For One Tooth, the Entire Jaw: Cross-Border Extremism, Coercive Diplomacy, and the India-Pakistan Security Dyad

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This thesis analyzes the factors that affect the stability of the current security dilemma between India and Pakistan. In particular, it develops a strong link between the advent of cross-border militant attacks and the potential for escalation to nuclear-level conflict. A survey of three major case studies—the 2001 “Twin Peaks” crisis, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2016 Uri incident—suggests that a number of changing contextual and strategic factors contribute to the increasing destabilization of the status quo. These factors are as follows: Pakistan’s acquisition/posturing of tactical nuclear warheads, India’s shift from a strategy of coercive diplomacy to persuasive compellance, and the growing internal security threat that violent extremists pose within Pakistan. This analysis concludes with a series of policy recommendations that India, Pakistan, and influential third-party actors can implement in order to introduce greater stability to the region.

Hypothesis

I hypothesize that the stability-instability paradox—characterized by no high level conflict and intermittent low-level conflict—is not an appropriate theoretical framework to understand the India-Pakistan dyad. Instead, India and Pakistan are increasingly entangled in a web of escalation dominance where both parties will posture conventional and nuclear resources in order to gain the upper hand in the next potential conflict. To that extent, the key element in igniting this powder keg will be another cross-border attack that India attributes to Pakistani permission/support. I further predict that some “compellent” strategies employed by both India and Pakistan will be less effective at reducing low level conflict and asymmetric warfare because the broader context is one of strategic escalation. This is because some compellence strategies can’t change the base assumption or calculus that Pakistan will continue to allow extremist organizations like LeT to operate across the border. Finally, I predict that the strategies that are most effective will involve input from credible influential international actors such as the U.S.

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Reflecting on the thesis process, I feel that I benefitted tremendously from the experience of choosing a topic, refining it numerous times, conducting extensive research, and translating what are often highfalutin and intellectual concepts into actionable policy recommendations. There are many I must thank for the gift of this experience and for the mentorship that they provided along the way. Foremost, I wish to thank my advisor, Bruce Jentleson, for his patience and guidance at every step along the way. Professor Jentleson was often more optimistic about my thesis than I was, and I will be forever indebted to him for that vision. I also wish to thank Professors Ken Rogerson and Adam Hollowell for their guidance and for organizing the thesis process. Additionally, I wish to thank Michael Krepon at the Stimson Center and George Perkovich at the Carnegie Endowment for intellectual help and for assistance in refining my topic. As two of Washington’s foremost experts on security conflict in India and Pakistan, they provided much-needed perspectives on everything from nuclear conflict escalation to concision in writing. Finally, I wish to thank my dear friends Christopher Molthrop, Colin Taylor, Joel Kelly, and Elizabeth Ratliff for their moral support and willingness to hear me rant about esoteric security issues halfway across the world. This project would not have been possible without their help.

Chapter I: “A Tooth for a Jaw”
In late September, 2016, four armed militants descended from a bluff in Pir Panjal mountain range in Pakistan to the neighboring Indian town of Uri. Heavily armed and carrying incendiary weapons and grenade launchers, these militants opened fire and killed 19 Indian Army troops stationed in the town before Indian security forces were able to eliminate the threat. In response to this provocation, Indian BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav railed, “for one tooth, we will take the entire jaw.” Subsequently, the Indian Army conducted a series of surgical strikes across the Kashmir Line of Control (LoC) that it claims resulted in the deaths of nearly 40 militants. In many ways, these strikes represent a series of firsts for a relationship long fraught with tension and difficulty. Despite Pakistan and India’s long history of cross-border conflict, they represented the first time that India has publically announced military action across the LoC. They also represent the first time that India has engaged in conventional aggression within Pakistan since the ‘nuclearization’ of both states in 1998. Finally, the strikes were remarkable for the level of third-party support they garnered. Far from earning international condemnation, they occurred with the tacit approval of the United States, the UNSC, and China.

These strikes come at a time of rapid change for US strategy in South Asia. With the evolution of the US presence in Afghanistan during the early days of the Trump Administration, a series of serious questions remain about future US involvement in the region. Foremost amongst these is the future relationship between the US and Pakistan. As the late ambassador Richard Holbrooke often noted, “A stable Afghanistan will never be essential. . .A stable Pakistan will always be essential.” To be sure, Pakistan has long occupied a role as a difficult and erstwhile ally for the United States. This is in part due to Pakistan’s complicated relationship with militant

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2 Myra MacDonald, Defeat is an Orphan: How Pakistan Lost the Great South Asian War (London, England: Hurst and Company, 2016), 256.


organizations operating from within its borders. First during the Cold War and later in the global war on terror, the Pakistani government’s strategy of supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan has long flustered its American allies.

While at the surface this strategy flies in the face of both US objectives in Afghanistan and the once strong relationship between both countries, a closer analysis of Pakistani strategy explains the seeming inconsistency. More important to the Pakistani civilian and military leadership than a strong relationship with the US is the quest to achieve tactical and strategic parity with its perceived nemesis and neighbor, India. The importance that this drive for parity has for US strategy rests on one key fact about the India-Pakistan relationship: both countries’ ownership and deployment of nuclear warheads. The introduction of the nuclear element in South Asia has increased the stakes for conflict escalation to a hitherto unprecedented level. Analysis of the India-Pakistan conflict of any scale thus occurs in the shadow of the potential nuclear war. in the three major conflicts that have occurred since India’s “peaceful” military explosion in 1998, the risk of conflict escalation to nuclear proportions has been ever present. That said, as Paul Bracken has noted, “the first bounce of the nuclear ball” in South Asia has been “calmer than that of the last century”, and certainly calmer than nuclear pessimists had anticipated.

**Literature Review**

A careful analysis of existing literature suggests that three major factors play a role in ensuring that conflict in South Asia does not escalate to outright nuclear war. The finessing of these three factors one way or another can contribute to either the escalation or diffusion of conflict. These three factors are the role of coercive diplomacy, the ongoing counterterrorism struggle within Pakistan, and the relative strategic posturing of each state’s nuclear and conventional forces. The most relevant bodies of literature for this inquiry can be broken down into a few separate groups; a discussion of compellence, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy in the context of a nuclear-power conflict, theory on the causes/roots of conflict escalation, and analyses of counterterrorism efforts went so far as to pass legislature banning military and economic assistance in response to Pakistan’s quest for nuclear weapons.


in Pakistan and India. The analysis found in the following case studies of South Asian crises will draw a series of links between these three separate bodies of literature. At the same time, the insights provided by existing literature provides a relatively robust analysis on the potential for conflict escalation in South Asia.

**Conflict Escalation: Nuclear Optimism and Pessimism**

When analyzing the potential for a two-state security dilemma to escalate to full-scale conflict, analysts highlight the importance both of clear signaling and the existence of a credible retaliatory threat. The presence of both in conjunction can play a dramatic role in reducing the possibility of conflict escalation. Kenneth Waltz, for example, asserts that “nuclear weapons are in fact a tremendous force for peace and afford nations that possess them the possibility of security at reasonable cost.” This argument rests on a strong conviction that a credible second-strike capability ensures that both parties are deterred from engaging in nuclear conflict. Much of Waltz’s intuition comes from his experience analyzing the Soviet-American interactions during the Cold War. In recent years much of the heuristic value of this analysis has been supported by the tools of game theory. In one particular model, two nation-state ‘players’ engage in a cooperate-defect game with respect to high level violent conflict. So long as both ‘players’ possess a credible retaliatory threat, the theoretical deterrence equilibrium is stable.

This analysis relies on an assumption that the competing actors are instrumentally rational, risk-prone, utility-maximizers free of domestic constraints and “are capable of identifying themselves as defenders or challengers.” As later discussed, many of these assumptions do not hold for the India-Pakistan security conflict. That said, this finding has significant heuristic value because the assumption of a serious and credible retaliatory threat appears to reflect the reality of the India-Pakistan status quo from 1998-2016. Because both states possess the ability to credibly retaliate to the other states’ provocations, some form of second-strike deterrence has so far been successful at preventing nuclear war.

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9 F. C. Zagare, "The Dynamics of Escalation" (working paper, State University of New York, Buffalo, NY, August 1989), 249.

To describe the South Asian status quo as stable, however, would be to ignore the inherent instability that nuclear weapons have introduced. As Scott Sagan (a colleague of Waltz) argues, “nuclear weapons programs are not obvious or inevitable solutions to international security problems; instead they are solutions looking for a problem to which to attach themselves so as to justify their existence.”

The Stability-Instability Paradox

Although (as later discussed) Pakistan’s first use nuclear doctrine and India’s quick-trigger mobilization of troops have also contributed towards the prevention of nuclear war, the resulting dynamic has allowed for high levels of instability at low levels of conflict. Robert Jervis considered this equilibrium the result of something he called the “stability-instability paradox.” Borrowing from Cold War literature and the experiences of limited war between the US and Soviet Union, Jervis – and later Michael Krepon, co-founder of the Stimson Center – have argued that “massive retaliation gave way to the quest for flexible nuclear war-fighting options and limited war doctrine” and that “To the extent that the military balance is stable at the level of all-out nuclear war, it will become less stable at lower levels of violence.” Notably, the stability-instability paradox exists somewhere between the positions of nuclear optimists and pessimists.

Since Jervis first formulated the stability-instability paradox, some have attempted to apply the model to the case of South Asian stability. The best example of this was in Peter Lavoy’s treatment of the Kargil conflict in *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia*. According to Lavoy, the dynamic during Kargil represents the first flashes of what he termed the ‘Dependence-Independence’ corollary to the Stability-Instability paradox. In articulating his theory, Lavoy channels Sagan’s pessimism about nuclear weapons proliferation by arguing that they make nuclear states highly reliant on the international community for maintenance and de-escalation. While on one hand the

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11 Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed* (New York, NY: Norton, 2003), 54. “Optimists argue that the acquisition of nuclear weapons contributes to strategic stability due to the enormous potential costs of any conflict. So long as it can survive an attack and be used against an aggressor, even a very small nuclear arsenal should deter war. Alternatively, pessimists emphasize the possibility of unauthorized or accidental nuclear use, particularly when civilian leaders do not exercise strong control over a nation’s armed forces.”

Kargil war represents an instance where high level stability (i.e. nuclear stability) held in exchange for high levels of instability at low levels of conflict, it also displayed for the first time the immense reliance that both parties had on international diplomacy. Herein lies the paradox. Whereas the development of nuclear weapons was intended to make both Pakistan and India less reliant on outside actors (and one another’s goodwill) for high level stability, the necessity for an ‘honest’ broker when low level conflict does flare up has made them more reliant on outside actors like the US to provide channels of communication and a pathway towards conflict resolution.\(^\text{13}\)

Since Lavoy, others have attempted to argue that the stability-instability paradox is not an appropriate heuristic device by which to analyze conflict in South Asia. S. Paul Kapur, for example, has argued that stability-instability does not bear out in South Asia because the contextual factors impacting conflict in the subcontinent make it too different than the Cold War context from which the paradox arose. Moreover, Kapur suggests that the history of South Asia directly contradicts the predictions of stability-instability. Contrary to the paradox, “South Asian violence has resulted from a strategic environment in which nuclear escalation is a serious possibility in the event that a limited Indo-Pakistani confrontation spirals into a full-scale conventional conflict.”\(^\text{14}\)

Still others have argued that, whereas the strictures of stability-instability may have governed South Asian conflict, changing contextual circumstances require a revision to existing theory. As Evan Montgomery and Eric Edelman posit, the India-Pakistan security dyad was originally a ‘poster-child’ for nuclear escalation pessimists.\(^\text{15}\) One reason for this appraisal relates to worries surrounding the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal. As they argue, Pakistan has largely bucked this trend through careful stewardship of its arsenal from the designs of internal and external threats.\(^\text{16}\)

In critiquing Krepon’s and Lavoy’s notion of stability-instability, Montgomery and Edelman claim

\(^{13}\) Clary and Fair, "Pakistan’s motivations," ch 2.
\(^{14}\) S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 151, PDF.
that “rivalries are dynamic competitions, with both sides continually seeking new advantages or developing new countermeasures to improve or maintain their position.” In short, they argue that the situation is transforming into one where “escalation dominance” better explains the potential for conflict. Escalation dominance refers to the constant desire by one state to achieve military advantages over the other in order to shift the deterrence equilibrium in their favor. Framing the case of India–Pakistan in this light suggests that, although the expectations of the stability-instability paradox have held to a certain degree, they haven’t resulted from the mechanism suggested by Krepon or Lavoy. Rather, the story is one of repeated failed attempts to achieve escalation dominance by one side or the other. The most notable example of that Montgomery and Edelman site is failure of the ‘Cold Start’ program instituted by the Indian military following the 2001 militant attacks on the Indian Parliament.

An accumulating body of evidence suggests that “escalation dominance” has become the norm in South Asia. Two major observations emerge among these. First is the observation that Pakistan is growing its nuclear stockpile and investing in tactical nuclear weapons in order to achieve a more effective ‘first strike’ capacity in order to maximize deterrence against Indian conventional actions. As Vipin Narang argues, this ‘asymmetric’ nuclear posture threatens to push India to accelerate its own efforts to achieve escalation dominance. As subsequent evidence has shown, this may be occurring. “There are some indications that India might eventually consider altering its nuclear doctrine and force structure, particularly if Pakistan’s limited nuclear options become more robust and the limitations of Cold Start become more apparent.” For example, in 2016, India may have made subtle changes to its nuclear doctrine. Rather than stating a blanket no-first-use (NFU) pledge as had been the norm after the Kargil war, the revised doctrine stated that “nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere.”

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The point of analyzing the theories of conflict escalation—particularly as they relate to the quest for escalation dominance—is that they provide a window into the mechanisms that determine the risk of actual escalation. Montgomery and Edelman, for example, suggest that a scenario of an escalation dominance race-to-the-top may result in an increased risk of miscalculation. “The emerging asymmetry between India’s growing conventional military power and Pakistan’s nuclear buildup is creating a situation where miscalculation is becoming more likely and, as a result, the possibility of large-scale conventional war, nuclear use, and a nuclear exchange are all increasing.”

Additionally, as Kapur notes, this debate over theory has real-world policy implications. If the stability-instability paradox is responsible for ongoing conflict, attempts to stabilize India-Pakistan relations at both high and low levels of conflict could be futile, or even dangerous, as increased strategic stability would ostensibly allow for more low-level conflict. If, on the other hand, ongoing violence in South Asia has not resulted from the stability-instability paradox, then conflict would not demonstrate any necessary incompatibility between tactical and strategic stability in the region, or suggest that there is any danger inherent in current attempts to minimize the likelihood of nuclear war.

**Counter-terrorism**

The use and support of asymmetric actors and warfare by both Pakistan and India presents the greatest opportunity to spark conflict escalation outside the realm of nuclear or conventional conflict. The most notable examples of these are Pakistan’s support of violent extremist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and India’s support of separatist insurgents in the Pakistani state of Baluchistan. Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow a full treatment of Indian support of militant separatists in Pakistan. Because Pakistani support of groups like LeT and JeM have in past contributed to conflict escalation, it is the more important trend to study.

