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Correspondence should be addressed to Muhammad Usama Khalid; usama.khalid@bttn.org.pk

RESEARCH ARTICLE

India's Acquisition of MIRVs: Destabilizing the Strategic Stability of South Asia

Muhammad Usama Khalid [a] Nomeen Kassi [b] Ali Abbas [c]

Abstract: India's acquisition of Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capability and its integration into the Agni-V Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) series reveals a significant shift in the South Asia's strategic landscape. This particular development not only undermines strategic stability but also intensifies the prevailing security dilemma, potentially accelerating an arms race between India and Pakistan in the region. Analysed through the theoretical frameworks of the Spiral Model and Security Dilemma of Arms Race, this study investigates how India's MIRV capability exacerbates the threat perception and contributes to the sophisticated security dynamics of South Asia. Moreover, this paper presents the rationalization of MIRVs debate in the hostile South Asian context and its implications on the arms race stability. This paper proposes prospective Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), with a particular focus on Nuclear CBMs, as mechanisms to mitigate escalatory risks. By placing MIRVs technology within the broader South Asian strategic context, this research paper contributes to the existing literature by highlighting its destabilizing implications and the critical need for cooperative security measures.

Keywords: Multiple Independently-Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs), Arms Race, India, Pakistan, South Asia

Introduction

On March 11, 2024, India conducted its first ever Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) test (News Desk, 2024). The technology is being employed on the Agni-5 missile which holds a strategic significance because of the long operational range it possesses around 5000-7000km as well as it also lies in the category of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). This development of MIRVing the delivery vehicles come under the broader umbrella of strategic signalling code name 'Mission Divyastra' which means 'Divine or Celestial Weapon' (Khalil, 2024).

Historically, South Asia has remained a flashpoint for conflict between India and Pakistan since their creation in August 1947. The two nations possess formidable military forces with significant conventional asymmetry. They have fought three major wars and engaged in multiple limited skirmishes, primarily in the disputed Kashmir region. The introduction of nuclear weapons into this hostile landscape fundamentally altered the strategic calculus. India's first nuclear test in 1974, known as "Smiling Buddha," conducted at the Pokhran test site, marked the beginning of nuclear proliferation in South Asia. This test was labelled as a peaceful nuclear explosion, yet it served as the motivating factor for Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear weapons, which were eventually effectively communicated in 1998. This development further reflects that the theoretical approach of the Spiral Model (Glaser, 2000) can be applied - wherein India's nuclearization compelled Pakistan to follow suit in an effort to maintain strategic stability despite conventional asymmetries

[a] Research Officer at the Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.
[b] Research Officer at the Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.
[c] Research Officer at the Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

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– in order to understand this complex spiralling phenomenon between the two nuclear armed state in the hostile regional calculus of South Asia.

The evolutionary historical account of MIRVs' development dates back to the Cold War era when the tussle for global dominance between the United States and the former USSR was on the peak. However, the deployment of MIRVs by both superpowers was driven by the logic of ensuring assured second-strike capability and maximizing warhead delivery efficiency and lethality. The introduction of MIRVs led to increased strategic instability by fuelling arms racing dilemma and heightening crisis instability. This Cold War precedent is now being reflected in South Asia, where India's pursuit of MIRV technology is poised to exacerbate already existing regional security dilemmas. India's exertions to develop and deploy MIRV-equipped missiles, such as the Agni-V, represent a significant shift in its strategic aptitudes. Pakistan, seeing this change as a direct threat, is likely to retaliate with countermeasures, which in turn may trigger an accelerated regional arms race dilemma in South Asia. Thus, Security Dilemma (Herz, 1950), one of the major concepts in international relations, is extremely relevant here. India's quest for MIRVs is viewed as threatening by its rivals, inducing the defensive countermeasures that further increase instability. The multi-faceted character of regional context also underscores the manner in which South Asia's security landscape is highly interconnected such that the actions of one state necessarily affect others' security dynamics, especially in the context of nuclear deterrence.

This paper critically examines the implications of India's MIRV acquisition on the already unstable strategic balance of South Asia. It assesses the ways in which MIRVs, being an offensive missile capability, have the potential to destabilize deterrence stability, increase the prospect of crisis escalation, and may encourage rival states in pursuing new regional arms race. The analysis of the paper analyses these dangerous developments in the Cold War paradigm and examines their relevance to the presently changing security environment of South Asia. The paper also examines that how would Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) counteract the destabilizing impact of MIRVs and ward off further escalation during a crisis environment? The final part provides policy suggestions to help foster stability and lower the risks of MIRV deployment in the region.

