed set of limitations between India and Pakistan on a future war—as there were none in past wars—neither side has control over the other's saliencies. As a consequence an escalatory spiral is ever ready to come into being.

In war, political and military leadership comes under tremendous pressures. The political leaders, having embarked on war, must define and constantly redefine victory. The military leader is under pressure to attain the objectives in time and with minimal costs. International pressures, close media attention, impact of body bags on domestic opinion, the costs of war in terms of displacement of people, economic downturn, all combine to place a heavy burden on the decision making process. The information technology impact on carrying the reality of the conflict to the people of the states at war, further add to the burden of taking the appropriate decision. This has always been a leadership challenge, but would be greatly increased when decisions involve nuclear weapons and the incalculable consequences of their use. Doubts on this account have been well summed up by a perceptive analyst who concluded:

> If psychological stress, time pressure, and information overload can have as serious an effect on policymakers' ability to make rational decisions as they did in 1914, over a period of

> nearly a month and with less at stake than there would be today, enormous doubt is cast on the plausibility of nuclear escalation as a deliberate strategy. [82]

In a limited war, both India and Pakistan would have difficulty establishing the saliencies that control escalation. The political-military objectives which India considers limited, might be considered unlimited and unacceptable by Pakistan. Pakistan plans to use nuclear weapons in the event of a deep military offensive by India. How deep would be deep enough for India to obtain its objectives, and how deep would be too much for Pakistan, is unclear and will always remain so. In any case, the extent of territorial loss which is acceptable in one theater of war may be unacceptable in another. If the military leadership of Pakistan considers the Indian success——however limited—as affecting its image and legitimacy, the critical saliency would have been crossed irrespective of the depth of the Indian offensive. Since Pakistani nuclear command and control remains firmly and exclusively in the hands of the military, and considering the military's unilateral decisionmaking process, risks of an escalation to nuclear war are more real than are commonly imagined. A similar conclusion was reached in a study by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The study judged that

> the common perception that Pakistan's nuclear option deters war and therefore reduces the risk to Pakistan in covertly supporting insurgencies on Indian territory is based on a poor understanding of Indian military planning. The bases of Indian and Pakistani military planning are different and the mismatch of perceptions could lead to nuclear escalation. [83]

CONCLUSION

The overt arrival of nuclear weapons on the South Asian scene in 1998 has changed the dynamic of conflict in the region. Indian expectations of stability, which was assumed would follow after Pakistani nuclear weapons neutralized Indian conventional superiority, have not been fulfilled. Nuclear weapons have instead encouraged Pakistan to take greater risks in the ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. The military initiative in Kargil during 1999 and the heightened violence in Kashmir since then have been interpreted in India as requiring a strong military response. Indian leaders have threatened Pakistan with limited war, even in the face of Pakistani nuclear weapons. On the other hand, leaders at the highest level in India and Pakistan have asserted that there is no risk of a nuclear war between the two countries. The conflict in Kargil, despite its relatively small scale, highlighted the potential of escalation into a larger military conflict with nuclear overtones.

The reality of nuclear weapons, inadequate warning capabilities, first generation command and control arrangements, exclusive military control over nuclear weapons in Pakistan, inadequately developed command and control arrangements in India, and the conflict over Jammu and Kashmir all combine to raise the risks of inadvertent or unintended nuclear war. Limited war has not been thoroughly examined and its possible consequences are inadequately understood by both India and Pakistan. The limitations on war objectives, the means employed in such war, and the escalatory potential inherent in war are regarded in both New Dehli and Islamabad with insufficient care. Past patterns of war, present military capabilities, and the lack of awareness of what a future war would entail, raise concerns about the seriousness with which the issue has been addressed by Indian and Pakistani leadership. There has also been no effort by the two governments to put into place a mechanism by which the issues can be tackled and the risks of a nuclear conflict reduced. In the event of another military conflict between India and Pakistan, these factors could coalesce to pose serious risks of nuclear escalation, even as the political leadership in the two countries continues to make efforts to allay fears about this possibility.

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