To be sure, the way that deterrence and strategic interaction play out is complicated when asymmetric warfare is concerned. As George Perkovich argues, India has an array of options that it can employ in order to try to “compel” Pakistan to stop its support for violent extremist groups.

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22 Kapur, "India and Pakistan's," 152.
These include changes in nuclear and conventional posture, targeted air strikes, appeals to third parties for support, and counter-support of insurgent groups within Pakistan. The extent to which any of these achieves a ‘sweet spot’ of “compellence” above uselessness yet below nuclear war is a key contributor to the chance of conflict escalation.\(^{23}\)

The other side of the coin that determines the effectiveness/role that asymmetric warfare and cross-border extremism is the internal political economy that Pakistan faces. Namely, these are the factors that determine Pakistan’s tacit support of violent extremists. The Pakistani military and Inter-Services Intelligence agency’s (ISI) relationship to radical extremist groups dates back to the days of the *Mujahideen* and Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union. Since the US invasion of Afghanistan, however, Pakistan continues to struggle to determine which groups it will continue to support. This difficulty arises from the fact that the ISI has historically used groups like LeT and JeM as leverage in the ongoing conflict with India as well as supported groups like the Afghan Taliban in order to prevent a hostile government from gaining power on its western border.\(^{24}\) Further complicating the matter is the growing internal security risk that these militants contribute to. According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), “the proliferation of militant groups has overwhelmed law agencies, providing small militant outfits the space to significantly increase the number of terror attacks.”\(^{25}\)

Although there are a number of causes that combine to explain the full picture of violent extremism in Pakistan—such as religious identity, broader concerns about Islamism, and socioeconomic concerns—the aforementioned paradox between Pakistan’s support for some terror organizations and active battle against others remains the focus of this study. Although Moeed Yusuf notes that it is impossible to fully address the issue of counterterrorism (CT) in Pakistan without addressing counterinsurgency (COIN) first, this thesis is less concerned with the tactics of CT/COIN than I am the decision to favor or combat certain groups in the first place.\(^{26}\)

\(^{23}\) Perkovich and Dalton, *Not War*, introduction.


\(^{25}\) Ibid, 16.

\(^{26}\) Moeed Yusuf, introduction to *Pakistan's Counterterrorism Challenge* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 33. As Yusuf notes, this feeds directly into a perennial debate over whether the reason that the military doesn’t target groups has more to do with lack of capacity than the will to do so.
To that effect, numerous commentators like Marvin Weinbaum and Ayesha Siddiqa have noted that the Pakistani military has adopted a so-called “good Taliban, bad Taliban” strategy in order to differentiate between groups with strategic benefit to Pakistan and those responsible for an increasing number of civilian casualties within Pakistan.\(^{27}\) As Weinbaum has pointed out, however, this ‘dual-hat’ strategy appears misguided and has led to inconsistent domestic policy decisions. Among these include the Pakistani Army’s difficulty in rooting out militants in south/north Waziristan and the fact that the good-bad distinction is often meaningless in practice. For example, Weinbaum reports that members of LeT (a ‘good’ group) and the TTP (a ‘bad’ group) have begun to team up on certain terror operations despite their wholly different positions and demographic makeups.\(^{28}\)

This tactical decision is important to the broader analysis because it defines the internal calculus that Pakistan undergoes in its decision to support (or at least tacitly allow) cross-border violent extremism. As Perkovich argues, the operative goal in any Indian strategy moving forward (besides achieving overall escalation dominance) is to compel a change in Pakistan’s internal calculus when it comes to terrorism. This is where the interplay between both bodies of literature becomes clearer. On one hand, both India and Pakistan are constrained by the threats of escalation dominance and the worries that any strategic move taken by one player will lead to a disruption of the current stability-instability status quo. On the other hand, the status quo many not be so stable to begin with, particularly as the problem of attribution for cross-border attacks continues to remain murky.

**Deterrence, Compellence, and Coercive Diplomacy**

The third factor that plays a role in determining conflict escalation is the extent to which coercive diplomacy is deployed. As Alexander George defines it, coercive diplomacy is “a strategy geared towards pressuring an opponent to change policy that emphasizes diplomacy, but also entails the

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28 Yusuf, introduction to *Pakistan's Counterterrorism*, 57.
threat and/or limited use of military force or other forms of coercion.\(^29\) As the above section on strategic escalation noted, the pursuit of “escalation dominance” can be viewed as an attempt to ensure maximum deterrence capability for each state. In the many cases where this dominance cannot be achieved through physical means or coercion, both India and Pakistan have employed some form of coercive diplomacy to achieve escalation dominance. In this sense, South Asian strategic actions can all be mapped as some combination of pure coercion (i.e. war in the Clausewitzian sense), pure diplomacy (i.e., the management of international relations by negotiation), and deterrence (posturing and signaling in a way that prevents the opponent from acting in an adverse manner).\(^30\)

There exists an abundance of literature on the relationship between deterrence, coercion, and diplomacy. As Thomas Schelling suggested, there is a distinct difference between actions of deterrence and compellence. As he hypothesized, compellent threats are more likely to result in violent conflict. It is easier to deter than to compel, compellence is a risky activity, and targets of compellent activity usually have a bargaining chip over the initiators.\(^31\) This concern features prominently in discussions that India, in an effort to compel Pakistan to change its behavior, may cause a spiral of escalation (that neither actor can credibly control and) that may quickly reach nuclear levels. As Schelling viewed it, deterrence and compellence are equal-and-opposite sides of the same coin in strategic interaction. Revisionists to his theory, however, argue that this isn’t necessarily true. Mira Sperandei, for example, suggests that states often use deterrence and compellence sequentially in order to accomplish their objectives.\(^32\)

Despite these disagreements, Bruce Jentleson notes that there are a few factors that, when present, suggest that a strategy of coercion or compellence will be more likely to succeed. These are proportionality: the relationship between the coercer’s strategy and the scope of their objectives, reciprocity: the understanding that there is a link between the coercer’s incentives and the target’s concessions, and coercive credibility: the signaling to the target that non-compliance has its


\(^{30}\) Ibid, 406.


\(^{32}\) Ibid, 272.
consequences. Moreover, “all three elements of a balanced coercive diplomacy strategy are more likely to be achieved if other major political actors are supportive and if the opposition within the coercing state’s domestic politics is limited.” This last point is exceedingly crucial as it signifies the importance of the role of third party actors like the US, UN, and China play. It also emphasizes the importance of the domestic audience in determining the success of a compellant strategy.

Conclusion
As Jentleson suggests (and as the literature generally agrees), it is exceedingly difficult to theorize about the relative strengths of escalation, counter-terrorism, or coercive diplomacy “in anything more than conditional and probabilistic terms.” For that reason, this thesis does not attempt to create a model or predict how the presence of certain factors absolutely portends certain conclusions about South Asian security. As Alexander George describes in *Case Studies and Theory Development*, it is important to not rely solely on a “Billiard Ball” cause-effect paradigm when analyzing case studies. Although the focus of the aforementioned decision trees is on Indian and Pakistani responses to one another’s strategies these decisions are never made solely in a vacuum. Indeed, as Perkovich notes, the nub of the India-Pakistan problem lies in the fact that the decision-makers are non-unitary and base their decision-making on numerous inputs. At the same time, a brief survey of the literature suggests that at the very least there is a relationship between the strategies that each state employs and the domestic political economies of the target state. Particularly as India has attempted (through a mixture of coercion, deterrence, and diplomacy) to change Pakistan’s internal calculus, it is important to remember that Pakistan will always have a say.

The Kargil War: “The First Bounce”
An analysis of the Kargil war can prove informative in an effort to understand both how historical context and theory impact the potential for conflict escalation in South Asia. Despite the fact that this war does not fit the mold of conflict started by non-state actors (which is the scope of this

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33 Jentleson, "Coercive Diplomacy," 408.
34 Ibid, 409.
36 Michael Krepon and Julia Thompson, eds., *Deterrence Stability and Escalation in South Asia* (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 2013), 12, PDF.
37 Perkovich in *Deterrence Stability*, p. 21
analysis), it is nonetheless relevant because it represents the first (and only) hot conflict between Pakistan and India following the nuclearization of both states. Moreover, it highlights the importance of tactical decision-making on escalation dominance as well as the role that international peace-makers/third parties can play on compelling de-escalation. Finally, the events of Kargil further calcified the mutual distrust between India and Pakistan – a distrust that forms the backdrop of this analysis’ three case studies.

In the Spring of 1999, Indian troops patrolling in the town of Kargil approximately 5 miles on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) came under fire from a group of assailants. Although the Indian troops first treated the attackers as a small group of militants, it soon became apparent that the intruders were well-trained troops from the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry (NLI). Upon realizing that they were in the midst of a major military incursion, India mobilized a large military and diplomatic campaign that succeeded—over the period of 2 months—in pushing the Pakistani intruders out of Kargil. Although the sum total of casualties (approximately 750-950) does not meet the formal definition of a war (which requires at least 1000 casualties), the conflict had a significant influence on setting the stage for future conflicts.\(^{38}\)

Months before the attack, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf proposed the idea of invading Kargil towards the end of the winter to the Pakistani Prime Minister of the time, Nawaz Sharif. As Musharraf noted in his 2006 autobiography, this plan promised to rectify a series of geopolitical wrongs and bolster international support for a pro-Pakistan solution to the Kashmir conflict.\(^{39}\) Foremost among these was what Pakistan viewed to be the illegal Indian occupation of the Siachen glacier since 1984. Although the Simla Agreement of 1972 (signed after the 1971 war between both countries) did not formally designate ownership of the Glacier, Musharraf and the rest of Pakistani Army staff viewed the Indian presence as proper cause for rectification.\(^{40}\) The loss of well over 100 square miles of territory – even in this desolate and practically uninhabitable region – was a deep psychological scar for the Pakistani military. For this reason, Musharraf considered it well within Pakistan’s rights to rectify the situation.

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In his meeting with Sharif, Musharraf outlined a plan where, upon winter’s snowmelt, Pakistani troops would infiltrate the village of Kargil and overwhelm the underprepared Indian troops stationed there. Once Kargil was obtained, it could be used as a bargaining chip in future negotiations over Siachen and other disputed areas along the LoC.\textsuperscript{41} This attempt at a \textit{fait accompli} was intended to put the mostly-forgotten Kashmir issue back on the international agenda. What remains unclear, however, is the level of complicity of the Pakistani government in this plan. While Musharraf claimed that he received the go-ahead from Sharif following their meeting, Sharif maintained after the the conflict (and to this day) that he gave no such permission. This civil-military tension later spilled over into a \textit{coup d’état} in 1999 and the deposition of Sharif as Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Decision-making during Kargil: The birth of “Strategic Restraint”}

From even a cursory view of the Kargil conflict, what stands out most is the concerted effort by both sides to restrain the overall level of violence and prevent the escalation of conflict to nuclear war. With both sides strategically posturing so as to minimize the possible chance of any escalation, there’s little wonder that the conflict remained as limited in scale as it did. From the Indian perspective, the inertia of conflict suggested that India would be better off continuing military gains past the LoC into Pakistan. Given that the mobilized army and air force had recently executed a successful retaliation against Pakistani incursion, the Indian military was in prime position to continue the offensive into Pakistani military and punish Musharraf for his conceit.

As Indian General V.P Malik notes in his reflections on the war, there were three primary reasons that India chose to exercise restraint. First, he cited the immediate political context of the war. Months before the Pakistani incursion was discovered, India and Pakistan were engaged in a series of seemingly fruitful Track-I and Track-II dialogues. As he argues, he wanted to ensure that “all the goodwill and bonhomie generated” by the negotiations would not go to waste.\textsuperscript{43} Even by Malik’s reckoning, the more compelling reasons that he cites for strategic restraint relate directly

\textsuperscript{41} Musharraf, \textit{In the Line}, 96.
\textsuperscript{43} V. P. Malik, ”The Kargil War: Some Reflections,” \textit{CLAWS Journal}, July 2009, 9, PDF.
to India’s political signaling to the rest of the world. For his second reason, he notes that “it was essential to ensure that international [sic] opinion remained in our favor.” Malik considered preserving India’s image as a victim of Pakistani aggression so important he called it tantamount to a “major force multiplier.” Second, he states that “the nuclear weapons factor played on the minds of political decision-makers.” Although potential Pakistani retaliation with nukes was not a factor in Kargil, Malik worried that an incursion into Pakistani territory would start an escalatory spiral and give Pakistan the excuse to use their weapons on Indian troops.

From Malik’s perspective, if the conflict had escalated, major world powers would increase pressure—directly and through the United Nations—to prevent a nuclear confrontation. In that case, “They would seek immediate ceasefire and termination of war” which would have left “part of our territory in Pakistanis” hands, representing a major political and military setback. For the military, the grand strategy of exercising ‘restraint’ was no doubt a handicap. Such a strategy was justified, at least to start with.

Perhaps more surprising than India’s strategic restraint was Pakistan’s decision to exercise restraint in response to Indian advances in Kargil. The Pakistani decision to refrain from deploying its air force to strike Indian armor is particularly striking in this regard. Instead, Pakistani Air Force (PAF) units remained grounded as NLI troops in the mountains surrounding Kargil were battered by wave after wave of artillery and targeted air strikes. Unlike India, the reasons for Pakistani restraint are not so clear. This is in part because the Pakistani government has not published an official account of the conflict or any analysis of its aftermath. Additionally Pakistani officials have for the most part displayed little candor in public discussions of the war. The only exception to this claim is Musharraf’s own account of the conflict. In his Kargil post-mortem, he lays blame at the feet of the civilian government for their indecision and non-cooperativeness.

44 Ibid.
46 Celia Duggar, “Pakistan Calm After Coup; Leading General Gives No Clue About How He Will Rule,” New York Times (New York, NY), October 14, 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/14/world/pakistan-calm-after-coup-leading-general-gives-no-clue-about-how-he-will-rule.html. “more aggressive officers were angry when the Prime Minister bowed to American pressure and called for withdrawal of the Pakistan-supported forces. Others say military leaders were upset because they felt that Mr. Sharif gave the impression that rogue army officers were to blame for the misadventure, rather than accepting responsibility himself.”
As Peter Lavoy suggests in his analysis of the Kargil conflict, the Pakistani decision to not respond to Indian battle successes is puzzling because Pakistan risked so much by attempting the assault to begin with. Unless the Kargil incursion was intended as an initial assault as part of a larger battle plan, the possible explanations for this behavior likely revolve around signaling. Indeed, just as the case of India, the decision to not escalate seems oriented towards appeasing outside actors. One possible explanation is that Pakistan wanted to maintain the cover story that its military was not responsible for the incursion to begin with. By continuing to blame the mujahedeen and Kashmiri militants, the Pakistani government could assume the position of victim of circumstance. Second, (and equally as likely) is that the Pakistani military would use the threat of further escalation as a point of leverage in diplomatic negotiations. In both cases, the role of restraint is to persuade international actors in favor of Pakistan’s position and influence negotiations on its behalf.

