India’s Ballistic Missile Defense: Implications for South Asian Deterrence Stability

A single factor may not fully explain the rationale for India’s quest for a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system. Security, prestige, and an aspiration for power projection are predominant factors in New Delhi’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, as well as in its pursuit of a BMD system. Particularly after the 2005 India–U.S. nuclear deal, which allowed the United States to provide nuclear-related facilities that India would only use for peaceful purposes, New Delhi has strived for a nuclear strategy that will not only include a nuclear triad (missiles, aircrafts, submarines), but also a successful operationalization of a BMD system to meet its geopolitical and geostrategic goals in the region. This in turn would make India one of five countries—in addition to the United States, Russia, China, and Israel—to have an operational BMD system.

Since its first BMD test in 2006, India has carried out more than ten tests, three of which have confronted failure. In both February and March 2017, India subsequently tested a high-altitude interceptor missile designed to enhance the “kill” probability of incoming ballistic missiles both inside (endo) and outside (exo) the earth’s atmosphere. On these recent BMD tests, one of India’s defense officials stated that, “all the mission objectives were successfully met. The weapon system radars tracked the target and provided the initial guidance to

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the interceptor which could precisely home on to the target and destroyed it in the
endo-atmospheric layer.” The Indian Ministry of Defense also revealed that
“India has crossed an important milestone in building its overall capability
towards enhanced security against incoming ballistic missile threats.”

Despite India’s written Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) of 1999 and 2003, and
nearly two decades of its nuclear maturity since its 1998 nuclear tests, India’s
nuclear doctrine remains open for more interpretation and modifications. As
India’s DND remains an open draft, India may bring more changes to it when
and if India deems it would suit its strategic imperatives. Nevertheless, India has
not fully articulated its essentials of nuclear policy such as the nuclear policy of
“minimum deterrence,” its doctrinal posture on “No First Use” (NFU), and its
retaliatory strategy of “massive retaliation.” Each of these core ingredients has
flaws and may not remain consistent with what earlier Indian leaderships concep-
tualized. Currently, there appears to be a debate on whether India might shift away
from NFU to First Use—changing from a policy of not being the first actor to use
nuclear weapons in a dispute to potentially strike first if a war has already started as
part of its counterforce targeting posture. Yet, one has to wait and see if this
debate materializes more strongly within the Indian civilian official domain. All
these essential ingredients of India’s DND pave the way for India’s eventual
deployment of the BMD system. Similarly, the development of India’s BMD
system could further contribute to this debate on these core elements of its
nuclear policy.

China, India, and Pakistan—all three nuclear weapons states—create a “triangular
dilemma.” Although China’s strategic force
development and its modernization is meant
to counter U.S. predominance in the Asia–
Pacific region, India’s development of its deter-
rent forces focuses on China and Pakistan as its
strategic factors. This in turn creates worries in
the Chinese security establishment. Pakistan,
in turn, then reacts to India. India, for
example, may not be able to fully justify its
nuclear strategy to become more credible
against China while remaining “minimum” against Pakistan. While elaborating
such an Indian strategic imperative, Devin T. Hagerty, a leading South Asian
nuclear specialist, explains that India’s deterrent force posture includes attempts
to “deter nuclear attacks by either China or Pakistan; minimize the likelihood
of conventional war with China or Pakistan (which might escalate to nuclear
war); maximize the probability of India winning a war with either adversary,
should one erupt; promote India’s goal of emerging as a fully sovereign and
autonomous great power; and do all of these things without provoking countervailing responses in Beijing and/or Islamabad that would undermine India’s net security.” As India perceives that it confronts two adversaries, its development of deployed defenses could create strategic worries in South Asia, particularly for both China and Pakistan.

In this context, India’s BMD is an interesting, but expensive development that in turn reflects India’s organizational and technological imperatives to acquire advanced technology. India believes that this could enhance its security by defending its major cities. Islamabad believes that India’s deployment of the BMD may give India a false sense of security and is counterproductive for South Asian deterrence stability. India’s development of BMD forces is causing a strategic flux that contributes to an “unending arms race” in the South Asian region—it affects the credibility of Pakistani deterrent forces, and that in turn makes Islamabad explore effective countermeasures in order to defeat the Indian deployed defenses, particularly because of the value of accuracy and technological innovation in the new era of counterforce strategy.

