



# Understanding the Nuclearization of Middle East with Reference to Indo-Pak Security Paradox

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## Abstract

Developmental capability of Iran's nuclear weapons is a remarkable challenge facing the security dynamics of regions as well as the world at large, especially in the already volatile Middle East region. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential impacts of such an acquisition on strategic stability in response to Israel's expansion on the one hand and Saudi-Pak Strategic Partnership on the other within the region. Drawing on historical precedents from South Asia and the Middle East, this paper will set in context the situation to be studied. It will analyze how Iran's nuclear capabilities could alter the strategic calculations of key regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Israel, and non-state actors like Hezbollah. This research will also consider the reactions of the international community, particularly the United States and other European nations, regarding an Iran with nuclear weapons. The nature of the research undertaken in the study is qualitative, and it utilizes case studies and interviews of experts on how nuclear proliferation may change power shifts, security collaborations, and even the scopes of conflict. By citing important themes and trends in the responses of various stakeholders, this research hopes to add depth and richness to regional stability. At the very least, this study expects to provide policymakers and scholars with insights into the delicate relationships between the highly contested issue of nuclear proliferation and strategic stability in the Middle East: that it will provide insights for future diplomatic efforts and security frameworks.

**Keywords:** Strategic Stability; Nuclear Deterrence; Nuclear Proliferation; Middle East; Pakistan; Iran.

## 1. Introduction

The recent Saudi-Pak Strategic Partnership which includes collective response against any aggression. The aggression against any one of them would result in a mutual defense. According to Saudi and Pakistani defense officials, all types of military means will be used by the two countries to

protect each other against the aggressor. Geopolitical tensions have long centered in the Middle East with its messy historical narratives, sectarian divisions, and punctuated landscape of conflict. Iran could soon add another layer of complexity to an already intricate regional security environment as a future nuclear power. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has maintained a nuclear program under the banner of peaceful energy development, but its intentions have often been questioned both by regional adversaries and by western powers. The dual nature of Iranian nuclear ambition-its need for energy versus possible military application-ignited an extremely contentious debate within international relations. That the drive for nuclear weapons in Iran is often cast within the logic of deterrence: possessing a nuclear capability is, in this view, assurance of national sovereignty as a bulwark against foreign aggression from the United States and Israel. Yet the implications of the nuclear-armed Iran stretch beyond its borders into the security considerations of neighboring states. This will have a cascading effect that may lead to regional arms race, since other states may feel compelled to acquire nuclear capabilities in response to Iran's actions.

## 2. Research Questions

1. How would Saudi-Pak Strategic Partnership will bring change in strategic environment of Middle East?
2. What will be the impact of Iran's nuclear capability shift on the strategic balance of actors in the region?
3. What would likely be the response of Israel towards its loosening grip of nuclear hegemony in the Middle East?

## 3. Research Objectives

1. An examination of how an Iranian nuclear capability may influence regional geopolitics would look at how such a development could disrupt the balance of power in the region, especially among traditional U.S. allies.
2. In analyzing Saudi Arabia-Pakistan Strategic Agreement with Iran's nuclear ambitions, and Israel's loosening grip on nuclear hegemony in Middle East will outline the contours of future security arrangements.
3. Assess the implications for future conflict and cooperation in the region.

This study traces out the possibilities of escalation as well as possible détente in a nuclear-enabled environment. Relevance of the Study The recent strategic partnership agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan has led the two countries towards a new milestone in their relations of more than seventy years. It has made Saudi Arabia capable of using Pakistan's Extended Nuclear Deterrence. This development has brought a major change in the Middle East as it has ended the nuclear hegemony of Israel. And therefore, it will further lead towards the nuclearization of Iran. In my opinion, the nuclear deterrence has been established in the Middle East with three nuclear weapon states including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. This new nuclear dynamics of Middle East has challenged the writ of Israel which considered it as a "sole superpower of Middle East" (According to Fareed Zakaria, CNN). Understanding historical patterns of conflict and cooperation in the Middle East, this study will give policymakers and scholars an overall view of the changing military dynamics of Middle East with a nuclear factor included in it. In this modern era where nuclear weapons are considered to provide a survival to the state as it threatens the enemy with an existential threat, these insights will enable policymakers and strategists to employ more viable diplomatic strategies and preventions of conflicts.

#### 4. Literature Review

Studies have been made by Banerjee (1987) and Oren (1994) discussed India and Pakistan's security relations. While Banerjee (1987) argued that the US supported Pakistan in 1971 war against India, Oren (1994) defended Pakistan's alliance with the US and West in increasing its military capabilities. A study conducted by Banerjee (1987) highlighted India and Pakistan's 1971 war and discussed the US role in it and further argued the US supported Pakistan in 1971 Bangladesh crisis. A study conducted by Oren (1994) highlighted India and Pakistan's arms competition and argued that the states go for the alliances to increase their military capabilities.