Background and Context

India's and Pakistan's nuclear doctrinal postures symbolize two fundamentally different sets of strategic doctrines influenced by their own respective security agendas and geostrategic circumstances. India follows a No First Use (NFU) doctrine, focusing on keeping a credible minimum deterrent as its nuclear posture. But recently, there have been voices within the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that have indicated a potential change in India's nuclear doctrine from NFU to a more modal First Use (FU) policy. India's nuclear arsenal, organized around a delivery triad of land-based missiles, air, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles – with the focus on ensuring a second-strike option. India views its strategic emphasis as being determined by distinct natures of threats from China and Pakistan.

In contrast, Pakistan does not possess or produce an official nuclear policy document, but its strategic posture can be deciphered from official statements of the strategic planners and policy makers in this regard. Pakistan does not subscribe to an NFU policy and has devised a nuclear strategy focusing on deterring both conventional and nuclear threats, emanating particularly from superior conventional military might of India. Pakistan emphasizes a Full-Spectrum Deterrent (FSD) under the essentials of Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD), which includes the development of tactical nuclear weapons aimed at counterbalancing India's conventional force advantages vis-à-vis Pakistan (Kidwai, 2015). This strategy is particularly crafted to respond to threats originating from India's limited warfare strategy, as outlined in the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), which Indian envisions rapid conventional strikes into Pakistani territory below the nuclear threshold.

The existing conventional military force imbalance between Pakistan and India has led to multiple armed confrontations and standoffs in the pre-nuclearization period. Since the overt nuclearization post-1998, India despite possessing larger force concentration, deterred from launching any military misadventure against Pakistan. Pakistan's nuclear acquisition, therefore, has security connotations to contain Indian threat of military incursion in the times of hostilities (Khan, 2015). Whereas, on the other side, India's nuclear ambitions have been influenced majorly by prestige considerations because of her ambitious desires of regional hegemony and power dominance under the Hindu extremist ideology of 'Hindutva' (Ganguly, 1999). However, the introduction of MIRVs into India's missile arsenals directly exacerbates technological asymmetry and intensifies the mutual threat matrix between the South Asian nuclear armed rivals. A single MIRV capable missile can carry multiple warheads targeting different locations at a time, that significantly enhances India's first-strike capability, undermining Pakistan's assured second-strike response. This development is particularly destabilizing in the context of CSD, as it provides India with the conjectural ability to launch a counterforce nuclear weapon strike that could neutralize Pakistan's retaliatory capabilities, thus increasing the chances of pre-emptive strike which could trigger an unintended nuclear escalation.

Furthermore, the integration of MIRVs into India's missile forces complicates Pakistan's deterrence posture by forcing it to re-evaluate its response strategies, potentially leading to the development of counter-MIRV measures such as expanding its warhead stockpile, improving missile defence systems, or adopting launch-on-warning postures. Such technological advancement thus has the potential to ignite an accelerated arms race in South Asia, further straining regional strategic stability. Ultimately, the deployment of MIRVs undermines existing deterrence frameworks. It also complicates future arms control mechanisms as well as increases the risks of inadvertent escalation in a crisis scenario between the two nuclear-armed neighbouring states.

India's MIRV Technology

The development of Agni-V was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), while the idea was circulated in the strategic circles about the upgradation of the Agni-III in 2007 when the chief scientist in the DRDO Mr. M. Natarajan revealed that his team has been working on developing an upgraded version of the Agni Missile (Missile Threat, 2021). The technical specifications of the Agni-V suggest that this delivery vehicle have the capability to travel in-between 5000 to 8000 kilometres. This Agni-V is the upgraded version of the previous Agni-III delivery system that lies in the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) while the former is categorized as Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). The Agni-V can travel at the speed of Mac 24 which is equivalent to 29,400 Kilometres Per Hour (KPH). With a launch mass of approximately 50 tones and a development cost exceeding US$300 million, the Agni-V incorporates advanced technologies, including a ring laser gyroscope and accelerometer, for enhanced navigation and guidance (The Economic Times, 2024). The Agni-V after getting equipped with MIRV can contain multiple nuclear warheads in a single deliverable body, while, each warhead is designed to travel at different speeds and follow independent trajectories, striking targets hundreds of kilometres apart (Missile Threat, 2021). This capability enables the missile to escape missile defence systems, which DRDO has been working to counter for several years. In addition to the actual warheads, MIRV systems can deploy decoys to perform manoeuvrability in order to evade detection. The MIRV test marks an important development in the miniaturization of nuclear warheads by DRDO. As the warheads re-enter the atmosphere, their impact points are separated by approximately 200 kilometres, with varying descent speeds. To ensure structural integrity during the high-temperature re-entry phase, the warheads are constructed using carbon composites (Diaz-Maurin, 2024).