This article begins with India’s pursuit for the BMD shield and the rationale of its development. It discusses the countermeasures Pakistan could develop as well as how India’s BMD development and its deployment could have strategic implications for South Asian deterrence stability. In its conclusion, anticipating successful Indian deployment of its BMD system as well as Pakistani countermeasures, the paper calls to revisit the proposed Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) that has not yet been implemented in South Asia to avoid the risk of war and sustain deterrence stability.

India’s Pursuit for BMD

U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars” speech under the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 was influential in India’s initial interest in a BMD program. India’s Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) played a crucial role in shaping its BMD program post 9/11, after it agreed with the U.S. strategic framework that included U.S. support to India in developing BMD forces in Asia. The post-9/11 India–U.S. growing strategic partnership has further supported India’s BMD program by seeking support from countries such as Russia, France, and Israel that have also contributed to India’s missile defense system.

Currently and more specifically, India is working on the development of a two-tiered missile defense shield. The first tier is the Prithvi Air Defense (PAD), capable of addressing high-altitude threats. The second is the Advanced Air Defense (AAD) capable of addressing low-altitude threats. After successful development and deployment of these two types of defense systems, India could plan for
an “enhanced air defense capability” covering a wider part of India’s territory, its population centers, and strategic assets. However, a comprehensive strategy for its deployment of the BMD system would require India to utilize both advanced technology from friendly countries and its indigenous capabilities to tackle the immediate requirements. Indian security analyst Vinod Kumar remarked, “Without abandoning its indigenization goals, India should move on to a phased approach of building an initial augmented air defense capability to plug major gaps… toward a comprehensive missile defense shield that can protect against all possible aerial threats.”

Currently, India’s development and deployment aim at protecting only two cities, New Delhi and Mumbai (where the Indian leadership sits and the center of the Indian economy, respectively). But it is not clear whether India might expand its deployed defenses to other cities equally important as part of India’s territory and sovereignty. Although it would be a success story if India could protect two important cities, the loss of other cities not protected from its deployed forces may also become unacceptable. A reminder from McGeorge Bundy, the U.S. National Security Adviser during the peak of the Cold War, is worth mentioning to contextualize: “Think-tank analysts can set levels of acceptable damage well up in the tens of millions of lives … in the real world of real political leaders—whether here or in the Soviet Union—a decision that would bring even one hydrogen bomb on one city of one’s own country would be recognized in advance as a catastrophic blunder; ten bombs on ten cities would be a disaster beyond history; and a hundred bombs on a hundred cities are unthinkable.”

The loss of one city by nuclear weapons use may not be acceptable to India. Indeed, the protection of each city would become difficult for India, just as it was difficult for the Soviet Union (Russia) and the United States. Cold War contextualization depicts that effective protection of population center against a large-scale nuclear attack is not possible. In this context, Charles L. Glaser, a renowned theorist and nuclear strategist, concluded that “no foreseeable technical change will alter this condition.”

Nevertheless, India has successfully completed different types of BMD-related tests as it enhances its strategic cooperation with other powers, like the United States. However, the expenses of defense forces means it would take many years before India could actually deploy them. Even then, in an actual war, we are not sure whether India’s deployed forces could successfully protect its key cities, military installments, and other sites of strategic value. Much would then
depend on how sophisticated the adversary’s countermeasures are against the deployed defense system. Many in Pakistan believe that India’s BMD system may not be able to guarantee intercepting all of the incoming missiles, especially when countermeasures are based on advanced and sophisticated technology.

The complete success of Indian deployed forces may become a question mark for Indian strategists as well. Nevertheless, India could expand its deployed defenses to other parts of India, injecting more money for the import of both advanced technology and development of indigenous capability as well as crafting better co-production and an enhanced strategic partnership with the United States and other key allies such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia and Israel.