Bhimaya (1994) and Walker (1998) also discussed about the role civil military decision making in South Asia and the changing situation after India Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests. While Bhimaya (1994) argued that the international community have concerns over the civil military relations in India and Pakistan, Walker (1998) considered a change in international nuclear order after India and Pakistan's nuclear weapon tests. A study conducted by Bhimaya (1994) discussed the role of civil military decision making in South Asia in the prevalence of nuclear weapons and argued that major powers have serious concerns on emerging South Asian nuclear weapon states of India and Pakistan as the two states' nuclear weapons are not controlled by the same authority as in case of Pakistan, its nuclear weapons are controlled by its military while Indian nuclear weapons are under civilian control. A study done by Walker (1998) discussed about India and Pakistan's nuclear tests conducted in 1998 and argued that this new development will bring changes in the international nuclear relations in the world.

As Huntley (1999), Jain (2003) and Nizamani (1997) discussed India and Pakistan's nuclear path, India and Russia's cooperation and India and Pakistan's path to nuclearization. While Huntley (1999) was of the opinion that India and Pakistan cannot be directed to disarmament of nuclear weapons, Jain (2003) highlighted India and Russia's cooperation and Nizamani (1997) stressed that India and Pakistan will continue its nuclear path. A study made by Huntley (1999) highlighted the alternative futures after India and Pakistan's nuclear tests and argued that the two South Asian nuclear weapon states will continue to strengthen their nuclear weapon capabilities and it will be difficult to pursue them to follow the root of nuclear disarmament. A study made by Jain (2003) highlighted India and Russia's relations and said that India and Soviet Union have strong cooperation during Cold War era and this cooperation between India and Russia will also continue in all fields in future. The study conducted by Nizamani (1997) highlighted that the nuclear ambitions for India and Pakistan were so high that the two states could not change their routes.

Seth (1988) and Hagerty (1995) have discussed on 1987 Brasstacks crisis and 1990 crisis. Both Seth (1988) and Hagerty (1995) agreed on the US role in diffusing the tension in 1987 and 1990 crises. A study done by Seth (1988) discussed while discussing the US role during India and Pakistan 1987 Brasstacks crisis that US played an important role in diffusing the tension between India and Pakistan during Brasstacks crisis. A study conducted by Hagerty (1995) discussed India and Pakistan's 1990 crisis and stated while there was no nuclear crisis between India and Pakistan in 1990 but the US role was appreciable.

Fetter and Hagerty (1996) and Ganguly (1999) discussed about India and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and 1990 crisis. While Fetter and Hagerty (1996) highlighted 1990 crisis, Ganguly (1999) argued that possession of nuclear weapons has created strategic stability in the region. A study done by Fetter and Hagerty (1996) highlighted India and Pakistan's 1990 crisis and discussed about the nature of the crisis with their perceptions. A study conducted by Ganguly (1999) highlighted Indian nuclear tests and prospects for its future and argued that the strategic stability prevails in South Asia

and neither India nor Pakistan are sure about their First Strike Capabilities which can destroy the adversary's nuclear weapons.

Karl (2001) and Ganguly and Biringer (2001) discussed about nuclear deterrence in South Asia. While Karl (2001) argued that the results showed mix responses about the performance of nuclear deterrence, Ganguly and Biringer (2001) stressed that crisis stability prevailed between India and Pakistan in South Asia. A study conducted by Karl (2001) highlighted the proliferation scholarship and South Asia and said that there has been mixed evidence whether nuclear South Asia supports nuclear optimists or nuclear pessimists. A study conducted by Karl (2001) further added that the future of South Asia seems to be risk prone. A study made by Ganguly and Biringer (2001) discussed the nuclear crisis stability in South Asia and said that while looking at the history of India and Pakistan's four wars, the United States need to play its role in maintaining the strategic stability in South Asia.

Basrur (2001) and Hoyt (2001) wrote about the role of nuclear weapons in bringing stability in South Asia. While Basrur (2001) argued that there is instability in South Asia, Hoyt (2001) saw serious threats to strategic stability in South Asia. A study done by Basrur (2001) highlighted nuclear weapons and Indian strategic culture and said that there is strategic instability in South Asia. A study made by Basrur (2001) further added that there was need on Indian side to work more on operational level to maintain strategic stability in South Asia. A study made by Hoyt (2001) discussed Pakistani nuclear doctrine and dangers of strategic myopia and argued that the nuclearization of India and Pakistan have posed a serious threat to strategic stability in South Asia. A study done by Hoyt (2001) further added that cautious and careful policies of India and Pakistan can only guarantee strategic stability in this region which has a history full of animosity, wars and conflicts.

