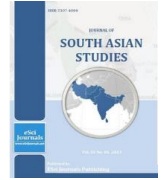




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Book Review

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE IN SOUTHERN ASIA: CHINA, INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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By Arpit Rajain, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, May 1, 2005. 495pp. ISBN 0761932305. USD 97.

In his book *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia*, Arpit Rajain has tried to address many aspects of nuclear deterrence. He has focused on the concepts of minimum nuclear deterrence, limited war, the triangular relationship of China, India, Pakistan and a multitude of other factors like the strategic culture, nuclear doctrines, and domestic politics; Arpit Rajain a senior policy analyst at the Centre for Global Studies, Mumbai (at the time of publication) has used the concept of nuclear deterrence to analyse not only Indo-Pak relations but also the role of nuclear armed China in the security dynamics of Southern Asia.

The book starts with the examination of the three potentially deadly confrontations of nuclear armed states, these events are the Cuban missile crisis, the Ussuri river clashes and the Kargil conflict respectively. Though not a single shot was fired in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 but the tensions rose to a level where both the superpowers stopped on the verge of initiating a nuclear catastrophe. It all started with the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba with US aggressively demanding the immediate withdrawal of Soviet assets. According to author, the primary motives of Soviet Union in deploying their missiles might have been to improve their bargaining position, to protect Cuba and to find an opportunity to improve their position in Europe. This deployment could not achieve what was expected of it except for USA's non-aggression pledge towards Cuba. Many scholars even contend that it was not deterrence but mere luck that narrowly avoided a nuclear conflict in this crisis.

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The Ussuri river clash of 1969 is the first armed conflict between nuclear weapon states which erupted out of a border dispute between China and Soviet Union. Later on, the Soviet Union gave up its claims on the disputed territory but the incident clearly raised questions on the notion of deterrence and highlighted the risk of escalation. The only limited armed conflict after the Sino-Soviet border dispute is Kargil war of 1999 where the two nuclear rivals of South Asia fought despite a high risk of escalation. Many Indians believed that the presence of nuclear weapons prevented India from crossing the Line of Control. While on Pakistan's side nuclear capability was considered a potential balancer in conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan. The Kargil conflict provided much support to the idea of a possible failure of deterrence and its intense ramifications for sustaining peace in the region. Author's analysis of above mentioned examples concludes, "nuclear weapons do not prevent the outbreak of conflict; on the contrary, they increase the chances of skirmishes that contain seeds of escalation to the nuclear level".

In a chapter titled 'Revisiting Deterrence', the author has explained the idea of deterrence being based "on the belief that rationally calculating decision makers would refrain from a first strike, fearing a massive retaliatory strike". In an attempt to further clarify deterrence concept, the writer has quoted Michael Howard's definition which defines deterrence as "a policy that seeks to persuade an adversary, through the threat of military retaliation, that the cost of using military force to resolve political conflict will outweigh the benefits". He further describes the concepts of deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial. Deterrence by

punishment uses the threat of punishment to deter opponent's aggression. American nuclear strategies of massive retaliation and assured destruction were based on deterrence by punishment. While deterrence by denial is to convince the opponent through defensive measures that his aggression will fail. Unlike deterrence by punishment, defence is the core aspect of deterrence by denial.

"In a scenario where more than two states are engaged in trying to deter each other, the calculations are complex", this is what the writer says about the triangular deterrent relationship. He further adds that a miscalculation or rational choice might escalate a crisis to the level of a nuclear exchange. A mere technical error or political causes may shatter deterrence. Moreover many misperceptions are involved in the pursuit of a workable deterrent strategy like efforts by one state for a "survivable second strike capability can be misperceived by its adversary as a preparation for a pre-emptive strike". Apart from this the question of numbers is still unanswered in deterrence strategies, "how much is enough?" is still debated among scholars. The concept of limited war under nuclear umbrella with the inherent ability to escalate also increases the threat of nuclear war in a triangular relationship. Writer has quoted Barry Posen as "the disarray of the 'fog of war' and analysis under the intense pressure of conflict, command, control, communications and intelligence are likely to suffer, and there could occur, what he has called unplanned escalation'.

After discussing the conceptual imperatives of deterrence, Arpit Rajain has dedicated three separate chapters to analyse China, India and Pakistan via their strategic culture, nuclear doctrines, command and control, arms control and their foreign policy issues. Starting with China, author admits its potential to influence international system in the coming years. Author has discussed deceptions, limited use of force, centrality of armed forces, and primacy of men over weapons along with military modernization as the key factors of Chinese strategic culture. Regarding Chinese nuclear doctrine writer is of the view that from the beginning China realized the futility of competing with superpowers thus it adopted the strategy of credible minimum nuclear deterrence. In addition to this China is a strong proponent of non-nuclear proliferation. Writer has also discussed Chinese foreign relations with special

emphasis on China's nuclear and missile technology assistance to Pakistan. China's continuous focus on its economic development and force modernization suggest that it has the potentials of a great power.

Arpit Rajain while discussing Indian strategic culture has denied any existence of a Hindu strategic culture. He has quoted Jawaharlal Nehru's explanation of Hinduism's essence as to live and let live. While discussing Indian Nuclear Program author has pointed towards security threats from China and India with a slight reference to domestic politics and bureaucratic compulsions. On Indian's nuclear doctrine author has mentioned its key points as minimum nuclear deterrence, no-first use, no use against non-nuclear powers and commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons. After discussing India's foreign policy issues, author went on to state its stance on CTBT, FMCT and NPT. India has not signed any of these treaties while linking them to their demands of time-bound nuclear disarmament.

In the end author has focused on the third nuclear armed states in Southern Asia, Pakistan while pointing to its confused role in international system author argues that it has strengthened its armed forces to shape its destiny. National security decision making in Pakistan is largely dominated by the armed forces. Furthermore Pakistan's nuclear program has been Indo-centric with reactionary behaviour to India's nuclear capabilities. In Pakistan's foreign policy issues author has highlighted Pak-China relations with special reference to China's transfer of missile and nuclear technology to Pakistan.

In conclusion writer has described possible scenarios of deterrence failure in Southern Asia. A possible conflict in India-Pakistan setting may arise from the dragged conflict on Kashmir. Another adventure along LOC by Pakistan like Kargil may lead towards an ultimate nuclear exchange. While in China-India setting, a strategy of salami slicing of its claimed Indian territories has the potential to trigger a nuclear war. In the end author asserts that it may not be correct to import western constructs of cold war, rather a delicate analysis of cultures, politics, and geo-political realities will enable scholars to understand the complex nuclear interplay of Southern Asia. The book lacks a proper logical connection between sections and chapters otherwise a fine attempt in understanding the trio-nuclear relations in Southern Asia.