**India’s Potential Rationales: the Shield and the Sword**

Before discussing implications of India’s BMD system for regional stability, it is imperative to analyze in greater detail India’s potential rationale for developing its BMD system. One of the objectives of India’s security leadership is likely that the DRDO, with its ambitious and expensive BMD program, makes sure that its missile defense system becomes sophisticated, remains successfully deployed, and is capable of intercepting incoming missiles of both low and high altitude from India’s perceived adversaries. For India, missile development from China or Pakistan, comprising the capability of both high and low altitude ballistic missile technology, could constitute such a threat. Therefore, India is undoubtedly seeking an effective and comprehensive shield against Pakistani and Chinese missile development to protect its key cities and deterrent forces from being preempted.15

But why else might India’s BMD program exist? What other purposes might it serve? It is important to understand the potential logic of India’s deployment of its BMD through the defense-offense framework, that is, whether India’s rationale of BMD is merely for defensive purposes or if it could enhance India’s confidence to become offensive as well. The following rationales reflect a sheer combination of defense-offensive approaches. In other words, India would have both a shield to protect and a sword to fight.

First, there is an argument that an Indian defense shield could protect India and its deterrent forces from an unauthorized terrorist attack, largely perceived to be taking place from Pakistan or possibly from China. For example, South Asian nuclear specialist Rajesh Basrur argues that deployment of India’s BMD shield could reduce this vulnerability, if not completely eliminate it.16

However, Pakistan would resent the BMD system being used in this way, and argue that it has cracked down on many terrorist organizations. One of Pakistan’s
recent military operations in 2017, called Radd-ul-Fasaad, was meant to achieve a similar objective—that is, eliminating all terrorist activities from across the country—and could potentially diminish the risks of military confrontations due to terrorism between India and Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan argues that its deterrent assets are completely in safe hands and its command-and-control system is robust, centralized, and effective, as acknowledged by the international community. That being said, there is no such possibility that a terrorist could use missiles against India while using Pakistani soil. The capability of the BMD system would therefore not only allow India to defend itself, but also to have greater confidence in its ability to strike back. Planning to wage smaller and bigger wars because of the spread of terrorism on both sides of the border may not be a rational approach to resolve the issue. This could have adverse effects for South Asian strategic stability.

Second, proponents of the BMD system would argue that deploying BMD forces could enable India to reduce its offensive deterrent forces and promote the arms control process between the two nuclear rivals. For example, President Reagan predicted that U.S. development of its BMD system “could pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves.” In a similar context, proponents of India’s deployment of BMD strongly believe that it would create incentives for strategic stability and counter-proliferation of ballistic missiles in South Asia. This, in other words, means that India’s strategic adversaries (either China or Pakistan) would get involved with India to reduce the production of ballistic missiles, perceiving that the risk and consequences of confrontation would have become too high. In doing so, BMD proponents argue that this rationale may promote deterrent stability by encouraging arms control in South Asia.

However, it is not clear whether or how India, through its BMD system development, could encourage Pakistan and/or China to craft a strategy for an arms control regime in South Asia. It is pertinent to note that India has already rejected Pakistan’s proposal on the establishment of a Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) in 1999 after India had presented its first draft of the DND followed by the Kargil crisis in the same year. The proposed SRR included one of the provisions on non-introduction of anti-ballistic missile systems between the two rival nuclear states. Pakistan continues to propose the SRR for deterrence stability in South Asia, and largely believes that it is India that does not agree to the Pakistani proposal on this. The suspicion is that India had already intended to develop its BMD system and acquire a nuclear triad as mentioned in the 1999 Indian DND. Also, changes in the strategic environment from the Indian perspective—particularly after the Kargil crisis in 1999, the common border confrontation between India and Pakistan in 2002–2003, Mumbai in 2008, and more recently the Pathankot and Uri incidents in 2016—spurred the Indian government to focus on terrorism.
first with Pakistan. These incidents have further diminished the prospects of SRR between India and Pakistan. Currently, there is no SRR or any other formal establishment or institutionalization of an arms control regime in South Asia that could restrain the production of newer deterrent force technology both in the conventional and nuclear domains.

Third, more conceptually, India may say that its BMD system is for defensive purposes without strategically intimidating its adversary. India could claim that its BMD deployment is primarily to protect its key cities and deterrent assets from an adversary’s preemptive strikes, and are not meant for its own preemptive and/or offensive strategy against its adversary. India could declare that, unlike the United States, it would not expand its deployed defenses to protect its allies and partners in the South Asian region. Although all these scenarios may justify India’s rationale to develop its BMD system, they would be followed by consequences for South Asian deterrence stability, whether intended or unintended.