Sagan (2001), Hoodbhoy and Mian (2001) and Saez (2003) discussed about the strategic stability in South Asia. Sagan (2001), Hoodbhoy and Mian (2001) and Saez (2003) highlighted the chances of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan. A study done by Sagan (2001) highlighted the proliferation issue in South Asia and argued that there has been a wide debate between proliferation optimists and proliferation pessimists on the role of nuclear weapons in bringing stability and instability in South Asia. A study made by Sagan (2001) further added that the hostile relations between India and Pakistan indicate to the strategic instability in South Asia and he stressed the US to play its role in averting war between India and Pakistan. A study conducted by Hoodbhoy and Mian (2001) discussed Indo-Pak 2002 crisis in detail and highlighted the danger to the strategic stability in South Asia. Hoodbhoy and Mian (2001) added that during Indo-Pak 2002 crisis both states were at the edge of the accidental war. A study made by Saez (2003) discussed about BJP's government in India and chances of nuclear war between India and Pakistan and argued that the huge military mobilization on the two sides of the border during Indo-Pak 2002 crisis had the potential of a war which could be converted into a nuclear war.

Chari et al. (2003, 2009) and Weininger (2004) discussed about India and Pakistan's crises after nuclearization. While Chari et al. (2003, 2009) argued that the deterrence signal worked between India and Pakistan but needed the US help to make it stable, Weininger (2004) witnessed other factors other than nuclear deterrence play its role in averting war between India and Pakistan. A study made by Chari et al. (2003, 2009) for instance, considered the role of nuclear deterrence as a signal which worked between India and Pakistan since it has managed to create restraint on the Indian side. A study made by Chari et al. (2003, 2009) were not undermining the role of international diplomacy in averting conventional war between India and Pakistan. A study made by Weininger (2004) claimed that even though nuclear deterrence had played its role in averting conventional war between India

and Pakistan, other factors were of greater importance such as India's slow mobilization process and international diplomacy, especially the role of the United States.

Batcher (2004) and Cheema (2004) discussed the role of nuclear deterrence in South Asia. While Batcher (2004) argued about the possibility of a breakdown of deterrence in South Asia and estimated the losses of a limited nuclear war between India and Pakistan, Cheema (2004) had a faith in the role of nuclear deterrence. A study done by Batcher (2004) discussed the consequences of India and Pakistan's nuclear war and said that even a limited nuclear war between India and Pakistan will bring catastrophic results. Additionally, the study conducted by Cheema (2004) stressed on the role of nuclear deterrence in averting conventional war between India and Pakistan.

Kapur (2005) and Croft (2005) talked on the role nuclear deterrence and diplomacy in South Asia. While Kapur (2005) doubted nuclear deterrence's role in averting war between India and Pakistan, Croft (2005) favoured the role of diplomacy in reducing the environment of tension in South Asia. A study made by Kapur (2005) highlighted the topic India and Pakistan's situation after the nuclearization of the two states and compared it with the Cold War situation in Europe. A study conducted by Kapur (2005) further argued that the strategic instability in Europe stopped the lower level violence while the same facilitated the violence in South Asian and therefore the violence in South Asia has the germs of nuclear escalation. A study done by Croft (2005) discussed Composite Dialogue in South Asia and appreciated the efforts of the two states in continuing dialogue on the sidelines of the cricket diplomacy.

Meanwhile Ganguly (2008), Kapur (2008), Rauchhaus (2009), and Mehdi (2017) have discussed on the role of nuclear weapons in bringing stability in South Asia. While Ganguly (2008) considered nuclear weapons bringing stability between India and Pakistan, Kapur (2008) stressed that nuclear weapons have been a source of instability on South Asia. While Rauchhaus (2009) argues that possession of nuclear weapons prompts states to take serious risks, Mehdi (2017) sees increased competition between India, Pakistan and China in improving its conventional and nuclear forces. A study made by Ganguly (2008) discussed strategic stability in South Asia and argued that although India and Pakistan have been engaged in Kargil Conflict in 1998 and Indian Parliament attack crisis in 2001-2002 between 1998 and 2008, these crises did not escalate into war and according to Ganguly, this trend shows strategic stability in South Asia. A study made by Kapur (2008) highlighted the instability prevailing in South Asia after the nuclearization of India and Pakistan between 1998 and 2008 and argued that Kargil conflict fought between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states was just short of war and had the potential to be converted into a full-fledged war and Indo-Pak crisis in 2001-2002 which resulted in terrorist attack on Indian Parliament and experienced massive mobilization on the two sides may have caused in an accidental war leading to a nuclear exchange. A study made by Rauchhaus (2009) while highlighting the nuclear peace hypothesis stated that although nuclear weapons promote strategic stability, it also prompts states to take more risks in lower intensity disputes. A study conducted by Mehdi (2017) while highlighting India, Pakistan and China's nuclear posture and regional stability stated that the rapid increase in India, Pakistan and China's conventional and nuclear forces is creating regional instability in the region.