**Key Takeaways: strategic restraint meets coercive diplomacy and negotiated settlement**

Once the Pakistani military made its decision to send an expeditionary force of NLI troops with the purpose of putting Kashmir back on the international agenda, the most influential set of actors that could influence Pakistani calculus through non-violent means were members of the international community. In particular, the role that the United States and China played as credible negotiating parties compelled Pakistan to de-escalate and eventually back off totally. Continuing with the notion that international signaling was important to the Pakistanis, the United States in particular struck a hard tone on how it viewed Pakistani aggression. As Strobe Talbott notes in his observations during the conflict, President Bill Clinton “Went beyond the studied neutrality that both prime ministers were expecting—in Pakistan’s case with hope, and in India’s with trepidation.” Clinton made Pakistan’s immediate withdrawal a precondition for a settlement and the price it must pay for the U.S. diplomatic involvement it appeared to be seeking. Clinton made
this point very clear when he went public with information that most of the 700 men who had crossed the Line of Control were attached to the Pakistani Army’s NLI division.\footnote{Ibid.}

Clinton could not take a single-mindedly assertive position, however, because of his fear that the Pakistani military may deploy its nuclear weapons. As Bruce Riedel, an NSC staffer at the time, noted: “On the eve of Sharif’s arrival, we learned that Pakistan might be preparing its nuclear forces for deployment. There was, among those of us preparing for the meeting, a sense of vast and \textit{nearly unprecedented peril}.”\footnote{Bruce Riedel, "Farewell, Sandy Berger, the Clinton Man Who Stopped Armageddon," \textit{The Daily Beast} (New York, NY), December 5, 2015, https://www.thedailybeast.com/farewell-sandy-berger-the-clinton-man-who-stopped-armageddon.} When Clinton assembled his advisers in the Oval Office for a last minute huddle, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger told him that overnight we had gotten more disturbing reports of steps Pakistan was taking with its nuclear arsenal.\footnote{Ibid.}

As noted, strategic restraint on both sides played a major role in reducing the chance for conflict escalation. At the same time, the impact of nuclear deterrence should not be understated. As Lavoy claims, the threat that Pakistan could deploy its nuclear weapons in response to Indian advances was very real. As General Malik asserted, however “There was a strong belief that Pakistan’s demonstrated nuclear weapons, in May 1998, were sufficient to prevent the escalation of the situation in Kargil to a full-scale conventional war. The military high-command, headed by Pervez Musharraf, was confident about Pakistan’s ‘nuclear shield.’”\footnote{V. P. Malik, \textit{Kargil: From Surprise to Victory} (New Delhi, India: HarperCollins, 2006), 272.} Indeed, in light of this self-assurance, not a single nuclear shot was fired.

This analysis leads to several possible conclusions, the first being that Pakistani planners were not ultimately swayed by a calculation that the risk of nuclear escalation would deter India from counterattacking. Other factors, such as the local terrain, the military balance in Kashmir, and domestic civil–military relations – shaped more decisively the Pakistani decision to advance across the LoC. Second, the fear of nuclear war did drive the international community to end the crisis as quickly as possible and prevent Pakistan from claiming a victory that could validate an Indian defense strategy based on nuclear threats and military aggression. Some nuclear learning did take
place after Kargil, but the lessons India and Pakistan drew from the crisis did not significantly lessen the likelihood of another military crisis or the prospect of it escalating out of control. For example, “In India, Kargil validated the potential for limited war under a nuclear umbrella and led decision makers to call for a declared nuclear doctrine.”53 In Pakistan, policymakers came to see a clear articulation of effective nuclear threat as more critical than a carefully articulated nuclear doctrine. Thus, India chose a declared doctrine of no-first use (NFU) with little articulation of its command-and-control structure “while Pakistan chose to retain an undeclared option of first-use combined with well-defined C2.”54 The result was that, while India and Pakistan displayed better nuclear discipline in the Kargil crisis than they would in later conflicts, they came much closer to fighting a major conventional war which had a greater risk of going nuclear.

Finally, although the Kargil conflict does not fit the mold of threatened escalation sparked by a cross-border terror attack, it provides two key lessons regarding the use of asymmetric tactics on the subcontinent. First, the brazen Pakistani insistence that the infiltrators were not NLI troops but rather Mujahedeen unaffiliated with the government was intended to provide Pakistan with cover and legitimacy should India have been provoked to respond. Once India did respond disproportionately, this tactic backfired in diplomatic negotiations given that US intelligence showed that Pakistani troops were indeed involved. Despite this, Pakistani leadership consistently told US officials that the Kargil fighters were Mujahedeen, and that if the United States truly desired to play a constructive role in resolving the crisis, “It should mediate the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir, which it maintained was the root cause of all the past and present trouble along the LoC.”55 At first, this strategy seemed to work at limiting international pressure. In a public statement on May 30th, State Department spokesman James Rubin categorically ruled out any mediatory role on Kashmir, stating that this was a “bilateral diplomatic matter between India and Pakistan.”56 The following day, the US changes its tune. Assistant Secretary Rick Inderfurth told a New York Times reporter that the intruders who had seized territory in the Indian-held

54 Ibid.
Khan: For One Tooth, The Entire Jaw

Kashmir would have to leave: “Clearly the Indians are not going to cede this territory that these militants have taken. They have to depart, and they will depart, either voluntarily or because the Indians take them out.”

In addition to slowing down effective diplomacy, this insistence created a distinct attribution problem that was compounded by Indian intelligence failures. These failures are adequately highlighted in the K. Subrahmanayam report, the official Indian government post-mortem on the conflict written by the eponymous author. As it notes, “The Pakistani armed intrusion in the Kargil sector came as a complete and total surprise to the Indian Government. . .The Committee did not come across any agency or individual who was able to clearly assess before the event the possibility of a large scale Pakistani military intrusion across the Kargil heights. What was conceived of was the limited possibility of infiltrations and enhanced artillery exchanges in this Sector.” The posturing to deal with such limited infiltration often involves counterstrikes and incursions into opposition territory. Thus it wasn’t until the Indian Army established that they were dealing with NLI troops before it “progressively moved to deploy in a deterrent posture. These measures sent out a clear message to Pakistan and the rest of the world that India was determined to oust the invader by military means.”

Seeing as the Mujahedeen cover appears only to have hindered the attainment of Pakistani strategic goals, the question remains as to why the Pakistani military insists to this day that it did not initiate conflict. The answer to this question comes from taking a deeper dive into the implications of poor Pakistani civil-military relations. Though there are conflicting sources on whether Sharif knew beforehand about the assault, the scholarly consensus is that the wide majority of both Pakistani and Indian civilian leaders were surprised by the scope of the attack. Indeed, some evidence suggests that because Indian military officials were not expecting a military incursion and that the origins of the Mujahedeen story accidentally began with Indian intelligence reports. Once Indian sources reported that there were Mujahedeen ensconced in the Kargil sector, the Pakistani army developed the story more thoroughly. By the time that the international community ascertained

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59 Ibid.
60 Clary and Fair, "Pakistan’s motivations," ch 9.
that the intruders were NLI soldiers in early June, the Pakistani Foreign Office and Secretary (likewise caught unawares of the assault) argued against conceding the involvement of the NLI and the Pakistan army in the operation. He insisted, “We must stick to this story.”61

The civilian government decided to stick with the military story in order to save face because of poor civil-military communication/relations. Had there been better coherence of narrative between both parties, perhaps the story would have been more convincing. Here, the distend between civilian and military authorities seems to have played an escalatory role (even though no escalation occurred). This seems to mirror George Perkovich’s assertion that nuclear deterrence is complicated when the weapon-bearing actors are not ‘unitary’ within a single state. Because India has to deal with both Pakistani civilian and military preferences, this complicated the deterrence puzzle. As we will see, this will be a recurring theme as the rogue actor in the following case studies will no longer be the military, but rather non-state terror groups.

Conclusion
The Kargil war represented the first blows in a newly nuclear south Asia. Despite the fact that the conflict did not escalate to a full conventional war or result in the deployment of either nations’ nuclear arsenal, the conflict lay the framework for a number of key trends moving forward. These are the establishment of the stability-instability paradox in the subcontinent, the first articulation of nuclear doctrine in response to conventional and asymmetric threats, and the creation of serious distrust between India and Pakistan despite mutual efforts towards strategic restraint.

Method
A greater understanding of India-Pakistan strategic interaction will occur through a study of potential Indian and Pakistani responses and outcomes following a hypothetical future cross-border attack. In order to do this, one must first understand the decision-making “trees” of previous conflicts. These decision-trees map previous Indian responses to attacks perceived to be emanating from within Pakistan. These responses would be categorized based on Perkovich’s aforementioned Indian ‘compellance’ strategies.62 The decision-trees will be labeled to see if escalation cycles are

62 Perkovich and Dalton, Not War, Conclusion.
different for different kinds of attack. For example, one tree may begin with an attack with clear and immediate attribution to groups associated with Pakistani support (such as LeT) while another tree would map possible responses where attribution is not necessarily clear. India’s response to an attack will likely fall into five separate categories: continued negotiations, air power, covert operations, nuclear capabilities, and non-violent “compellance.” In each of these cases, the pros and cons of each strategy would be weighed and assigned values in terms of likelihood and desirableness by each party.

The same logic will then be applied to the Pakistani responses to Indian strategy. In the second iteration, however, special attention would be paid to impacts of changes in domestic CT/COIN. The goal in each of these cases is to promote a relatively robust understanding to explain which factors are most important/related to the potential for conflict escalation between India and Pakistan. These decision trees will add to a growing literature on the role of strategic interaction, low-level conflict and “compellance” between nuclear armed states. Scenario analysis, in turn, attempts to bridge the gap between political science theories of conflict escalation (such as tit-for-tat, ladder escalation, and third-party appeals) and potential public policy solutions to reduce the risk of escalation.
The branches of the model and the weight of potential outcomes are informed through a set of qualitative case studies of prior conflicts between India and Pakistan. These will help identify important factors and patterns. In order to craft these, I analyze the decision-trees of previous conventional conflicts between India and Pakistan. These in-depth case studies will account for the initiation of conflict as well as all the potential options facing each party and their reasons for picking the strategy that they did. The cases are:

- The standoff following the Indian Parliament bombing (2001)
- The standoff following the Mumbai hotel bombing (2008)
- The standoff following the Uri attacks (2016)

The reasons for selecting these cases are as follows: They all exist following the demonstrated nuclear capacity of both parties and involve a cross-border attack as the impetus for conflict. At the same time, they vary on a number of key metrics. For example, some involve mass mobilization of troops with no actual kinetic conflict while others required international intervention to prevent escalation beyond small-arms conflict. Analyzing the decision-trees for each of these conflicts will allow me to craft relatively robust scenarios. First I will proceed to craft a decision-tree for each of these conflicts to analyze the scenario faced by major actors. The hypothetical scenarios crafted after will then rely on the conclusions drawn from the case studies. These case studies will be both structured and focused. Instead of paying attention to every detail or factor related to these conflicts, they will focus on three groups of criteria. These are the key external factors that influenced the beginning of the conflict, the reasons for the conflict, and the short/long-term policy decisions and implications.

The first major set of factors worth note are those external to the immediate decision-making process. These include domestic issues, institutional culture/conflicts, and international climate. Second, and perhaps more directly relevant to the cases, are the immediately identifiable causes for the conflict. This step will include listing the immediate events leading up to the conflict followed by establishing a relational hierarchy of these events. Although these will differ dramatically between each of the case studies, establishing the hierarchy will be nonetheless important for constructing case studies. Finally, it will be important to track the long-term impacts of the conflict both in physical and perceived outcomes. For example, it will be important to track how each actor behaved during the conflict, note who “won” the conflict, and trace how each actor
adjusted in preparation for future conflict. In short, the following bullets describe the structure of each case:

- **Contextual Factors**
  - The lead-up to conflict
  - Key changes in conventional or nuclear posturing
  - Changes in the standing/position of international actors
  - Why did conflict happen?
    - Immediate impetus
    - A timeline of actions, reactions

- **Strategic Decision-Making During Conflict**
  - Outcomes and long-term policy implications
    - Policy lessons
    - Validation/impact on theory

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Figure 1.2: Understanding the key themes in each case study

Throughout an explication of each of these factors, the goal will be to see how those that fit into the categories of conflict escalation, counter-terrorism, and coercive diplomacy contribute to the overall chance for escalation. Articulating a scenario where each decision is weighed based on some assumed values (such as the Pakistani military’s anti-India pathology or India’s desire to project strength) would allow policymakers to understand at what step intervention may be most effective. For example, taking the case as mentioned above, if the critical step in escalation occurs at the second branch (that is, Pakistani decision-making), this may be the most advantageous time/place for third parties like the UN/US/China to change Pakistani incentives through coercion or positive compellance. This is only one of many possible conclusions that could arise from scenario analysis.

**Chapter 2: The 2001-2002 “Twin-Peaks” Crisis**
On December 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2001, five armed militants infiltrated the Indian Parliament house in a suicide mission and opened fire on those inside, killing 14 and injuring 22 more. Although the attackers hoped to catch the Parliament in session, a fortuitous scheduling change prevented a decapitation of the Indian government. More important than the body count however was the symbolism of the attack. Speaking shortly after the assault, Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee stated firmly, “This was not just an attack on the building, it was a warning to the entire nation. We accept the challenge.”\textsuperscript{63} Coming just four months after the 9/11 attacks in the US and two months after a similar assault on the Kashmir state assembly in Srinagar (where 38 died), the infiltration represented a brazen attempt by militants to spark high-level conflict between India and Pakistan. In this regard, the militants were partly successful. The attack sparked a 10-month period during which India and Pakistan each kept approximately one million soldiers in a high state of readiness along their international border and LoC dividing Kashmir. Such was the state of mobilization that, by December 31\textsuperscript{st}, US intelligence believed that large-scale war was imminent “within a number of days.”\textsuperscript{64}

This worry increased when a second attack (the “second peak,” so to speak) occurred in the Jammu Kashmir capital of Kaluchak. On May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2002 armed militants infiltrated an Indian Army base and killed 31, including women and children.\textsuperscript{65} This attack caught many in the US intelligence community by surprise and came only one day after Indian Foreign Minister George Fernandes claimed that militant “leadership is freed, it lives in houses and gets paid an allowance by the government of Pakistan.”\textsuperscript{66} This indicated that there was no doubt within the highest levels of the Indian security apparatus that Pakistan was directly responsible for the attack and may have to suffer consequences. Within a period of 10 months, it appeared once again that India and Pakistan may be primed for war.