Fourth, many may consider that India’s deployment of its BMD could offset its frustration in carrying out any limited surgical strike against Pakistan in the event of any perceived terrorist attacks from within parts of Pakistan, thereby, blunting Pakistan’s declaratory nuclear strategy of first-use.

Of course, Pakistan is concerned that the deployment of BMD could boost the Indian confidence in its ability to strike first with the belief that it could protect itself afterward against what strategists have called “ragged retaliation.” In this case, that means that India could strike Pakistani nuclear forces first and use its missile defense to defend against the remaining Pakistani nuclear arsenal, even if Indian BMD could not withstand a full Pakistani first strike. This fear is heightened because the modified Indian nuclear policy draft of 2003 is based on a counterforce strategy in India. Further, as previously mentioned, any revision in the near future may place emphasis on a counterforce strategy that in turn could accelerate India’s shift from nuclear NFU to allowing the option to use nuclear weapons first, if war were already underway, thereby shifting the escalation dominance to its favor.

This would also mean that India’s deployed BMD forces would boost India’s defensive abilities if it were to carry out a possible future surgical strike against parts of Pakistan. This in turn could help India meet its political and military goals. Until now, India has not carried out any of its plans for surgical attacks against any parts of Pakistan. The Indian security leadership claims that it successfully carried out a so-called surgical strike in September 2016 after a series of attacks on the Indian military in Indian-held
Kashmir, but the Pakistani leadership completely rejects such claims, saying that there is no evidence to it.  

India continues to prepare itself for carrying out a preemptive surgical strike under the banner of its Cold Start Doctrine (CSD). In this context, India’s top military leadership, General Bipin Rawat, has publicly claimed the existence of CSD aiming at carrying out a limited war. General Bipin claimed in an interview to India Today that, “[W]e know that the future wars will be short and intense and, when short and intense wars are the future forms of combat, you have to be prepared to move fast. Now this is something which you can term in whatever way you want.” Moreover, in the same interview, General Bipin openly stated, “Weaknesses have to be overcome. And these weaknesses can only be overcome if you accept the strategy (Cold Start). If you don’t accept the strategy, then you will let your weaknesses [limit you]. But when you enunciate a strategy you say: these are the weaknesses which I need to overcome to adopt success.” This clearly reflects the Indian security leadership’s longstanding struggle for deployment of the Cold Start Doctrine closer to the Pakistani border, thus endangering the risk of a limited war and/or counterforce strikes amid the existence of nuclear forces in South Asia. Therefore, the perceived BMD system provides a rationale to enable India with a shield to protect itself and a sword to strike Pakistan with nuclear weapons first.

In sum, India could craft many rationales for the development of its BMD system in South Asia, protecting both its key cities and deterrent assets within these cities, before India could make it more comprehensive, covering major parts of India. The defense-offense elements for India’s deployed defenses exist to address both India’s defensive and offensive strategic imperatives. As Pakistan closely observes India’s development of the BMD system, it could also craft counterstrategies in order to defeat the deployed Indian system.

**Responses to a Shield in South Asia**

India’s successful deployed defenses could certainly enhance the credibility of India’s deterrent forces, but this in turn could decrease the security of its adversaries, particularly of Pakistan. Pakistan perceives that India’s deployed defenses could undermine the credibility of its deterrent forces. Pakistan’s response to India’s BMD may not immediately be to develop its own BMD system, at least in the immediate future. Islamabad could produce countermeasures to defeat the deployed defenses of India, making sure that Pakistan does not shift away from its nuclear policy of minimum deterrence.

Pakistan may want to develop a strategy to: a) successfully avoid pressure from the international community against its countermeasures to the would-be
deployed defenses of its adversary; b) avoid entering into a severe arms race in South Asia; and c) reflect more on its conceptualized strategy for its deterrent forces rather than bring immediate shifts in those policies. Islamabad could take rational measures toward how these challenges could be tackled without undermining the credibility of its deterrent forces and/or eroding deterrence in South Asia.