Its first stage is derived from the Agni-III, while its second stage is modified, and its third stage is miniaturized, allowing the missile to reach a range of 5,000 kilometres. Both the second and third stages are constructed entirely from composite materials to reduce weight (Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat, 2024). Additionally, the canister-launch system significantly enhances road mobility, providing

the armed forces with greater operational flexibility compared to earlier generations of Agni missiles. According to reports, the accuracy of the Agni-V and Agni-IV, due to their superior guidance and navigation systems, surpasses that of Agni-I (700 km), Agni-II (2,000 km), and Agni-III (3,500 km). Tessy Thomas, the Project Director of Agni-V, noted that during the missile's second test, it achieved a single-digit accuracy level (Thomas, 2013).

The only thing which the previous Agni-III series lacks is the distant targeting capability such as it could not be able to reach the extreme eastern and north-eastern locations of China from the far-flung military bases of India. Whereas the current Agni-V with an enhanced range enabled India to achieve targets across Asia as well as Europe (Krepon et al., 2016). The missile is engineered for efficient road mobility through the incorporation of a canister-launch system, which distinguishes it from earlier iterations of the Agni series. Additionally, the Agni-V is designed to carry MIRV, a technology that has been tested in March 2024. A single MIRV-equipped missile has the capability to deploy multiple warheads to strike distinct targets simultaneously, allowing it to carry approximately 10-12 manoeuvrable nuclear warheads, each of which can be assigned to separate targets spread over hundreds of kilometres (Krepon et al., 2016). Alternatively, multiple warheads can be directed towards a single target. The MIRV system enhances India's second-strike capability, even with a limited number of missiles. According to the DRDO, the MIRV payload is considerably heavier due to the inclusion of multiple nuclear warheads, each weighing approximately 400 kilograms (Kuramitsu, 2024). A configuration with five warheads would therefore weigh between two to four tones.
As of 2012, the MIRV's core module was in an advanced developmental stage, with deployment planned as needed. According to Bharat Karnad, a contributor to India's nuclear doctrine, the missile's MIRV capability was indirectly tested during the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C20 multi-satellite launch on 25 February 2013, using Agni-V's System-on-Chip (SoC) for guidance (Karnad, 2024). The Agni-V missile is primarily guided by a Ring Laser Gyroscope-Based Inertial Navigation System (RLG-INS). However, it is also equipped with a backup guidance system, the Micro Inertial Navigation System (MINGS). Both systems are capable of interfacing with satellite navigation networks, such as Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System also known as NavIC and the Global Positioning System (GPS). Developed by the Research Centre Imarat, these advanced navigation systems ensure the missile's precision. For control and guidance, Agni-V employs an On-Board Computer (OBC) based on a System-On-Chip (SoC) architecture, weighing approximately 200 grams. Additionally, all stages of the missile are equipped with nozzle-based control mechanisms for enhanced manoeuvrability (Army Technology, 2017).

Rationalization of MIRVs Debate in the South Asian Context

The nuclear postures of India and Pakistan reflect distinct strategic doctrines shaped by their respective security concerns and geostrategic dynamics. India has long adhered to a No First Use (NFU) policy, maintaining a credible minimum deterrent primarily focused on second-strike capabilities (Sundaram & Ramana, 2018). However, recent developments in missile technology, particularly India's successful testing of the Agni-V missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology in March 2024, have added a new dimension to this posture. This technological advancement, which allows a single missile to deliver multiple nuclear warheads to different targets at a time, significantly enhances India's second-strike capability and strengthens its nuclear deterrence. But vis a vis Pakistan in the regional security context it is disturbing and destabilizing.