Yet, contrary to expectations, the twin-peaks crisis did not result in overt war or lead to the direct threat of nuclear conflict. Instead, a mixture of bilateral and international crisis management, mutual assurances of restraint, and worries about the consequences of conflict escalation kept the conflict from boiling over into a larger war. This makes Twin-Peaks a highly useful case study in the effort to understand the key factors that portend conflict escalation in the subcontinent. Indeed, many point towards the events of 2001-2002 as proof that nuclear conflict in South Asia is explained by the strictures of the stability-instability paradox. By applying the framework outlined in the previous chapter, the following will take a deep dive into the key external factors of the conflict, the immediate causes of conflict, and the key outcomes from the conflict.

**Contextual Factors**

**Pakistan**

In the immediate aftermath of the Kargil conflict, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Pervez Musharraf came under heavy domestic criticism for his planning and execution of the incursion. This criticism notably came from both civilian and military sources. As stated in the introduction, the Kargil conflict widened an already large rift between Musharraf and then-Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Additionally, Musharraf’s main critic in the military apparatus was the head of Pakistan’s navy, Admiral Fasih Bokhari. Bokhari was critical enough of Musharraf’s conduct during the conflict that he demanded a public inquiry into the strategic planning behind the Kargil conflict. Sharif initially intended to capitalize on this discord within the military by appointing Bokhari as the new Chief of the Pakistani Army. Acting before Sharif could do so, however, Musharraf quickly seized control of the military and soon used the incident as the main impetus for a coup d’état against Sharif.

What is most telling about the Pakistani public’s reaction to the coup, however, is the fact that it largely allowed to go unperturbed despite the fact that Sharif had only recently won his premiership

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69 Hashmi, "Karamat retired,"
in a landslide. Most analysts attribute the public’s tame reaction to the perception that Sharif “sold out” Pakistan in Kargil during his negotiations with President Clinton. The recent primary instigator of the Kargil conflict thus found himself in a relatively stable position as the undisputed leader of Pakistan by the end of 1999. At the same time, the coup attempt left the United States with little to no understanding of or control over events in Pakistan. If anything, the recent events in Kargil and subsequent coup attempt proved to American policymakers the failure of the decade-old sanctions regime imposed by the US in response to Pakistan’s nuclear program.

American strategists were left with little time to formulate a well-planned, post-coup strategy towards Pakistan before the events of 9/11 changed the dynamics of that relationship overnight. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the US decision to invade Afghanistan, Washington immediately normalized ties with Pakistan. On September 15th, 2001, Pakistan announced its willingness to extend full cooperation in the ‘war on terror.’ In doing so, it made a decision that would have significant impacts for both its domestic policy as well as its policy towards India. Namely, its public abandonment of the Afghan Taliban, a government it had long supported in Kabul, served a number of purposes.

In aligning itself with the US against the Taliban, Pakistan attempted to break free of its portrayal as a pariah state. If successful, this means that it could respond to India's moves with greater confidence. Having made a U-turn on its Afghan policy, Islamabad did not have to worry about the concerns of the international community about its support of the Taliban. Pakistan's offer of unmitigated cooperation to the US in its fight against terrorism was therefore motivated by the immediate need to save itself from being seen as an ally of the Taliban. Musharraf is on record as having said that “this decision was taken to avoid immense damage and loss that could accrue to

70 Celia Duggar, "Pakistan Calm After Coup; Leading General Gives No Clue About How He Will Rule," New York Times (New York, NY), October 14, 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/14/world/pakistan-calm-after-coup-leading-general-gives-no-clue-about-how-he-will-rule.html. "More aggressive officers were angry when the Prime Minister bowed to American pressure and called for withdrawal of the Pakistan-supported forces. Others say military leaders were upset because they felt that Mr. Sharif gave the impression that rogue army officers were to blame for the misadventure, rather than accepting responsibility himself.”
71 ibid.
Pakistan if it did not cooperate with the US."73 Seen as an indispensable asset in the Afghan War, the US willingly accepted this offer – to India’s great ire.74

India
From New Delhi’s perspective, increased political space for Pakistan would mean a reduced one for India for two reasons: first, Pakistan would find new diplomatic and media support for its designs in Kashmir. Second, the US would be under pressure to balance its strategic shift away from India due to military cooperation with Pakistan in Afghanistan. Given that Pakistan had earned international ire both for the development of its nuclear program and its cavalier behavior in Kargil, Indian officials like Defense Minister George Fernandes loathed the opening of a window for Pakistani rapprochement with the rest of the world. Indeed, the prevailing post-9/11 attitude in Dehli was the desire to further alienate Pakistan from the international community by declaring it a ‘terrorist state.’75

This desire came from a place of serious worry that Pakistan would exploit its diplomatic elevation to push the Kashmir issue on the international agenda. Chastened from its experience during the Kargil conflict, India itself underwent a serious revaluation of its relationship with Pakistan between 1999 and 2001. In the immediate aftermath of Kargil, the Indian government commissioned K. Subrahmanyam, an Indian defense academic, to conduct a comprehensive post-mortem evaluation of Indian failures. Chief among Subrahmanyam’s recommendations “were a need for a high degree of vigilance on the India-Pakistan border, the critical importance of intelligence in pre-empting crisis. . .the need to equip the armed forces with appropriate weapons for mountain combat, and the necessity of developing an integrated infrastructure for strategic planning.”76

At the same time, Indian policymakers recognized for the first time the strategic importance that limited war would play in deterring and compelling Pakistan to behave appropriately. Despite the

73 Muhammad Ishaque Fani, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities after 9/11," Pakistan Horizon 58, no. 4 (October 2005): 56, JSTOR.
74 Ibid, 55
75 Ibid, 57.
successes of third-party crisis negotiation in convincing Sharif to not escalate in Kargil, the chief lesson that India took from Kargil was the key role that military retaliation played in curbing Pakistani designs. In this sense, the Indian security apparatus internalized the framework of the stability-instability paradox to the extent that it was willing to use limited force to prevent larger conventional or nuclear conflict. In January 2000, Fernandes asserted that nuclear weapons “can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not all and any war,” and that Kargil had demonstrated that Indian forces “can fight and win a limited war, at a time and place chosen by the aggressor.”

Post-Kargil India’s thinking, however, was not rooted entirely in the primacy of military action. Rather, Indian premier Vajpayee was insistent on the role that bilateral diplomacy would play in managing tensions. This is despite the fact that he felt personally burned by Pakistan’s duplicity in welcoming him to Lahore for bilateral talks in February, 1999 even as early Pakistani incursions into Kargil were under way. Vajpayee had invested considerable political capital in extending the olive branch to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and Kargil came as a shock. To be sure, by 2001, the perception of Pakistani perfidy remained strong in Vajpayee's memory: “[w]e shook hands like friends. It's a different matter that we were stabbed in the back.”

Despite this bad blood, Vajpayee continued to make overtures towards the Musharraf regime. In the days following the coup d’état, he released the following: "We wish the people of Pakistan well. . .We remain committed to developing friendly relations and cooperative ties with Pakistan based on mutual trust and confidence, for which the Government of Pakistan needs to create the right environment.” In late 2000, India declared a unilateral ceasefire to facilitate negotiations between the Government of India and Kashmiri secessionists. At the same time, India and Pakistan agreed to revive the Confidence Building (CBM) hotline (between their respective Directors-General of Military Operations) that had been suspended during Kargil a year earlier. Subsequently, renewed diplomatic efforts led to the 2000 Agra summit between both states.

**Strategic/policy decisions during conflict**

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77 Ibid, 42.
78 Ibid, 41.
80 Basrur, Minimum Deterrence, 41.
Coercive Diplomacy

Five days after the assault on the Mumbai Parliament, the Indian government initiated *Operation Parakram*, a mass troop mobilization aimed at threatening—and perhaps executing—large-scale conventional war with Pakistan. The process that the Indian government took to arrive at this policy decision is worth visiting in greater detail. In a meeting following the day of the attack, the Cabinet Committee on Security met to discuss possible strategies. Intelligence announced that the attack was the handiwork of Lashkar-e-Taiba, an anti-India terrorist organization based in Pakistan and a known associate of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). Upon this conclusion, the Cabinet decided that “Pakistan must be given a very serious warning’ and that ‘the threat of military action should be held up.” In meetings subsequent to this one, the Cabinet weighed two possible options.

First, it considered initiating “surgical strikes” into Pakistan-held territory. It decided against this because the military believed that it could not conduct strikes effectively in such short notice. To be sure, there were those within the cabinet who wished to escalate rapidly to teach Pakistan a lesson. The Indian army chief at the time, General S. Padmanabhan, observed that limited strikes would have been “totally futile. If you really want to punish someone for something very terrible he has done you smash him. You destroy his weapons and capture his territory.” In this initial stage, however, cooler heads soon prevailed. For example, Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh suggested that the military mobilize its three advanced strike corps and keep them postured for an assault should the situation further deteriorate. This middle-of-the-ground approach appeased both those within the cabinet who wished to strike Pakistan immediately as well as those who wished to see the situation develop further. It also appeased a domestic Indian audience largely expecting an assertive response to the parliament attack. At the very least, having troops mobilized would ensure that India seriously signaled its intention that Pakistan reign in its domestic terror problem.

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83 Ibid.
Additionally, this decision resulted from two key assumptions about India’s competitive advantages in a potential wartime situation. First, the Cabinet believed firmly that India held a strong conventional superiority over Pakistan. As the events of Kargil had supposedly demonstrated, once Indian troops were mobilized they were fully capable of defeating Pakistani intruders in even the most adverse combat conditions. Second, Indian leaders dismissed the threat of a Pakistani nuclear ‘first strike.’ On the one hand (and channeling Kenneth Waltz) they asserted that India was capable of absorbing a Pakistani first strike and then imposing unacceptable damage on Pakistan. By this logic, the latter would not opt for a first use of nuclear weapons. As Fernandes observed, “Pakistan can’t think of using nuclear weapons … We could take a strike, survive and then hit back. Pakistan would be finished. I do not really fear that the nuclear issue would figure in a conflict.”

This coercive strategy was not aimed solely at Pakistan, however. It was also aimed at galvanizing international—particularly American—support in the advent that the conflict did escalate. After seeing the pivotal role that US diplomacy played in de-escalating conflict in Kargil, India understood acutely the necessity of having a powerful third-party peace broker. Having witnessed, however, the recent rapprochement between the US and Pakistan in the wake of 9/11, there were those in the Cabinet who doubted the integrity of the US as an honest broker. For example, some Indian officials criticized what they called Washington’s “double standard” on terrorism—“urging restraint on New Delhi and discouraging Indian retaliation against Pakistan, when the United States responded to the 9/11 attacks by invading Afghanistan.” India thus sought to compel the US to apply pressure on Pakistan to abandon its support for terrorist outfits. The potential for a war with nearly unlimited consequences would work against US interests in the region. Manipulating Washington’s interests and concerns, then, was an integral component of India’s coercive strategy.

In some sense, Pakistan had little choice but to respond directly to Indian mobilization. In the days

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85 Ibid, 5.
86 Basrur, Minimum Deterrence, 9.
following the initiation of *Parakram*, Pakistan undertook its own mass mobilization. This included a deployment of troops on its eastern border with India, troop increases in Kashmir, and a redeployment of troops stationed on its western, Afghan border to forward positions.\(^8^9\) Although this response was a direct retaliation to Indian coercive actions, it also comes undergirded with a series of assumptions. One of these assumptions exists at direct loggerheads with the Indian assumption of conventional superiority. Unlike the case of Kargil, which the Pakistani military believed that it had lost because civilian betrayal of combat objectives, Pakistan viewed itself at rough parity with India at least at their shared border. As S. Paul Kapur notes, “Despite overall Indian conventional superiority, military parity prevails in the vicinity of the Indo-Pakistani border...with dispersed peacetime deployment patterns limiting India’s ability to bring its forces to bear on Pakistan.” In fact, in the short term, Pakistan may be able to field a somewhat larger force in the border region than the Indians.\(^9^0\)

Additionally, Pakistan employed what Vipin Narang calls a “first-use asymmetric escalation nuclear posture.” In his description, this means that Pakistan “aims to credibly threaten the *first use* of nuclear weapons on Indian ground forces—likely on Pakistani soil—to deter significant Indian conventional action against Pakistan.”\(^9^1\) Contrasted directly with India’s promise that it will never first use (NFU) a nuclear weapon, this strategy is intended to directly counter the Indian assumption that it could coerce Pakistan through overwhelming conventional superiority on the battlefield. As Narang notes, Pakistani threat of first use proved decisive in preventing Indian incursion. “In second phase of the Operation Parakram Crisis in June 2002, Indian leaders contemplated significant conventional retaliatory strikes against Pakistan but ultimately refrained from military action, partly out of fear of uncontrollable escalation to the nuclear level.”\(^9^2\)

**Third-Party Diplomacy**

Despite attempts throughout 2000 at diplomatic rapprochement, the India-Pakistan bilateral

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\(^8^9\) Ibid, 7.

\(^9^0\) S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 138, PDF.


\(^9^2\) Ibid, 4.
relationship remained “poisonous” by the fall of 2001. As recounted earlier, Indian leaders were bitter that Pakistan had become a beneficiary of the global “War on Terror” despite having been the Taliban’s strongest backer before 9/11. As one senior Washington official noted during this period, “every meeting with Indians had one topic: Pakistan. Pakistan was getting at some of the advantages that India had just won for itself—including the lifting of American sanctions.”

From the onset of the conflict, then, the US played a serious role in facilitating negotiations and attempting to diffuse tensions. As the crisis broke, US forces were in the middle of rounding up Al-Qaeda operatives in the Tora Bora caves with ostensible Pakistani help. The US thus had a keen national interest in ensuring that the conflict could be resolved quickly. As US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage recalled, “Once the violence moved to New Delhi, India-Pakistan tensions became a whole new ball game.” Aware of the US’ priorities, the Indian government was initially skeptical of whether the US could serve as an effective third-party peace broker. To this effect, The Indian ambassador to the US ‘worked hard to communicate to Washington that their coercive measures were serious “[The] Government of India would take steps without hesitation …We don’t care if Pakistan has nuclear weapons – there is a price to be paid.” To be sure, the Bush Administration made many overtures in order to assuage this concern of partiality. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, President Bush called Vajpayee to offer his condolences. In the same breath he counseled “patience and calm.”

The overall US diplomatic strategy that resulted from this dynamic could be characterized by two main points. First, as mentioned, were constant efforts to assuage Indian fears that the US could act in that state’s best interest. Second were efforts by the US to pressure Pakistan into de-escalating and addressing its domestic terror problem. As Srinath Raghavan notes, “Colin Powell spoke on telephone to Musharraf several times, urging him to blacklist certain terrorist groups operating in Kashmir.” The Bush administration also placed the LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad

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94 Ibid, 27.
95 Ibid, 28.
(JeM, another Pakistan-based terror group) on the State Department’s list of designated foreign terrorist organizations. Attempts by Powell and his diplomatic team failed dramatically early on.