## 5. Discussion

Acquisition of Iran with nuclear weapons development capabilities is a near and long-term challenge for strategic stability in the Middle East. It has become more viable one for Iran after Saudi-Pak Strategic Partnership agreement to fight against any aggression collectively with all military means including the nuclear weapons. As result of the research findings show, historical precedents suggest that proliferation of nuclear capabilities normally starts regional arm races or even tensions within the

region. For instance, after carrying out nuclear tests in 1998, India and Pakistan massively increased their military posturing very much raising the stakes in security terms (Sagan 1999). The treat of Israeli expansion and Iranian quest for nuclear weapons led Saudi Arabia on the path to ensure its security with Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Partnership. Regional Responses and Arms Race Dynamics The regional players will likely respond to Iran's nuclear aspiration by triggering reactions that will not only destabilize the already fragile security environment but also contribute to an arms race. For example, it has openly stated that it would continue with its nuclear program if Iran developed nuclear weapons successfully (Gause 2011). This reaction is based on the strategic interest of Saudi Arabia to balance Iran's influence and to remain a hegemonic state in the Gulf. On the other hand, with Turkey and Egypt also being in a similar situation, the regional security structure will face further complication.

The development of nuclear capabilities in the region could be building toward a new degree of deterrence, whereby nuclear states take on more brazen behavior, as the assumption is now that a state's nuclear arsenal provides immunity to insecurity. For instance, according to Waltz (2012), nuclear-armed states can afford to behave more rashly than others in regional conflicts because they may feel that nuclear status prevents foreign intervention. This would be particularly relevant in the case of Iran's proxies such as Hezbollah, which may be more aptly provoked by a nuclear-armed Iran and dangerously behave within the region. The International Community In this scenario, the international community, and specifically the United States, faces several hard choices as to what action to take vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear capabilities. First and foremost, U.S. policy has been characterized by oscillation between engagement and containment throughout its history. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreed in 2015 was meant to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for relief on the sanctions imposed.

However, the U.S. withdrawal under Donald Trump in 2018 worsened the relationship and may even have hastened Iran's nuclear efforts (Nader 2016). The challenge for the United States and its allies would be devising a coherent strategy that denies Iran nuclear weapons without risk to wider conflict in the region. This leads us to the role of Israel. Israel views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat and based on this assessment, has always offered a contingency for its potential preemptive defense actions against this threat (Cohen 2016). In this sense, such actions not only prove damaging to the region but could also unravel into a far more extensive conflict involving other regional and global powers. An Iran capable of acquiring nuclear weapons development capability presents a strong challenge to strategic stability in the Middle East. The historical context, regional dynamics, and international responses all conspire to create a complex security landscape in which the stakes indeed are very high. Understanding such dynamics would be crucial to policymakers looking to navigate this challenging environment and continue working toward a more stable and secure Middle East.

The newly emerged situation in Middle with the United States threatening Iran with war has clarified the ground reality that there is need for more stronger defenses to secure borders of sovereign countries. The negotiations between the United States and Iran on Iran's nuclear program are under way. The results of the negotiations are still clear. But what seems to be the reality is the war. The is on the rise. Therefore, in this newly emerged scenario, the situation of the middle will further be worsened and not improved.

## 6. Conclusion

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership agreement is one the initiative for strengthening ties with each other. Saudi Arabia feeling it insecure against Israel was in search of security. The options

were limited as the United States could not do anything when Israel was engaged in violating the sovereignty of different countries in the Middle East. This element of insecurity led Saudi Arabia to look to its long-lasting friend Pakistan. Therefore, the two countries engaged in one of the strongest bonds of Strategic Partnership. This agreement made the obligation for the two countries to join each other's hand against aggression. The aggression against Saudi Arabia will be considered an aggression against Pakistan and any aggression against Pakistan will be considered an aggression against Saudi Arabia. The two countries will defend each other with all its military resources. On the other side, Iran considers nuclear option as an only source to assure its security. According to different reports, it has achieved the milestone where it can manufacture nuclear weapons. Once, Iran gets the nuclear weapons, Israel will be in a difficult situation. The war fought between Israel and Iran in June 2025 showed us the intensity of the conflict between the two countries. As now the United States is threatening Iran, and the war seemed to be on the way puts Middle East in a serious security dilemma where all its actors are in search of security.

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