Whereas, on the political realm, the current ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has shown increasing interest in re-evaluating India's nuclear doctrine, as evidenced by former Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's 2019 statement suggesting potential flexibility in the NFU policy (Pant, 2023). The political motives cannot be discounted in this scenario. India having an agenda of attaining hegemonic status, enshrined in the hard-core ultra-Hindu nationalist ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) backed BJP government in their systematic approach towards the greater goal of Akhand Bharat. The statements of the Indian defence

minister and foreign minister with regards to its nuclear and foreign policy is not only aggressive in nature instead, but they also reflect the covert desires of emerging the unchecked power that have leverage to coerce their neighbours and adversaries according to their will and choice (Shi et al., 2024). Therefore, the development and incorporation of MIRV in the existing deliverable vehicles by India could potentially influence this debate, as it provides India with more sophisticated strike options that might encourage a reconsideration of its traditional NFU stance. India's nuclear triad - comprising land-based missiles (now with MIRV capability), aircraft, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles - is increasingly designed to counter growing threats from both nuclear neighbours.

Pakistan, perceiving India's technological advancements like MIRVs as a threat to strategic stability, might feel compelled to accelerate its own nuclear modernization program. This could potentially fuel an arms race in the region. The introduction of MIRV technology into South Asia's strategic calculus adds complexity to the already delicate nuclear balance, as it enhances strike efficiency while simultaneously raising the stakes of any potential nuclear exchange (Rehman, 2024). These developments occur against the backdrop of India's evolving strategic priorities, where the nuclear settings must now account for a two-front scenario involving both Pakistan and China, with the latter's own MIRV capabilities adding another layer to the regional security dynamics.

In contrast, Pakistan does not possess an official nuclear policy document, but its strategic posture can be inferred from official statements and doctrinal pronouncements by military and civilian leadership. Unlike India, Pakistan does not adhere to a No First Use (NFU) policy and maintains a nuclear strategy centred on deterring both conventional and nuclear threats, particularly from India. Pakistan's deterrence posture is guided by the principle of Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD) but has evolved into a Full-Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) doctrine to address evolving security challenges (Noor, 2022).

However, given India's pursuit of MIRVs, Pakistan's strategic calculus is likely to be influenced by the need to ensure the credibility of its deterrence posture. The deployment of MIRVs on India's Agni-V and future missile systems enhances India's ability to conduct counterforce targeting, thereby increasing the risk of pre-emptive escalation and crisis instability (Noor, 2024). This poses a direct challenge to Pakistan's strategic deterrent by threatening its retaliatory capability and potentially undermining the survivability of its nuclear forces.

Pakistan can pursue a variety of countermeasures, such as the creation of MIRV-capable delivery vehicles to ensure strategic parity. Because it lacks resources, Islamabad might maximize cost-efficient asymmetric reactions, such as improving the mobility and survivability of its missile forces through investments in decoys and electronic countermeasures and increasing dependence on second-strike capabilities. In addition, Pakistan can enhance its strategic capabilities by upgrading its Shaheen-III and Ababeel missile systems, the latter already equipped with MIRV capabilities (Missile Threat, 2021).

Although Pakistan's strategic stance continues to be in a defensive posture, the emergence of MIRVs on the subcontinent results in more arms race instability, more provocative counterforce posturing, reduced nuclear thresholds, and higher crisis instability (Noor, 2024). The lack of arms control regimes, combined with the increased technology edge of both nations, highlights the need for Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and strategic restraint structures to avoid inadvertent escalation amidst the adversarial crisis environment.

The Indian acquisition of MIRVs is having far-reaching security and strategic stability implications in the region, especially under the theoretical framework of Arms Race (Glaser, 2000). This is an argument that implies that the arms race is closely linked to the aggressive security dynamics of South Asia, such that any, even trivial, military progress by one state necessarily affects the threat perceptions and strategic choices of other regional powers. Indian integration of MIRVs into the country's missile arsenal is a classic case of this

phenomenon which forces Pakistan to rethink its strategic stance and resort to offensive countermeasures. Hence, fuelling the regional arms race instability.

From a doctrinal angle, MIRVs provide India with an enhanced first-strike capability, undermining the survivability of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. From both the operational and strategic contexts, this is particularly destabilizing considering Pakistan's FSD strategy, which depends on a plausible second-strike capability (Farooq, 2024). With the increasing precision of delivering multiple warheads to a single target with MIRVs, concerns arise regarding a counterforce strategy where India may seek to pre-emptively take out Pakistan's strategic assets in a nuclear first strike (Abid, 2023). Such a shift operationally undermines the foundational principles of deterrence stability in South Asia by enhancing the incentive for a first strike option.