Just months after Powell’s discussion with Musharraf, the Kaluchak incident threatened to burst open the seams. Days after the attack, Vajpayee trumpeted that “the time has come for a decisive battle. . .and we will have a sure victory in this battle.” At the same time, The Pakistani Minister for Railways (and a former ISI officer) delivered a menacing response. In May, he told a news agency that “if it ever comes to the annihilation of Pakistan then what is this damned nuclear option for, we will use (it) against the enemy … as they say if I am going down the ditch, I will also take my enemy with me.”99 Ultimately, it took a personal trip to both Islamabad and New Delhi by Armitage in June to diffuse the situation.

Counterterrorism and Terrorist Infiltration

To understand why American diplomacy seems to have succeeded later where it had first failed, one cannot overlook the importance of Pakistan’s decision to curb cross-border terror attacks. Looking at India’s list of demands following the attack on Parliament, two stand out in this regard. First, India demanded the immediate cessation of all cross-border infiltration of militants from Pakistan. On this issue, Vajpayee expected full Pakistani cooperation and positive efforts taken by Musharraf to curb the proliferation of terror groups within Pakistan. Second, Vajpayee demanded the immediate Pakistani extradition of more than 20 militants suspected to have been involved in the planning of the Parliament attack.

Recognizing the need to address the terror problem, Powell and Armitage convinced Musharraf to deliver a public address on the issue of cross-border infiltration in January, 2002. To his credit, Musharraf recognized the dual pressures of Indian mobilization and US diplomatic requests and quickly acquiesced to Powell’s demands.100 As Krepon notes, “Senior US officials seized on Musharraf’s intention to deliver a speech. . .[and] Washington provided detailed advice to

Musharraf on the contents of the speech.”

The contents of the speech, however, did not provide nearly the assurance that Powell and Vajpayee would have liked. In his speech, Musharraf announced a ban on six militant groups – including LeT and JeM – and vowed to bring to justice those “guilty of perpetrating terror.” But the Pakistani president was also sensitive to the issue of reputation: if Islamabad was seen as crumbling under Indian pressure, it might embolden New Delhi to press further demands. He thus categorically refused to concede India’s demand for extradition of the 20 terror suspects: “There is no question of entertaining the Indian demand.” In an attempt to counter-coerce India, he conveyed a deterrent threat. Asserting the readiness of Pakistani forces, he warned that “nobody should dare cross over [sic] the Line of Control.”

To make his deterrent threat more muscular, Musharraf told *der Spiegel* in an interview in April 2002 that if the pressure on Pakistan becomes too great then “as a last resort, the atom bomb is also possible.”

Despite the unpleasant caveats that Musharraf signaled, the Indian government was willing to abide by his promise to stop infiltration. This slight lull (the “valley” between “peaks,” so to speak) was short lived, however. Just a month after the speech the Kaluchak incident threatened to blow the lid off any possible rapprochement. This attack caught many in the Indian and US intelligence community by surprise and came only one day after Indian Foreign Minister George Fernandes claimed that militant “leadership is freed, it lives in houses and gets paid an allowance by the government of Pakistan.”

As noted earlier, it took a personal trip by Armitage to Islamabad in and then New Delhi in June to reduce tensions. Particularly noteworthy during this incident was the one-on-one discussion that Armitage had with Musharraf. After that meeting, Musharraf pledged his support towards permanently cutting down on cross-border infiltrations. According to one account, “Armitage believes that he elicited, confirmed and reconfirmed Musharraf’s pledge to make cessation permanent” Another account, however, has Armitage admitting that a permanent solution to the

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101 Ibid.
problem was “a bridge too far.” On balance, it appears that the nature of the commitment Armitage cajoled out of Musharraf was tentative in the sense that few concrete steps were taken to curb the next round of terror attacks. The US diplomat, however, felt that this was sufficient for his purposes. This was understandable, for the Bush administration’s primary interest lay in averting a war in the subcontinent.105

**Takeaways**

In the aftermath of the second peak, India was largely forced to accept Musharraf’s promise that he would cut down on cross-border infiltrations. This is because, in the lull between peaks (December 2001-June 2002), the Indian military had demobilized to the extent that any angry Indian bluster following Kaluchak carried with it much less weight than it would have following Operation Parakaram. Announcing the withdrawal of its forces from the border with Pakistan, the Indian government claimed that the objectives of the mobilization had been achieved. Fernandes stated in the recently reopened parliament that “some of the terrorist organizations in Pakistan were banned, some terrorist camps in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir closed, their accounts frozen and leaders arrested.” Cross-border infiltration, he claimed, had “come down considerably compared to the figures of the corresponding period of the previous year.”106 To a large extent, these claims were face-saving in what was symbolically a major defeat for India. Despite all the bluster, talk of targeted strikes, and coercive posturing, the end of the crisis resembled in many ways the status quo before the parliament attack. Indeed, all Vajpayee could walk away with was a meek promise from Musharraf (a man he knew to be duplicitous) that the latter would prevent future infiltrations. As the following case studies indicate, this will be the first of numerous incidents in which the crisis, even when de facto over, remains unfinished.

That said, there are still a number of useful conclusions to take away from the Twin-Peaks case study. First, Twin-Peaks provides a window into how coercive/deterrent posturing—both conventional and nuclear—can be a major factor in the escalation/de-escalation of conflict. Because both sides held differing views about the military balance, they postured themselves in a

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way that, absent third-party peace brokering, the situation could have easily gone out of control. For example, India’s belief that its conventional superiority and robust nuclear second-strike capability gave it the confidence that, should it have chosen to invade Pakistan, it should expect to win a conflict. Moreover, Indian strategists expected that Pakistan would recognize this ground truth and respond to coercive Indian behavior in a deferent manner. On the other hand, Pakistani confidence in its first-strike pledge as well as its tactical conventional parity led it to act in a way very different than Indian strategists expected. In this case, aggressive assumptions about conventional and nuclear posturing on both sides added to the risk for escalation.

Twin-Peaks also showed, however, that coercive diplomacy could have a de-escalatory impact on conflict. As noted earlier, India partly intended for its mobilization to attract an attentive International/American audience that could not accept total war in South Asia. After seeing the role that third-party diplomacy played in ending the Kargil conflict, India was more than happy to engage in this form of attract this attention. In doing so, Indian behavior seems at first glance to affirm the dependence-independence corollary to the stability-instability paradox first enumerated by Peter Lavoy. The importance of third-party diplomacy in ending twin-peaks cannot be overstated. Had it not been for the efforts of Colin Powell, Richard Armitage, and the rest of the US diplomatic staff, the conflict very well could have spiraled out of control after the attack on parliament (let alone the Kaluchak incident).

Even though third-party diplomacy was on-balance de-escalatory in this case, calling it a panacea would be missing critical nuance on two fronts. First, the importance of appearing as an honest, impartial broker was crucial for the US. Because the events of 9/11 resulted in a serious re-evaluation of US policy towards Pakistan, it unsettled the traditional expectations of Indian diplomats who expected privileged treatment in negotiations and acute pressure on Pakistan. Although Powell and Armitage were able to convince both Musharraf and Vajpayee that they could be honest brokers, the fact remains that this was a serious hurdle in conflict de-escalation through diplomacy. Second, the notion that Armitage could have given in to Musharraf on “permanent” blockage of cross-border infiltration shows the limitations of diplomacy in the face of Pakistan’s domestic imperatives.
To that effect, Twin-Peaks also proved informative in showcasing Pakistani response under pressure from Indian coercive diplomacy. First, it showed that Musharraf’s fear of disturbing his domestic population (for whom groups like LeT were popularly supported) was enough for him to allow cross border infiltrations to continue even when he had promised otherwise to an international audience. Second, once push came to shove after Kaluchak, it also showed that he had the capacity to temporarily cease any infiltrations. Both of these are valuable observations that suggest both Pakistan’s agency and lack thereof in dealing with inherently escalatory non-state actors within its borders. All of these conclusions suggest a mixed picture for the strategies relying of coercion, diplomacy, and counterterrorism to reduce the risk of conflict escalation.

Figure 2.1: Decision-tree from the Twin-Peaks Crisis (2001)

Chapter III: The 2008 Mumbai Attacks
On the evening of November 26th, 2008, just as many Americans began to celebrate their Thanksgiving weekend, news reports trickled in to Washington about a possible large-scale terrorist attack in Mumbai, India. In the events that soon unfolded in high drama, ten well-armed militants associated with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) descended upon Mumbai from the city’s waterfront and began a violent, indiscriminate assault on the city’s residents. The result was three days of carnage broadcasted worldwide before the security forces could neutralize the terrorist threat. By the end of the suicide attack, nine of the ten assailants lay dead, having taken 172 lives (and wounding at least 300 more) with them.107

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, American diplomats scrambled to diffuse tensions. At the same time, Indian civilian and military elites contemplated a coercive response to punish Pakistan for allowing the attack to occur. In this sense, the first few days following the attack were mostly indistinguishable from the immediate response to the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. The outcome also resembled the aftermath of Twin-Peaks—Largely symbolic promises followed by a demobilization on both sides and temporary cessation of cross-border infiltrations.

Even though the US and India deployed very similar strategies after Mumbai 2008 to what they did after the Twin-Peaks crisis, the circumstances on the ground fundamentally differed in several ways. The reasons that Mumbai 2008 did not spiral into a larger interstate conflict had little to do with the exact formulation of American/Indian coercive or diplomatic strategies. Instead, both India and the US operated under a growing recognition that Pakistan wielded much less control than previously thought over terror groups like LeT. They also worried that any effort to compel Pakistan to act against its domestic terror groups would result in serious blowback. This meant that Indian and American policymakers had to act with extreme caution. It was this extreme caution and hesitance to act, not the actual strategies employed, that resulted in the lack of escalation. In this sense, many of the key takeaways from 2008 directly contradict those of 2001. For this reason

alone, it is worth looking deeper into the circumstances on the ground and strategies employed by the US, India, and Pakistan.

**Contextual Factors**

**Indian Coercive Diplomacy**

After witnessing both the role that successful troop mobilization played in coercing Pakistani behavior in 2001 and the impacts of not being able to mobilize quickly enough (after Kaluchak in 2002), Indian strategists felt an acute need to revisit their conventional military doctrine. To correct for these perceived deficiencies, the Indian Chief of Army Staff unveiled a new mobilization doctrine—termed “Cold Start”—in 2004.\(^{108}\) As Walter Ladwig notes, “the goal of this limited war doctrine [was] to establish the capacity to launch a retaliatory conventional strike against Pakistan that would inflict harm. . .before the international community could intercede” while also pursuing “narrow enough aims to deny Islamabad a justification to escalate the clash to a nuclear weapon.”\(^{109}\) Cold Start would supposedly achieve this objective by leveraging India’s conventional superiority to respond to a potential future terror attack. The doctrine required a reorganization of the Indian military away from three large strike corps into eight smaller “integrated battle groups” that combined infantry, artillery, and armored vehicles. The implication here was that, the smaller a military unit was, the quicker it could mobilize. In addition to increased speed, Cold Start also intended to use limited punitive force in a way that would prevent Pakistani nuclear retaliation. “Rather than seek to deliver a catastrophic blow to Pakistan. . .the goal of Indian military operations would be to make shallow territorial gains, 50–80 kilometers deep, that could be used in post-conflict negotiations to extract concessions from Islamabad.”\(^{110}\)

Cold Start ostensibly resulted from the lessons of Kargil and Twin-Peaks, both of which suggested that the quicker and more effectively the Indian army could coerce Pakistani behavior, the more advantageous the aftermath would be for India. It also affirmed that the Indian military was operating under the assumption that the stability-instability paradox defined the relationship between its conventional and nuclear deterrence strategies. As General V.P. Malik publicly argued

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\(^{109}\) Ibid, 164

\(^{110}\) Ibid, 165.
at the time, Cold Start recognized that “space exists between proxy war/low-intensity conflict and a nuclear umbrella within which a limited conventional war is a distinct possibility.”

From the start, however, the gap between expectations for Cold Start and the program’s reality were large. To begin, within the Indian armed forces (and the government more broadly) there appeared to have been no single consensus on the status of Cold Start. The Indian Air Force (IAF) in particular was skeptical of being cast in a secondary, close-air-support role. Retired Indian Air Vice Marshal Kapil Kak noted “There is no question of the air force fitting itself into a doctrine propounded by the army. That is a concept dead at inception.” Additionally, the draft doctrine was never blessed by the Indian Ministry of Defense, let alone the Cabinet Committee on Security. As a result, the reconfiguration and relocation of Indian Army forces occurred at a snail’s-pace. Additionally, “procurement of equipment to update and replace obsolete kit lagged, leaving the Army short of the equipment and materials needed to execute Cold Start.”

Pakistan’s Complicated Counterterrorism Story

As India struggled to redefine its conventional force posture, Pakistan’s own struggle with internal terrorism caused it to seriously re-evaluate its internal CT strategy. Namely, a sharp increase in terror attacks targeted against the Pakistani state began to force the civilian government and military to begin to re-evaluate their long-standing relationship with terror organizations such as LeT and JuD. To be sure, the full complexities of Pakistani internal terrorism, particularly as they relate to the US invasion of Afghanistan and the global “War on Terror,” are outside the scope of this inquiry. As Samir Puri notes, “So multi-layered has Pakistan’s war against non-state armed groups been that such categorizations as ‘insurgency’ and ‘counterinsurgency’, or ‘terrorism’ and ‘counterterrorism’, hardly capture all that is stake.” To the extent that it is relevant to a discussion of conflict escalation, however, a quick briefing on Pakistani terrorism in 2007 is

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111 V. P. Malik, "Strategic Stability in South Asia" (paper presented at Center for Contemporary Conflict, Monterey, CA, June 29, 2004), 54.
113 Ibid.
necessary here. As Puri discusses:

_The Taliban movement, always factionalized between various warlords, turned its attention much more decidedly against the Pakistani state from 2007 onwards. The TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban) brought together several anti-Pakistan factions. . .Infiltration into Afghanistan and the war against foreign forces there continued to be of prime concern for the Taliban movement. The US government forced President Pervez Musharraf to pursue these ‘high value targets’. Pakistani operations in turn provoked a wider tribal rebellion that fused the puritanical Islamist bent of these groups with a pervading and long-established tribal desire for Pashtun autonomy in the FATA from the central state._

The result of this newly developing dynamic was a Pakistan that had far less control over the terrorist organizations operating within its own borders than perhaps was the case in 2001-2002. If Pakistan couldn’t prevent attacks within its own state, for instance, how could it expect to prevent attacks outside its borders?

No single incident describes this troubling dynamic better than the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) incident in June, 2007. As Anatol Lieven describes, “Since January 2007 the Red Mosque complex had become a base for Islamist militants who were launching vigilante raids on video stores and Chinese-run ‘massage parlours’ in adjacent areas of the city.” The Mosque, located in Islamabad, sat only 2 miles away from the Pakistani Parliament. On July 10th, 2007, after repeated negotiations for surrender had failed, Pakistani troops stormed the complex. According to official figures, a total of 154 people, including 19 soldiers, were killed in the ensuing battle. As Lieven notes, “The Red Mosque affair illustrates some of the appalling dilemmas faced by Pakistani governments in confronting Islamist militancy.” In the months leading up to the military action, the Musharraf administration was constantly reproached by the Pakistani media for its failure to take action. “He was accused not merely of negligence, but of deliberately helping the militants in order to prove to Washington that he was facing an Islamist revolt and there.” The attack resulted in a marked fissure between Musharraf and armed groups residing within Pakistan.