Pakistan is already working on certain types of effective countermeasures, given that it perceives threats from India’s ballistic missiles including that of the BMD system. Such countermeasures are carried out for a couple of strategic reasons. One, they are useful for deterrence, signaling that the countermeasures developed by Pakistan can successfully be able to defeat India’s deployed defenses. Two, they are developed to sustain deterrence stability so that both sides would not wage strikes (i.e. both limited and full-fledged) against each other. And three, they may enhance the credibility of deterrent forces of a nuclear weapons state (in this case Pakistan) – that is, Pakistan would claim that its reliable and effective countermeasure against Indian BMD would increase the credibility of its deterrent forces to create a deterrence balance in South Asia. As India develops and deploys its defenses to protect its deterrent forces and their delivery systems from being attacked and safeguards its key cities, if not all of India, then India can expect its adversary could develop countermeasures to defeat the Indian deployed defenses.

Pakistan will want to develop responses to India’s BMD system to offset its perceived growing threat in South Asia. First, although developing and deploying a missile shield program remains expensive and Pakistan may not currently be able to afford it, Islamabad at some point in the future may also plan to develop its own BMD system to follow suit. Eventually, Pakistan would need to develop a BMD system to protect major cities, particularly after India intends to go for MIRV technology and increases the ranges of SLBM for counterforce targeting purposes.

However, for now, Pakistan could seek to sustain the credibility of its short, intermediate, and long-range missiles. Pakistan has developed a specialty in terms of indigenously developing cruise and ballistic missiles for deterrence purposes. It consistently increases its lethality, improves its penetrability, and enhances its ranges to the assigned targets each of these missiles are supposed to hit. These are the key deterrent forces to defeat a deployed BMD system. For example, testing to upgrade Pakistan’s series of Babur cruise missiles could deter and defeat India’s BMD system. Pakistan has recently developed the Babur-III nuclear-capable submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM) with the range of
450km to counter the increasing capabilities of India’s nuclear submarine development program. Pakistan could increase the SLCMs’ ranges in the near future. Although this is a very interesting and significant strategic development, Pakistan could also turn this into land-based cruise capability to defeat India’s BMD.

Second, in addition to cruise missile capability, Pakistan also successfully conducted a test on a ballistic missile, named *Ababeel*, with a range of 2200 km. Pakistan’s security leadership terms this as a Multiple Independently-targeted Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) that aims to eventually defeat the Indian BMD system. Nevertheless, Pakistan may have other options of turning its ballistic missiles into MIRV technology when and if needed. The prime candidates are the *Shaheen*-II and *Shaheen*-III missiles, given their payload capacity. In such a strategic process, Pakistan could increase its advantage of multiplying the payloads on one missile capable of hitting different assigned targets. There are chances that MIRVs could undermine the credibility of India’s deployed defense shield. In fact, MIRV was created against a BMD capability. For example, the United States was the first to develop MIRV capacity against the Soviet Union Anti-Ballistic Missile shield during the peak of the Cold War. Increasing warheads mounted on a MIRV would enhance their credibility enough to defeat the adversary’s defense shield, no matter how sophisticated the shield may be. Although this could increase the arms race, thereby damaging the prospects of an arms control/strategic restraint regime as initially proposed by Pakistan, ‘MIRVing’ could be one of the effective countermeasures against the possible deployment of a missile shield in South Asia.

Third, the possible deployment of a shield in South Asia would presumably make Pakistan rely even more on nuclear weapons. This could become Pakistan’s strategic compulsion to deter the adversary’s major conventional and nuclear strikes. The reliance on nuclear weapons increases when a conventional asymmetry exists between two nuclear rivals. This happened between the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia) during the Cold War. The disparity in the conventional force domain exists between India and Pakistan. Since India’s BMD system would widen this conventional asymmetry, the reliance on nuclear weapons by Pakistan would increase further to offset the growing imbalance in South Asia. Reliance on nuclear weapons would mean that Pakistan could potentially increase its warheads to a level it requires in order to address the deterrence issue. This would then mean Pakistan would develop more delivery systems for its warheads to be able to defeat the deployed system, that is, to create a balance and possibly avert war in South Asia.
Finally, as India deploys its first phase of its BMD forces, it could soon make it comprehensive, covering many other cities of India by increasing the number of interceptors for each of the cities. Pakistan could also develop other sophisticated countermeasures. In addition to MIRVing, Pakistan against India, like China against the United States, could at some stage develop decoys, chaff, jamming, thermal shielding, and warheads with very low infrared signature. It could develop these options to directly or indirectly attack the sensor system of the deployed shield. These are some of the possible sophisticated countermeasures China may consider against the U.S. deployed forces in Asia. Similarly, China in a worst-case scenario could also explode nuclear weapons in outer space to interfere with U.S. radars and infrared sensors.\footnote{31}