The theory also highlights that security in South Asia is not an isolated phenomenon. It is shaped by the interactions of regional actors. The incorporation of MIRVs boosts India's ability to employ an asymmetric escalation strategy which may undermine the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent. This may, in turn, force Pakistan to pursue more aggressive counteractions like accelerating the development of MIRV capable delivery vehicles, increasing the survivability of its nuclear forces through dispersal and mobility, or seeking external security guarantees from the US and China. These responses generate a strategic competition that extends the cycle of competitive strategy and deepening mutual distrust, rendering conflict resolution exceedingly hopeless.

In addition, the use of MIRVs makes it more difficult the effectiveness of arms control efforts in that region. South Asia does not have arms control arrangements comparable to those that the United States and the Soviet Union had during the Cold War. In environments with limited tangible trust building measures and communication systems, like South Asia, the possibility for serious miscalculations becomes heightened. In such a volatile scenario, the positioning of MIRVs might be mischaracterized as a movement toward counterforce targeting as opposed to a purely deterrent posture. Such a misinterpretation could drive the region toward pre-emptive responses, thereby further destabilizing the region's delicate strategic balance.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of MIRV technology increases the regional security interdependencies and complicates the security dilemma between India and Pakistan. Not only does it disturb the existing strategic stability, but it also increases the chances of crisis escalation and an arms race, intensifying volatility within the region. Proliferation of MIRVs accentuates the need to revisit the already destabilized balance of threat in South Asia by calling for risk reduction strategies, more comprehensive dialogues on South Asian security, and proactive regional arms control initiatives to avert any unintended provocations and preserve long term stability.

Implications for Regional Arms Race Stability

Indo-Pak relations have remained tense since the partition in 1947, but with nuclearization in 1998 changed their dynamics from hard-core traditional military competition to a strategic dominance. Unlike the Sino-India nuclear equation, Pakistan's tests were defensive in nature and the strategic responses to India's 1998 explosions in order to communicate the adversary that any thought of misadventure against Pakistan will be met with an unintended response. Hence, the post nuclearization period has established nuclear deterrence despite the conventional asymmetry between adversarial nations in the region. The inclusion of nuclear weapons has bridled Indian military's aggressiveness against Pakistan. Contrarily the arms race provocateur has always been the India in South Asian regional dynamics, commencing from the nuclear weapons explosions in 1974 and 1998, to Cold Start Doctrine in 2003 – an offensive military war engagement strategy - threatened the sovereignty of Pakistan that implicated Pakistan to find alternative means that resulted in the introduction of the Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) also known as the battlefield nuclear weapons. The primary objective of this technological development was to counter the eminent threat of possible ground

invasion by Indian military force into Pakistan from the Working Boundary (International Border) side (Khan, 2016).

Chinese Factor in a Broader Regional Settings

However, MIRV is not a new technology globally. US was the first state to acquire this capability in the 1960s followed by then USSR, UK and France (Buchonnet, 1997). China acquired this capability few years back in 2015, while Pakistan declared that it had acquired MIRV in 2017 (Kakar, 2024). Whereas, in the South Asian threat equation, the Pakistani acquisition of MIRV was to counter the Indian Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system and to ensure the credibility of the pre-emptive first strike nuclear use option. The bilateral rivalry between them is the testament to provoking the security trilemma (a concept not much discussed and debated yet) in which the actions of state (A) against state (B) will invite the reactionary response by the state (B).

The similar dilemma is prevalent in the broader Southern Asian region where the bilateral rivalries of India-China and Pakistan-India could exacerbate the security dilemma into a complex security trilemma (Rehman, 2024). The recent acquisition of MIRV by India is to balance the MIRVing competition vis a vis China and Pakistan, but it is being perceived as the offensive capability by Pakistan as compared to China because Pakistan's acquisition of MIRV capability was in its defence against the threat of Indian BMD capability. The possible implication of this development will further push Pakistan towards the development of an anti-MIRV capabilities, that in a highest probability, would inflict both regional nuclear armed neighbours into the expensive and risky arms race. Whereas the Indian stance of acquiring this technology is to stabilize the strategic balance vis a vis China, but China is least bothered with this development as it already possesses the much larger and sophisticated military hardware in comparison to India (Yuan, 2000). The inclusion of MIRV will contribute to the destabilization of the regional strategic stability of South Asia where two hardliner archrivals India and Pakistan already possess conventional force asymmetry.