Whereas 9/11 (and the subsequent Pakistani decision to support the US against the Taliban) provided the first fissure between groups like JuD and LeT and the Pakistani state, it was the

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116 Ibid, 221.
118 Ibid.
decision in 2007 by President Musharraf to break the siege at the Lal Masjid by force that
decisively fractured relations between Islamist armed groups and the state. Indeed, the wave of
suicide and other terrorist attacks that Pakistan would suffer to this day in have not been limited to
the FATA and the north-west, but have struck right across Pakistan’s urban centers, including in
the Punjab province.\textsuperscript{120}

Third Party Diplomacy: A ‘decoupling’ of India and Pakistan
The time period between 2001 and 2008 is also distinct for witnessing a shift in US policy
posturing towards India and Pakistan. Namely, the Bush administration increasingly employed a
policy of ‘de-hyphenation’ in its bilateral relationships with both countries. Up until the Twin-
Peaks crisis, US strategy was focused singularly on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation in the
subcontinent. This “India-Pakistan” strategy was instrumental in driving the US to serve as an
active peace broker during Kargil and Twin-Peaks. Post Twin-peaks represents a dramatic revision
of this strategy. The result was a concerted effort to come up with distinct “India” and “Pakistan”
strategies. As Ashley Tellis suggests, “Bush took to its limits the strategy advocated. . .prior to his
election in 2000, namely, that Washington ought to pursue a differentiated policy toward the region
centered on “a decoupling of India and Pakistan in US. calculations.”\textsuperscript{121}

This decoupling was based on a recognition of changing realities in the subcontinent. With both
the advent of the global war on terror and India’s rapidly growing economy, Washington realized
that it would have to tailor distinct policies for both countries that wasn’t based solely on the
criteria of encouraging nuclear de-escalation. From a US perspective, this strategy was highly
advantageous because it meant that pursuing better relations with one state did not automatically
result in a worse relationship with the other state. This meant that, as the US was pouring aid and
assistance into Islamabad to address the issue of terrorism, it could also pursue positive
relations with India to assuage the latter country’s fears and jealousies.\textsuperscript{122} One concrete result of this

\textsuperscript{120} Puri, "Brinkmanship, not COIN," 222.
\textsuperscript{121} Ashley Tellis et al., "The Lessons of Mumbai," RAND National Security: The RAND Corporation, 2009, 22, PDF.
\textsuperscript{122} Tellis et al., "The Lessons," 29. “Not surprisingly then, most U.S. aid, when it did start pouring in from 2002
onward, was oriented primarily toward compensating Islamabad for its counterterrorism activities (57 percent) and
supporting its military procurements (18 percent). The more modest residual allocation for economic activities (25
percent) mainly took the form of budgetary support through direct cash transfers (16 percent). This component,
although necessary initially to help Pakistan tide over its most serious moment of economic crisis, eventually
posturing was the signing of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) between Washington and New Delhi. This agreement, announced in January 2004 after many months of negotiation, drew its inspiration from the Bush-Vajpayee cooperation during Twin-Peaks. Despite continuing disagreements on other issues such as trade, Iraq, and the United Nations, The NSSP “committed both countries to collaboration in four difficult arenas-civilian nuclear energy, civilian space programs, high-technology trade, and missile defense.”

**Strategic/policy decisions during conflict**

Coercive Diplomacy

The gap between Cold Start’s expectations and realities was immediately exposed by the 2008 attacks. Instead of an immediate mobilization, it “would take ‘several weeks before [the Indian Military] could prudently commence operations.” This meant that India could not present nearly the coercive positioning to compel Pakistani behavior that it had in 2001. To make matters worse, the lack of military mobilization was coupled with near-total paralysis on the ground in Mumbai. As Krepon notes, “failure to share, as well as act on, advance intelligence. . .contributed to India’s inability to prevent and respond to the attacks.” The result was two distinct failures of Indian strategy. First, when India was attacked, it was not able to conduct the ‘game-changing’ retaliatory operations that it had publically broadcasted. This meant that the credibility of India’s willingness for deterrence by punishment was seriously undermined. Second, years of publically broadcasting provided Pakistan with a useful justification to intensify the production of nuclear weapons to counter Indian conventional superiority.

Additionally, in a direct response to Cold Start, Pakistan adopted an asymmetric nuclear posturing that went even further than the first use doctrine enunciated during Twin-Peaks. Although the end goal of the posturing — “To credibly threaten the first use of nuclear weapons on Indian ground forces to deter significant Indian conventional action against Pakistan” — was the same, Pakistan

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123 Ibid, 30.
124 Perkovich and Dalton, *Not War*, 79.
125 Ibid, 81.
implemented a series of steps to maximize their own credibility. This included the devolution of nuclear weapons use from the National Command Authority (NCA) to the combatant command level. The result was a “mad-man” mechanism whereby a lower-level military commander decides to take matters into his own hands and release nuclear weapons at a threshold lower than the NCA may otherwise do.

**Negotiated Crisis Settlement**

Once US diplomats could regroup themselves following the initial shock of the attack, they began immediate efforts to calm tensions in India and Pakistan. Given that some in Washington feared that New Delhi would immediately execute Cold Start with potential cross-border air attacks in Pakistan, all initial American efforts pointed towards preventing that eventuality. As Krepon suggests, there was a consensus in the National Security Council and amongst the interagency that, in order to reduce the risk of escalation, US diplomatic priorities should be to 1) “seek to persuade India to not employ military options” and; 2) “get the Pakistanis to cough up people and clamp down.” In short, this was exact same strategy they employed to reduce tensions during Twin-Peaks.

In order to achieve these objectives, US diplomats relied on two tactics; high level engagement with senior Indian/Pakistani officials and information sharing with India and Pakistan related to the attacks. From the outset, however, both of these tactics ran into unexpected hurdles. In Pakistan, high level meetings led by US Ambassador Anne Patterson were stymied by Pakistani officials’ initial unwillingness to accept attribution or responsibility for the attack. Additionally, intelligence sharing was stymied by Indian inability to receive it. By early December, Indian

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127 Ibid.
129 Ibid, 30. “One reason for the Bush administration’s return to this formula was that it had worked in the 1999 Kargil and the 2001-2002 Twin Peaks crises, according to a former NSC staffer. A second was that US officials still “don’t want to be seen as taking sides in a military conflict,” in contrast to the Cold War period, “even though we are closer to India.”
130 Krepon and Nayak, *The Unfinished*, 40. “She made no headway with…[her] message, which was ‘you’ve got to take action against these guys,’ including the JuD [Jamaat-ul-Dawa, a charity widely believed to be a public front for LeT] and Hafiz Saeed [JuD’s leader]. Pakistan, however, was extremely reluctant to admit any sort of involvement, even non-government sanctioned.”
counterterrorism experts were still stunned by the inability of their system to cope with the Mumbai attacks. “We are looking at a system which does not have the capacity to either generate adequate intelligence, or to respond to it,” Ajai Sahni, a prominent non-government expert, acknowledged in an interview. “The scale of the task before us is colossal.”

Pakistan’s Counterterrorism Strategy: Recalcitrance and Denial
Throughout the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, Pakistan exercised a constant strategy of denying involvement and only lukewarmly accepting (if not outright refusing) to engage in positive actions against LeT or JuD. This was despite the fact that both India and the US repeatedly presented “overwhelming evidence that Pakistani nationals recruited, trained and equipped in Pakistan perpetrated the Mumbai attacks.” Despite the fact that Musharraf was no longer President and a newly (democratically) elected government was ostensibly calling the shots, Pakistan’s playbook after 2008 differed little from that of Twin Peaks. Interestingly enough denial of involvement of any form extended to actions after the crisis as well. It was the Pakistani Army, not US diplomats, who countered rumors of Indian military movements along their border in the days that followed November 26th. Denying that India’s armed forces had mobilized, a Pakistani army spokesman announced on November 30 that the “ceasefire isholding.” From the perspective of the US Embassy in Islamabad at the time, this was “very responsible.” The announcement that Pakistan’s military was not going to peremptorily mobilize “had a calming effect”—if only momentarily so.

For the most part, however, Pakistani denial of complicity or willingness to do anything about terror groups operating in Pakistan ratcheted tensions further. As an American diplomat working in Islamabad at the time recounted “the period between December 15th and New Years” was the tensest. During this time period, India ceased information sharing with Pakistan and continued to threaten the use of incursive force. That said, India’s primary positive action was to rely heavily on US diplomatic involvement to achieve all of their objectives. As the same diplomat noted,

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133 Ibid. 41.
134 Krepon and Nayak, *The Unfinished*, 41.
“India’s Plan A, B, and C was to rely on the US. . .Delhi had more leverage on the United States than on Pakistan.” New Delhi, however, was not counting on Washington alone to press its case against Pakistan. Indian diplomats also appealed to the Chinese and Saudi governments to press their traditional ally, Pakistan, to act against the accused militants. Tensions were so high that China’s foreign minister telephoned counterparts in India and Pakistan in late December to urge dialogue. Interestingly, the head of the Saudi intelligence service met with Pakistani officials in Islamabad on January 13th (2009) to underscore the urgency of progress on all of these issues.135

Just as the situation looked direst, New Delhi blinked. Recognizing that third-party negotiations did not yield nearly the results or guarantees as in 2002 (which were half-baked to begin with), Indian strategists adjusted their expectations of Pakistani behavior downwards. With prospects for cooperation dimming by January, 2009, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee announced on Indian television that New Delhi “would be satisfied if those involved in the Mumbai attacks were tried in Pakistani courts, provided they were tried fairly.” This statement unofficially withdrew the Indian demand that the planners of the attack be extradited to India. Instead, Indian planners began to look inwards and started placing a much larger emphasis on improving India’s domestic security apparatus to prevent the next set of attacks. As Krepon suggests, “On the face of it New Delhi responded pragmatically to Pakistani stalling.”136

Analysis/Takeaways
Michael Krepon and Polly Nayak titled their analysis of the 2008 Mumbai attacks “The Unfinished Crisis.” In many ways, the crisis left many unanswered questions. Foremost among these was whether the South Asian security system would be resilient enough to handle another large-scale terrorist incursion. At the same time, Mumbai proved edifying in a number of respects. Namely, it requires a re-evaluation of a number of key assumptions about important factors for conflict escalation.

Unlike the success India experienced with mobilization and coercive retaliation following Kargil

136 Krepon and Nayak, The Unfinished, 52.
and Twin- Peaks, the failures of Cold Start suggested that India cannot rely solely on a conventional deterrent threat to prevent cross-border incursions. To be sure, the actual inability of the Indian military to mobilize within an appropriate window has little to do with the deterrent threat. After all, the 10 terrorists who beached at Mumbai on November 26th had little indication that Cold Start would not execute according to plan. Instead, these terrorists likely operated under the assumption that, following their attack, Pakistan’s ‘beefed-up’ first use doctrine would prevent India from invading out of fear of retaliation. In this sense, Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent served as an inadvertent umbrella for terror groups to operate with impunity. India’s inability to do nothing but shout into the wind did little to contradict this assumption. To be sure, Mumbai also taught that there existed serious organizational and technical deficiencies in India’s domestic security apparatus. Besides the failure of Cold Start, the overall disarray of India’s counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and domestic policing added to the confusion of the policymaking process.

Second, and perhaps more ominously, the crisis cast serious doubt into the staying power of US crisis management. This is despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that US diplomats employed the same strategies that proved effective in Twin- Peaks to an entirely different set of circumstances. The policy of ‘de-hyphenating’ India-Pakistan policy, though good for US policy process and improving relations with India, may have had a negative impact on crisis management after Mumbai. For example, although the NSSP was good for US-India bilateral cooperation, many in Pakistan looked askance at what they perceived to be the groundwork for preferential treatment. One tenet of the NSSP in particular, the agreement for mutual assistance in civilian-nuclear developments seriously endangered US credibility in the eyes of many Pakistanis—particularly after no corresponding courtesy was extended to Pakistan. The perception that the US could not act as an honest broker in crisis negotiations was additionally damaged by the recognition that, among those dead in Mumbai, at least 6 were American citizens.

The final takeaway worth note is a further need to dissect Pakistani denial of involvement and recalcitrance to take positive moves to end terror incursions. As noted earlier, Pakistan in 2008

was a nation chastened by a recent uptick in domestic terror incidents following the military assault on the Lal masjid in Islamabad. For that reason, although denial may easily have been a signaling mechanism (as it was in the case of Kargil) in an attempt to save face internationally, it may also result from a place of weakness. If Pakistan were to accept responsibility, the next step would have been to pressure Pakistan to act in a way that would likely further disrupt the already precarious domestic political balance. Ironically enough, this recalcitrance—although contributing to escalation in the short term (particularly in the last few weeks of 2008)—may have saved the conflict from higher escalation. India’s practical decision to scale back its demands resulted from a recognition that Pakistan’s hands were to some extent tied when it came to doing something about domestic terrorism.

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**Figure 3.1: Decision-tree of Mumbai Crisis (2008)**

- Terrorists attack multiple targets in Mumbai: November 28th, 2008
  - India fails to execute Cold Start program and mobilize coercive force
  - Pakistan reiterates asymmetric nuclear first use doctrine
  - Pakistan refuses to acknowledge complicity or turn over perpetrators
  - US diplomacy aimed at reducing Indian escalation and compelling Pakistan to turn over perpetrators
  - India forced to adjust expectations downwards and accept limited Pakistani Promises
Chapter IV: The Uri Incident and the End of “Strategic Restraint”

The town of Uri sits right to the south of the Pir Panjal mountain range that separates the Kashmir valley from the plains of the Punjab. The mountains form a natural U-shaped bend around the town. Since 1947, Pakistan has held the mountains surrounding the Indian-military occupied post in Uri. With its forested slopes and hidden valleys, the U-shaped crescent is one of the main routes for infiltrators within Pakistan to enter India-occupied Kashmir. On September 18th, 2016, four heavily armed gunmen descended from the Panjal into the Indian camp at Uri and opened fire, killing 19. The attack was the deadliest assault on an Indian army camp since the Kaluchak incident at the end of the Twin-Peaks crisis. Immediately, the Indian government pointed blame on direct Pakistani support for the assault. A number of indicators quickly supported this assertion. First, the location of the attack suggested that the attackers must have originated from within Pakistan. Second, the infiltrators were carrying military-grade incendiary weapons – weapons that would be very difficult to obtain without official assistance.