Although this is not to suggest that Pakistan would need to respond to its adversary the same way China might against its potential adversary, multiple options are available to be able to successfully defeat India’s deployed defenses. These and yet many more future countermeasures could affect the deployed defense forces in South Asia. As the U.S.–India strategic partnership grows, it could include the transfer and co-production of BMD-related technology to India. Similarly, it can also be assumed that China–Pakistan strategic and economic partnerships might grow as well.\footnote{32} Through the Pakistan–China Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of China’s grand Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pakistan could have the opportunity to secure the type of countermeasures China successfully builds against U.S. deployed defense forces in Asia.

**Strategic Implications**

India’s BMD shield could have multiple strategic implications both for China and Pakistan. A comprehensive and/or expanded BMD program in India could worry China both in short- and long-term perspectives.

Looking at Pakistan, one objective of India’s BMD shield is usually to blunt Islamabad’s declaratory nuclear option of first use. As previously discussed, it could actually enhance Pakistan’s reliance on nuclear weapons against India’s conventional force advancement, largely bolstered by its Cold Start Doctrine and BMD shield. Since Pakistan declares that it could use its nuclear weapons as a last resort for its ultimate survival and given the growing conventional asymmetry between the two adversaries in South Asia, Pakistan has rejected India’s proposal of NFU in South Asia since the release of India’s DND in 1999.\footnote{33} Since ambiguity exists in Pakistan’s declaratory nuclear strategy, as it exists in each nuclear weapon state, it is not clear where, how, or when Pakistan would use its deterrent forces. As long as ambiguity serves its purpose, nuclear weapons states may not bother to open up much. In fact,
Pakistan does not consider the recent public analytical debate about how India might shift from NFU to first use a big surprise.\textsuperscript{34}

Presumably for Pakistan, opening up its nuclear strategy unnecessarily would mean inviting more vulnerability that could undermine the credibility of its deterrent forces. It is unreasonable to think Pakistan would do this in the near future. Even if Pakistan were to become more transparent in the long-term, it would make sure that the credibility of its deterrent forces remained intact. Regardless, Pakistan may not allow India’s development of a BMD shield to blunt Pakistan’s asymmetric nuclear strategy of using its nuclear weapons first, both in the event of a conventional or nuclear attack. If India’s deployed defense forces strengthen its motives for carrying out a surgical strike against Pakistan, it could affect Pakistan’s nuclear strategy. India would desire that Pakistan be unable to use its short-range battlefield nuclear weapons against India’s limited conventional force attack. This could erode nuclear deterrence at the tactical level, thus undermining the credibility of Pakistan’s deterrent forces. Pakistan may then need to come up with reasonable and rational options to deal with such a scenario.

Second, Pakistan largely perceives India’s BMD as an offensive strategy enabling India to both defend and fight. That being said, many in Pakistan may presume that India’s deployed forces would increase India’s security and the credibility of its deterrent forces. This in turn would create a classic security dilemma in South Asia: the more India enhances its deterrent forces, the more it could decrease the security of its adversary. This dilemma remains one of the essential and, perhaps, predominant ingredients for crisis instability and nuclear proliferation between nuclear states. This theoretical perspective existed during the Cold War, and it explains nuclear South Asia. As part of its nuclear strategy, India’s BMD would appear offensive for its adversary. Pakistan would fear that this provides incentives to India to strike first with the belief that the shield would protect it when the adversary strikes later.

Third, although it may sound ideal to achieve arms control through India’s BMD system, it is unlikely that this might materialize in the South Asian security environment. For many in Pakistan, the deployed defense forces of India would mean that New Delhi would require more deterrent forces in order to successfully deploy its defense shield. Major powers’ nuclear exceptions to India provide New Delhi an exploited opportunity to produce many fissile materials to produce more warheads.\textsuperscript{35} For a comprehensive and/or expanded version of its BMD system,
India’s Ballistic Missile Defense

India would perhaps require more interceptors and develop strategic cooperation with friendly countries. Logically, India’s expanded version of the BMD program after it successfully achieves the deployment of its first phase would thus cause a greater threat for the South Asian region. Therefore, contrary to what India may perceive, its shield system may not reduce an arms race. Rather, it could trigger a new arms race, one that seeks successful delivery systems to enable the adversary to defeat India’s deployed forces. Since this could occur in a variety of ways, an arms race of some kind between the nuclear rivals is inevitable as long as ambitious conventional and sophisticated nuclear projects are accelerated.