Suggestive Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

In the existing scenario, the risk of unintended escalation has become more evitable than ever before and the current skirmishes not only across the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir, but also along the international border between them further endangering regional stability based on the mutual nuclear deterrence. Therefore, the urgency for establishing credible Nuclear Confidence Building Measures (NCBMs) have become eminent. The credible NCBMs can only be successfully implemented and devised through the commencement of mutual dialogues between India and Pakistan and for that the establishment of Crisis Communication Centres must be set up to minimize the risk of escalation in a hostile situation. Revision in the Scope of Non-attack of Nuclear Facilities in order to refrain from targeting each other's nuclear and communication facilities in a crisis situation. Advance Notification of Exercises should be bilaterally agreed among the three nations which must carve out the delicate rules for the advance notification of if any military exercise is happening because the misinterpretation of such scenario could have severe implications on the deterrence regime. Lastly, bilateral duologues should be initiated between India and Pakistan with regards to Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), if this is discussed between these two nuclear archrivals than there is higher probability that the deadlock could be resolved on this treaty aimed at non-proliferation strategy (Khawaja, 2018).

The strategy for the effective operationalization of these NCBMs according to scholars lies in the institutionalization of NCBMs approaches. The establishment of particular institution will assist states in formulating specific procedural code of conduct for civil nuclear facilities, pre-notification of the flight testing of missiles and for sharing of information on the existing nuclear weaponry for mutual understanding (Saadia & Choudhary, 2023). The seriousness by the politico-military leadership of India and Pakistan needs to be displayed for Nuclear Risk Reduction (NRR) measures at the strategic level. The verbal or documented

agreements have proved to be ineffective; therefore, the institutionalized approach is the only way forward for ensuring the credibility of any future agreed CBMs or NCBMs Pakistan and India. The institutionalized approach will not only strengthen the communication networks which currently is cut-off between India and Pakistan, instead it will also ensure the strengthening of the NRR mechanism. Additionally, the establishment of particular institution for this purpose will solely focus on this specific cause of agenda. The exchange of information will be formulized and easily be accessible for the decision making leaderships of the state in any situation anytime (Saadia & Choudhary, 2023). The institutionalized mechanism will also assist in building the trust which is in deficit contemporarily. The Brahmos missile incident is the most prominent case that clearly revealed that in the absence of the ad-hoc NCBMs due to hostile relations of India and Pakistan, such a development could be detrimental for the unintended nuclear escalation which is not in the favor of regional peace and security because the implications of nuclear war will not be limited to the certain area, state or region, instead it would drag other extra-regional actors who have geopolitical interests in the region. These developments are not only threatening the peace and strategic stability of the region instead it is fundamentally instigating the strategic arms race chain reaction in the broader regional settings among China-India-Pakistan.

Conclusion

The hostile relations between India and Pakistan have been a primary provocateur of insecurity, deeply influencing their respective foreign and defence policies. In such an environment of heightened tension, the establishment of credible CBMs, NCBMs, or NRR mechanisms remains exceedingly difficult due to the lack of consensus between the nuclear-armed rivals. Historical conflicts, particularly border clashes and military engagements based on disputed territories, have further exacerbated the situation, contributing to an intense arms race between India and Pakistan.

The recent and significant development in this regard is India's incorporation of MIRV into its strategic arsenal. This advancement has provided the foundation for the destabilization of the already fragile balance of threat in the most hostile region of the world. The integration of MIRV technology is demonstrative of India's potential shift towards a pre-emptive counterforce doctrinal strategy against Pakistan in future. By enhancing its ability to strike multiple targets with a single missile, India not only strengthens its nuclear posture, but also signals a latent move towards such capabilities that could undermine Pakistan's nuclear deterrence. This shift intensifies the risk of strategic instability in the region.

To minimize the rooted threat perceptions among the leadership of these states, there is an urgent need for the initiation and regularization of bilateral diplomatic dialogues, focused on addressing critical security issues affecting both nuclear armed states. In the contemporary setting, more effective approaches are required to operationalize any agreed mechanisms, particularly through the institutionalization of CBMs in whole. Historical studies reveal, ad-hoc composite dialogues have proven inadequate during times of crisis or heightened tensions. The establishment of a dedicated institution could lay the groundwork for more consistent and reliable communication channels, enhance crisis management capabilities, and significantly reduce the risk of unintended escalation. Such institutionalization would not only contribute to regional stability but also align with broader global non-proliferation objectives.

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