For its part, Pakistan immediately denied complicity with what happened at Uri. Whatever the actual truth of the attack – those prone to conspiracy theories claimed it was a false bait operation by India to discredit Pakistan to an international audience – it appeared to Indian decision-makers that there was some level of Pakistani complicity. So strong was the Indian sense of surety that the government immediately acted in two ways that represent a sharp break from the traditional doctrine of “strategic restraint.” First, in a strong diplomatic move, the Indian government temporarily suspended any activities with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an organization dedicated to providing a space for dialogue and policy cooperation among South Asian countries. More importantly, India publically announced for the first time that it had conducted “surgical” strikes against militant targets within Pakistan. The acknowledgement of these strikes represents a sharp break from India’s traditional reliance on negotiated conflict

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139 Ibid, 256.
management and aggressive conventional posturing—a development that has significant implications for the future of crisis escalation in the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{140} As the following will suggest, this represents a paradigm shift for regional stability. Though India may have “won” in the direct aftermath of the Uri incident, a long-term shift away from Indian strategic restraint will introduce new elements of instability that will increase the risk of total escalation.

**Contextual Factors**

**India, post-Mumbai**

India entered a period of deep domestic uncertainty following the 2008 Mumbai crisis. For many, the assault on the Taj hotel represented a direct strike not only against Indian civilians, but also against the popular vision of India as a rapidly modernizing, cosmopolitan country.\textsuperscript{141} As the conflict wound down, the 24-hour media coverage soon gave way to around-the-clock public commentary in the news and in social media. This commentary centered primarily around assigning blame for how poorly the response was handled. Beyond the rage directed towards Pakistan, much of the public attention also focused on the failures of the Indian government. Many voiced their frustrations over social media as sites like Twitter and Facebook were soon inundated with pictures of the carnage and angry condemnations of the slow Indian security response.\textsuperscript{142} A candlelight vigil held for the victims on December 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2008 soon turned into a 10,000+ person protest. “You can see how angry people are and how hurt everyone is,” said one protester, “I have come with my friends because we cannot take it any more. The politicians must act; they must stop taking us for granted.”\textsuperscript{143} Because much of this anger was directed at the civilian government response, it resulted in the resignation of Shivraj Patil, India’s home minister.\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{143} Mukherjee, "Mumbai mourns."

The widespread disappointment with India’s domestic response paralleled an even greater
disappointment in the Indian security establishment’s ability to deter the attack to begin with.
Although the attack was carried out by militants who were putatively unassociated with the
Pakistani government, the Indian strategy of Cold Start largely failed both at preventing the initial
strike and compelling Pakistan to act in a positive manner following the attack. In his recounting
of the Mumbai incident, Indian Major General Gagandeep Bakshi provided one of the most
vociferous critiques of the Cold Start strategy. In his words “India ceded the strategic and tactical
initiative to Pakistan...and one of our glaring failures has been the inability to design and
implement a strong and proactive response option to Pakistan's sustained asymmetric warfare
offensive.”

Bakshi and others placed the blame at the feet of what they perceived to be an overly-simplistic,
“all-or-nothing.” strategy. In the aftermath of the Kargil conflict and the Twin-Peaks crisis, the
Indian military had been convinced that its successes were tied to its ability to muster and
threaten—thought not execute—a full conventional war. Indeed, in an affirmation of the tenets of
the stability-instability paradox, the Indian political elite seemed to have concluded that use of
conventional military force was no longer a viable response to sub-conventional provocations.
Thus they implemented the Cold-Start doctrine. In Operation Parakram, India attempted to achieve
this mobilization in order to compel Pakistani action. The unintended result, however, was that
this coercive deployment sharply raised the stakes for the decision makers. In their view, it
paralyzed a potential military response that could well have been initiated at the lower levels of
conflict (and thus a lower level of the escalation ladder). For Indian analysts, such a response
would have been a far more feasible, just and proportionate to the Mumbai attack. More
importantly, they believed it would have transferred the onus of escalation entirely on to
Pakistan.

In the most biting (and prescient) portion of his critique, Bakshi storms “The patience of our
peacemakers may be inexhaustible. Unfortunately, the patience of the long suffering Indian

4 (October 2009): 17, PDF.
146 Ibid, 20.
citizens seems to have worn very thin." The two most important outcomes of the angry post-Mumbai sentiment were a rededication to shoring up internal Indian counter-terrorism and the election of the BJP. The latter represented a significant shift in the trajectory of Indian domestic politics. The neo-liberal, hard-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won India’s 2014 Parliamentary general election in 2014 with Narendra Modi as their party leader. Modi, the controversial former Governor of Gujurat province, had hitherto been known for presiding over (and perhaps being complicit in) a series of riots in 2002 that resulted in the deaths of over 800 Muslims. This history, combined with the BJP’s hard-line stance on retaliation towards Pakistan, made him an attractive candidate for a population that was widely disappointed with the Congress Party’s handling of Mumbai. During the campaign, Modi pitched himself as a strongman who would stand up to Pakistan. The BJP went so far as to distribute leaflets saying “ten eyes for one eye, one jaw for a single tooth” to describe their promises for massive retaliation. Though economic issues mattered to Indian voters (Gujurat had been the district that rebounded most successfully from the global financial crisis of 2008-2009), his own political leanings and demand for reprisals from his core constituency made Modi the ideal hard-liner candidate to take a tougher stance on Pakistan.

Pakistan, Post-Mumbai

At the same time that India has begun to posture itself more aggressively after Mumbai, Pakistan’s own relationship with militant groups operating within its borders has become increasingly precarious. In particular, Pakistan’s relationship with the TTP rapidly deteriorated after 2008. Following the breakdown of civilian attempts at rapprochement with militants in Pakistan after Mumbai, The TTP and other Islamist groups allied to them began to extend a campaign of terrorism from the Northwest Pathan areas (their traditional stomping grounds) to the more populous Pakistani region of Punjab. The bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad on

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148 Ibid.
149 Paul Staniland, "Improving India’s Counterterrorism Policy after Mumbai," CTC Sentinel 2, no. 4 (April 2009): PDF.
150 Paul Brass, The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India (Seattle, WA: Jackson School Publications in International Studies, 2003), 34, PDF.
151 MacDonald, Defeat is an Orphan, 257.
152 Ibid, 256.
153 Anatol Lieven, Pakistan: A Hard Country (Washington, DC: PublicAffairs, 2012), 742, iBook. “In February 2009 the ANP government of the NWFP negotiated a settlement with the Taleban of Swat based on the adoption by the national government of the Nizam-e-Adl (‘System of Justice’) regulation for Swat and the adjoining districts of the Malakand administrative division. This stipulated the exclusive rule of Islamic justice in Swat District, as well as an
September 20th, 2008 foreshadowed this and rendered a shattering blow to the complacency that had hitherto reigned among many Pakistani elites. In the winter and spring of 2009, attacks began in Lahore, including most notably an attack on the visiting Sri Lankan cricket team on March 3rd that left six policemen dead as well as an attack on a police training academy on March 30th that killed 12. The combination of these attacks in the Punjab as well as the particularly upsetting 2014 TTP attack on a Peshawar primary school that killed over 120 children struck a nerve within Pakistan. The result was a dramatic shift in tolerance for the TTP amongst the Pakistani general public as well as military and political elites.

In response, the Pakistani military ramped up what it would later term Operation Zarb-e-Azab (“sharp and cutting sword.”). Part of the ongoing war on Pakistan’s Western border, upwards of 30,000 Pakistani soldiers were involved in a “comprehensive operation” to flush out all foreign and local militants hiding in the North-West province of Waziristan. The operation received widespread support from the Pakistani political, defense and civilian elites. The result, as claimed by the Pakistani army, was a 90+ percent clearing of militants in the region (with over 3,400 militants killed in combat). As a consequence of the campaign, Pakistan’s overall security situation improved and terrorist attacks in Pakistan dropped to a six-year low by the end of 2015.

amnesty for all Taleban fighters there – in effect conceding Taleban control of much of the district. In return, the Taleban were to cease attacks on the army, police and local population. On 13 April, the agreement was passed into law by the National Assembly in Islamabad, and signed by President Zardari. To judge by media reports and my own interviews, it enjoyed the support of the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis, the Mohajirs of Karachi being the only large-scale exception. As will be seen, on paper at least the Nizam-e-Adl agreement was much less unprecedented, radical and extensive than appeared at first sight. The local Taleban certainly saw it that way, pointing out that it only covered justice, whereas a true Islamic system covers all aspects of life, including government, politics and economics. Responding to the will of the electorate, all the parties in the National Assembly except for the MQM voted for the agreement. However, it elicited immense criticism in the Western media and among Pakistani liberals, who saw it as a catastrophic defeat for the Pakistani state, as the de facto surrender of control over Swat to the Taleban, and even as part of an inexorable march of the Taleban that could take them to power in Islamabad, just as the Taleban in Afghanistan had swept from province to province in the 1990s.”

154 Ibid, 750.
158 “A Less,” chart.
Pakistan’s recent shift in attitudes towards its internal militants is a complex phenomenon. On one hand, the army’s willingness to purge the TTP from its Waziristan stronghold represents a decided shift from what was hitherto a strategy of toleration. On the other hand, the military and ISI have yet to turn their focus to over groups like LeT and JuD—groups that continue to threaten the chance at improving relations with India. As Samir Puri suggests, this may be because, post-Mumbai, Pakistan may be pursuing a strategy of internal “brinksmanship.” This has included some determined operations against insurgents, as was the case in Waziristan, whenever these insurgents directly threaten the integrity of the Pakistani state. However, “by not escalating its confrontation with certain groups, such as LeT, which was culpable for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the Pakistani state has ensured that the number of internal campaigns it has waged has been controlled by its own priorities.” This means that Pakistan prioritizes above all else its own “sense of threat prioritization and its own availability of resource, rather than be dictated entirely by foreign states, or in reaction to the biting criticisms from Afghanistan and India.”\(^{159}\)

The inverse of this argument about Pakistan’s threat prioritization is equally significant for understanding the Uri incident. Namely, because Pakistan’s post-Mumbai CT/COIN campaign is almost entirely driven by its own security calculus, American and Indian attempts at compelling Pakistani behavior are very rarely the driving force behind internal change. If anything, the deterioration of US-Pakistan relations following Mumbai imply that the opposite may be true. Following the Osama Bin-Laden raid in Abbottabad in 2011, a 2011 NATO air-strike that (accidentally) killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, and the continuation of the Obama administration’s widely unpopular drone-strike campaign, the post-Mumbai period witnessed a significant decoupling between Pakistani support for counter-terrorism within Pakistan and a belief that the US could be an ally in that endeavor. As Pew research polls from the time show, Pakistani approval of US actions and support stood at 53% right after the Mumbai attack.\(^{160}\) Yet, by 2013 (following the incidents mentioned above), US favorability ratings dropped to 8%. At the same time, the


percentage of respondents who viewed the US as a potential enemy rose to 74%. As Lieven suggests, a similar dynamic is at play for other third party influencers. China, fairly relaxed about the growth of militancy in Pakistan before Mumbai, communicated this alarm to the Pakistani government. “However, this outside pressure would not in itself have brought about a change in Pakistani behavior, if the actions of the Taliban themselves had not produced a new sense of will in the political and military establishments, backed by a significant shift in public opinion.”

**Strategy/Policy Factors**

**Coercive Diplomacy: The Birth of the “Surgical Strike”**

In the immediate aftermath of the Uri attack, Indian Prime Minister Modi promised that “those behind this despicable act will not go unpunished.” Unlike 2008, Modi was in a position to respond directly to the attack—like 2008, however, he faced a number of constraints that prevented outward aggression. On one hand, a covert strike would not quench the Indian public’s thirst for revenge against the perpetrators of the attack. On the other hand the visible use of Indian artillery or special forces to attack camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir might quench such a thirst, but would do little to change Pakistan’s internal calculus and decision to support/oppose certain militant groups. In the days following the September 18th strike, the Indian government announced a series of diplomatic maneuvers aimed at isolating Pakistan. This included the decision to withdraw from SAARC—a decision that was soon followed by Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. In the same week, the line between politics and art was blurred as the Indian Motion Pictures Association also announced a wholesale ban on Pakistani actors and technicians working in Bollywood “until normalcy returns.”

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162 Andrew Small, "China’s Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly*, July 2010, 85, PDF.
164 MacDonald, *Defeat is an Orphan*, 256.
165 Ibid, 257.
India’s *coup de force*, however, came on September 29th, 2016, when the foreign ministry summoned journalists for a press conference. During the press conference, the Indian Army’s Director General of Military Operations, Lt. General Ranbir Singh, said that India had conducted “surgical strikes” against Pakistan-backed militants prepared to infiltrate into Indian Kashmir.” According to the statement, “These strikes on launch-pads across the LoC inflicted significant casualties.”167 Although such cross-border strikes undoubtedly occurred on several occasions following Mumbai, this represented the first time that the Indian government publically announced their existence. In the immediate aftermath of the press conference, Pakistan took a page out of their Mumbai playbook and denied that any such attacks occurred.168 Pakistani Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa, an army spokesman, called the reports “an illusion” and “a fabrication of the truth.”169

**Takeaways/Analysis**

As George Perkovich argues, the implementation of a new, more “proactive” Indian strategy has been a long time in the making. A combination of growing domestic rage after Mumbai, India’s strengthening prestige in the world community, and deteriorating US-Pakistan relations have provided India with a policy window to test a strategy it has long been too reluctant to execute. This reluctance is in large part due to the internalized lessons of Kargil and Twin-Peaks. In both cases, the Indian government specifically limited its counteroffensive and threats of mobilization to Indian territory in the worry that any incursion into Pakistan would invite a nuclear response. Though India did raise the level of violence through use of air power, New Delhi opted not to attack Pakistani logistics or supply lines across the LoC, nor did it seek to open a second front that would redirect the Pakistan Army. After the conflict, in January 2000, then Chief of Army Staff Gen. V.P. Malik observed: ‘We were able to keep Kargil war limited primarily due to nuclear as well as conventional deterrence.’”170

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167 MacDonald, *Defeat is an Orphan*, 259.
168 Ibid.
What Uri shows, however, is that India is beginning to put into practice the belief that they can control the “spiral” of escalation. Part of this belief may be rooted in the understanding that India has the international community ‘at its back.’ On September 28th, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval received a call from US National Security Advisor Susan Rice. As later detailed in a White House press release, the details of that call contained a strong condemnation of Pakistan’s action/complicity and a reaffirmation of the US’ dedication to helping Indian security. The press release was one of the strongest official US statements to date in favor of India over Pakistan. Notably, it made no mention of Kashmir nor encouraged any dialogue between parties, Instead, the entire onus was on Pakistan to disarm the militants operating within its borders. Knowing that the US would likely respond in a friendly or non-confrontational manner should India strike likely played a large role in encouraging India to announce its strikes publically the next day.