For all these reasons, India’s deployment of its BMD forces would have immense strategic implications for South Asia, pressuring Pakistan to produce effective countermeasures to be able to defeat the deployed shield. This would speed up a new arms race between the two rival South Asian nuclear states, which in turn would necessitate some form of restraint regime such as the previously proposed SRR.

Revisiting the SRR

Amidst the arrival of newer and sophisticated deterrence forces, including the BMD system discussed that would trigger a new arms race between India and Pakistan, it would be beneficial for India and Pakistan to revisit the previously proposed Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR). Conceptually, the SRR, and/or more broadly an arms control regime, would put a limit on any arms race. This would reduce the chances of war, and sustain deterrence stability between India and Pakistan. The provisions of an SRR could encourage both India and Pakistan to take part in international non-proliferation regime discussions in order to figure out how these nuclear weapons states could best contribute toward a regional and international arms control regime mechanism. The established nuclear weapons states would like both India and Pakistan to get on board with them when it comes to a universal arms control regime process, just as both India and Pakistan would want major nuclear weapons states to first take initiatives toward nuclear disarmament.36

Nevertheless, it is imperative to mention that the concept of an SRR need not be mixed with the perception of disarmament. There is a conceptual and practical difference between the two terms: arms control may not contribute to the provision of both general and complete disarmament. The arms control process encourages restraint on each respective nuclear weapons state as part of the discussion, rather than actually disarming a nuclear weapon state. Although currently, nuclear disarmament is not taking place among nuclear weapons states, and both the major and smaller nuclear weapons states are not ready for this
common task of international nonproliferation regimes, both the United States and the Soviet Union (Russia) practiced the arms control process during the peak of the Cold War when each side possessed thousands of nuclear weapons. They still continue to hold certain useful discussions in this regard, though each of these bilateral strategic dialogues may not be free from certain loopholes.

The prospects for arms control between India and Pakistan at some point could also include India’s BMD system and the countermeasures to it. However, one of the major hurdles for New Delhi would be that India may not agree to what Pakistan proposes because of India’s aspiration for power projection in the South Asian region and the absence of other nuclear weapons states, such as China, as a full member party to the proposed discussion. Pakistan may perceive India’s consistent development of its deterrent forces based on sophisticated technological change as one of the major hurdles that in turn could undermine the credibility of Pakistan’s deterrent forces. In doing so, Pakistan may sustain the development of its countermeasures to maintain balance if not parity.

However, unilateral cuts or restraint on Pakistan’s countermeasures (MIRVs) in response to what India develops (BMD) will not materialize, and will remain a pipedream in twenty-first century South Asian nuclear politics. MIRVs were created in the Cold War because of the arrival of BMD. MIRVs as an effective countermeasure may continue to get developed and deployed because of the introduction of the BMD system in South Asia.

That being said, although the prospects for both disarmament among nuclear weapons states in general and an arms control regime between India and Pakistan in particular are dim, revisiting the proposed SRR, if not nuclear disarmament, is imperative. If both India and Pakistan would agree on SRR terms and conditions, the regional nuclear arms race could be decelerated, avoiding the risks of accidental war and sustaining deterrence stability in South Asia.

Notes

3. For interesting account on India’s nuclear strategy, see Ashley Tellis, India’s Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001); George Perkovich, India’s Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Rajesh Basrur, Minimum Deterrence and India’s Nuclear Security, (California: Stanford University Press, 2006); Bharat Karnad,

4. For a recent interesting analysis, see Shivshankar Menon, Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2016).


10. Ibid, 184.


30. For excellent analysis see, Feroz H. Khan and Masoor Ahmed, “Pakistan, MIRVs, and Counterforce Targeting,” in Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler and Shane Mason (eds.), The Lure and Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age, (Washington: Stimson, 2016), pp. 149-175.