Additionally, the strikes likely occurred in the wake of a growing Indian confidence that it could limit their escalatory impact. During the September 29th press conference, after announcing the advent of surgical strikes, Lt. General Singh made clear that India did not intend on continuing said strikes in order to assure Pakistan that escalation would not be necessary. To this effect, India only would have struck if it believed that it could appropriately calibrate punishment in a way that would achieve the desired results.

To be sure, Calibrating the punishment of an adversary is an almost impossibly-difficult task. A tit-for-tat strategy ostensibly works in theory, but evidence from neuroscience and social psychology indicate that punitive actions imposed by one state upon another usually have greater-than-intended effects on the recipient. For example, in a crisis simulation administered by the US Naval Postgraduate School, an Indian decision to escalate a crisis with a naval blockade was seen as an inherently escalatory step by the Pakistani team, while the Indian team had seen it as a punitive but clearly limited retaliatory measure. This theoretical confusion was mirrored by the

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172 Perkovich and Dalton, Not War, ch 2.
Pakistani response to the Uri attack. Hasan Askari Rizvi, a Pakistani defense analyst, said many in Pakistan saw India’s announcement as playing to domestic sentiments. “There was pressure on the Indian government,” he noted, “Hence, they are portraying this as a surgical strike to shape public opinion.”

Despite this challenge, it is clear that the Indian Army has continued to develop (and begun to exercise a proactive strategy.) In 2015 it held two major field exercises involving its Southern and Southwestern Commands. But the strategic challenge has not gone away, nor the desire for robust military options to motivate Pakistan to prevent future major terrorist attacks in India. The Indian Army seemingly has moved on from Cold Start, but still retains a desire for punishing options. Bakshi suggests that:

“[a] mass casualty terrorist strike could be first responded to by precise and calibrated Air/Special Forces strikes on the originators, their control centres and headquarters, their leaders and critical infrastructures...Such attacks need not be confined to targets across the LoC alone, as the triggering attacks have been on the Indian mainland...Partial mobilisation could be concurrently ordered to cater for any Pakistani move to further escalate the situation.”

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Figure 4.1: Decision-tree during the Uri Incident (2016)

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173 Barry and Masood, "India Claims."
174 Ibid.
Chapter V: Analysis

An analysis of the three case studies – The 2001 Twin Peaks crisis, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2016 Uri incident – shows that coercive diplomacy, counterterrorism, and crisis negotiation interact in at least three significant ways in South Asia. Each one of these challenges the theoretical presumption that stability-instability is a useful guide to understanding the South Asian security dilemma. These are the unique relation between third-party diplomacy and coercive diplomacy, A shift in India’s deterrence strategy (the use of ‘surgical strikes,’), and the relationship between Pakistan’s precarious domestic political economy and its nuclear posturing.

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<th>Theme I: Coercive Diplomacy and Third Party Diplomacy</th>
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<td>In the cases of Kargil, Twin Peaks, and Mumbai, the United States played a major role in diffusing tensions and reducing the chance that conflict would escalate to conventional or nuclear war. This is for two reasons. First, because attempts at bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan recurrently fail, The US has been able to fill a crucial communication gap that would normally exist through reliable bilateral channels. Even when bilateral negotiations do occur, little faith has been (or should be) placed in their durability. For example, the Kargil war took place right on the heels of the 1999 Lahore declaration and the Twin Peaks crisis happened only a year after the 2000</td>
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Agra Summit between India and Pakistan. In both cases, the bonhomie and hope created by renewed negotiations were soon shattered by militants acting from within Pakistan. Second, the US played a major role in facilitating negotiations because it was considered by both India and Pakistan to be an honest, reasonable broker that would negotiate a ‘fair’ end to conflict.

At face value, this reliance on the US as a primary conflict negotiator and diffusor of conflict would seem to validate what the literature has to say about third-party influence on diplomacy. Peter Lavoy’s dependence-independence paradox was constructed out of the observation that, after the nuclearization of South Asia, two states that wanted to become more independent from outside influence actually became more dependent on third party peace-brokers. Additionally, as Jentleson and others suggest, coercive diplomacy (that is, the threatened use of force to achieve diplomatic objectives) almost always works better when it has international backing.

![Figure 5.2: The role of international diplomacy according to stability-instability](image)

Looking deeper into the case studies, however, shows that third-party crisis negotiation is not as singularly important as it first appears. Instead, in Kargil, Twin Peaks, and Mumbai, overriding concerns about conflict escalation and India’s failure to execute an effective coercive strategy have played an equal, if not larger, role than US crisis negotiation. In Kargil, a combination of Pakistani civil-military tensions, worries about horizontal escalation, and the fact that neither state had yet enunciated a nuclear doctrine quickly led Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif and Indian PM Atal Vajpayee to exercise strategic restraint. To be fair, this mutual realization benefitted from the Clinton Administration’s activist role and facilitation of negotiations in Washington. Even then,


while Kargil was a situation in which third party negotiation played the most significant role, the US’ role was little more than to serve as a negotiating platform for existing Pakistani and Indian concerns. This suggests that, although there is a relationship between national interests and third-party crisis diplomacy (as outlined by Lavoy), that the directional arrow flows opposite to what is expected. According to dependence-independence, the successful stability of a nuclear security dyad requires regular third-party intervention to maintain the status quo. Instead, it seems that the success of third-party negotiation relies more on existing conditions on the ground.

Figure 5.3: A revised look at the dependence-independence paradox

The weakness of third-party diplomacy was exposed during the Twin Peaks crisis when, despite months of shuttle-diplomacy between New Delhi and Islamabad, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage was only able to extract a half-baked promise from Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf that the latter would restrict cross-border attacks after the Kaluchak Massacre. Indeed, it seems that the real reason that the potential for conflict did not escalate in Twin Peaks had more to do with the failure of Operation Parakaram than with the critical role of third-party diplomacy. When India mobilized its military following the attack on Parliament in December, 2001, it chose to not cross the LoC or the Pakistani border because it feared that Musharraf would act on Pakistan’s nuclear first use (NFU) pledge.

Despite this unwillingness to execute, having Indian troops on high alert and postured to strike put Indian diplomats in a good position to negotiate. This advantage was lost following a slow demobilization during Armitage’s shuttle diplomacy so that, after the Kaluchak attack, India was caught on its back heel and unable to implement any immediate threats. After Twin Peaks, India introduced Cold Start foremost as a way to deter any future militant action. If that failed, the quick-trigger mobilization of troops would help prevent another unprepared response and strengthen India’s negotiating position in its efforts to compel Pakistan to stymie terrorism. As we
now know, Cold Start fell flat on its face due to a number of political and tactical considerations. The result was that India had to rely once again on the last-minute efforts of Colin Powell and the rest of the US diplomatic staff to quell tensions. Without the coercive military posturing to back it up, India was able to exact little more than a meek promise that Pakistan would be more active in quelling cross-border attacks.

In each of these cases, there is a distinct tension between India’s desire to maximize its conventional deterrence and mobilization capacity (i.e. its ability to engage in coercive diplomacy) and its willingness to accede to third party diplomacy as a quick fix. As Twin Peaks and Mumbai show, India has tended to rely foremost on its ability to deter and coerce Pakistan through its conventional superiority. This shows that it may have over-learned the lessons of Kargil—a conflict in which Indian conventional military superiority carried the day. When conventional coercion failed in 2001 and 2008, US-led diplomacy served as a short-term fix that helped to reduce immediate tensions but would lead to no long-lasting solution.

India’s increased reliance on its on ability to coerce Pakistan may also be a function of a growing perception that the US can no longer serve as an impartial negotiator between the two South Asian countries. The US’ deteriorating relationship with Pakistan following the 2008 Mumbai attack and subsequent developments in Afghanistan mean that, now more than ever, Pakistanis trust the US less to serve as an impartial negotiating partner. Although a result of domestic developments within Pakistan, this may also be a belated result of the ‘de-coupling’ of US-India and US-Pakistan relations. Although in the lead-up to Mumbai this de-coupling allowed the US to pursue a positive agenda with both countries, the emphasis after 2008 seems to have been a strengthening economic, nuclear, and security relationship between the US and India at the same time as a rapidly deteriorating security and relationship between the US and Pakistan. In this sense, while US policy may be de jure decoupled, it is de facto tilting in favor of India over Pakistan. As noted throughout each case, the perception of even slight bias can have a deleterious impact on diplomacy.

In the near future, the US does not seem poised to improve its relations with Pakistan. This is for two reasons. First, the evolution of US grand strategy – highlighted by an eventual drawdown in the US troop presence – in Afghanistan means that Pakistan may also figure to play a lesser role.
Second, where US crisis mediation has succeeded at reducing conflict escalation, it has often been because of the heady efforts of figures like Richard Armitage, Strobe Talbott, Colin Powell, and their strong supporting staff. Given the trajectory of the current Administration’s diplomatic corps and its general desire to downsize US involvement abroad, such figures may be in short supply in the advent of a future cross-border terror attack. This is particularly true in the light of growing US security concerns in other parts of the world such as Eastern Europe, the Persian Gulf, and South China Sea.

To that effect, the only major state actor poised to take the US’ place as a trusted crisis negotiator would be China. Unfortunately, the latter would fall into the same difficulty as the US of being perceived to be a biased negotiator. In this case, the worry would be that China would be biased in favor of Pakistan. China has recently invested upwards of $51 Billion in a series of massive infrastructure projects in Pakistan and has worked to develop strong security ties with its southern neighbor. At the same time, a recent border standoff between India and China over the Doklam province on India’s Northeastern Border would suggest that Sino-Indian relations, if not headed in the opposite direction, are at least becoming very complicated. Regardless of the future As the above has argued, the role that third-party crisis mediation in South Asia occupies is that of a fallback when coercive posturing fails. For that reason, it remains a secondary concern for Indian and Pakistani policy-makers. If the US (and China) can no longer credibly serve the role of impartial mediator, this fail-safe disappears and the risk for conflict escalation between India and Pakistan is poised to increase in the future.

179 Simon Denyer and Annie Gowen, "Who blinked in the China-India military standoff?," The Washington Post (Washington, DC), August 30, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/08/30/who-blinked-in-china-india-military-standoff/?utm_term=.910945b0c198. To be sure, even this divergent trend between Sino-Pakistani relations and Sino-Indian relations isn’t as clean-cut as first appears. As Michael Beckley of the Belfer Center suggests, Sino-Pakistani relations may be treading on thin ice—this is for two reasons. “First, China and Pakistan do not share a robust partnership; they engage in limited cooperation on a narrow set of interests, and these interests have been diminishing over time. Second, China will not take active measures to protect Pakistan from US pressure. As a result, the United States can impose punitive measures on Pakistan without fear of catalyzing an anti-American Sino-Pakistani alliance.” Beckley, 9.
Theme II: Deterrence by Denial and Deterrence by Punishment? A New Indian Strategy

In the absence of either formal negotiations or a third-party crisis negotiator, India has shown a willingness to move away from a model of coercive diplomacy backed up by the threat of conventional force. Instead, as the events of Uri show, India is increasingly moving towards a strategy oriented at compelling a change in Pakistan’s calculus with positive actions such as surgical air and ground strikes. If the Uri strike and subsequent public announcement are any indication, India is becoming increasingly confident in its ability to strike across the LoC without Pakistani reprisal. In some ways, this transformation is the logical conclusion of Jentleson’s assertion that a coercive action succeeds more often when the response is proportional to the provocation. Before Uri, India’s strategy of relying on mass mobilization in order to compel the Pakistani state to curb cross-border terrorism meant that its threat was necessarily disproportionate to the terror attack (no matter how gruesome or indiscriminate). Moreover, it relied on the tenuous assumption that this mobilization would directly lead to a change in militant behavior. If India continues to pursue a strategy of surgical strikes against militant targets within Pakistan, the signaling would be at the mercy of Pakistani interpretation/response.

The fundamental assumption that has encouraged India to act in such a blatantly assertive manner is the belief that it can control the spiral of escalation following a strike. This newfound confidence represents a marked shift from Indian behavior after Kargil, Twin Peaks, and Mumbai. In each of those cases, despite verbal bluster, harsh language, mobilization of large portions of the Indian military, India remained too worried that an armed incursion into either Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir or Pakistan proper would invite a nuclear response. With the election of PM Narendra Modi and growing domestic pressure within India to act in a positive manner to reduce terrorism, the Indian defense apparatus would still only have acquiesced to pressure if it believed that a strike wouldn’t cause an escalatory spiral. In this regard, Pakistan’s response to Uri was encouraging. Between 2008 and 2016, such strikes did occur from time to time—India’s decision to announce them during the Uri incident put the Pakistani military in an awkward position. To both Indian security analysts and the Indian press, the fact that the Pakistani military spent so much effort

denying the existence of surgical strikes suggested that it was ill prepared to deal with the consequences if such strikes were actually occurring.\(^1\) This is fundamentally a question about signaling. From Islamabad/Rawalpindi, the decision to deny the existence of strikes/incursions made sense because it absolved the military of any responsibility to respond. From New Delhi, denying that any strikes took place looked distinctly like a ‘blink’ on Pakistan’s behalf.

As the Council on Foreign Relations’ Alyssa Ayers argues, this ‘blink’ has opened the door for India to formulate a whole strategy based around the idea of targeted, coercive, public strikes and undergirded by the assumption that, so long as India conducts the strikes wisely, it can control the possibility of escalation.\(^2\) This strategy has three benefits for India. First, it allows India to solve its terror problem by punishing terror groups and eliminating the threat ‘in the bud.’ Second, by humiliating Pakistan (and particularly its military) through public announcement, they signal India’s conventional/surgical superiority. Finally, the publication of these strikes serves to appease a domestic audience hungry for action and increases the potential credibility of a direct Indian response in the event of another major cross-border attack. If executed properly, then, the result would be a scenario in which India has ‘won’ Montgomery and Edelman’s ‘escalation dominance’ game.

India’s growing belief in its ability to control the spiral of potential escalation and maintain escalation dominance suggests that it believes that there continues to be a strong divide between low levels of conflict and high levels of conflict (i.e. the conclusion of the stability-instability


\(^2\) Alyssa Ayres, "This is the New India," *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), entry posted September 29, 2016, https://www.cfr.org/blog/new-india. “This week we have seen India unfurl a new, more coercive diplomatic strategy. The Indian government has coordinated with neighboring countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan to jointly boycott the upcoming South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit planned for Islamabad. Modi has convened meetings with his ministers and senior advisors to examine India’s use of water resources under the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan. Modi has also scheduled an internal meeting to review the possibility of withdrawing the “most favored nation” designation granted to Pakistan in 1996 under the World Trade Organization, which Pakistan has never reciprocated. Each of these steps marked new arenas where the Indian government signaled a willingness to look for new diplomatic sticks, since the carrots haven’t worked.”
paradox). This adherence to the conclusions of stability-instability is troublesome for three reasons. First—and perhaps most importantly—is the attribution problem that a cross-border strike creates. As shown in the aftermath of Kargil, much of the initial confusion associated with India’s response was due to poor intelligence and the inability to distinguish between Pakistani military (NLI) and Kashmir-based militants. In both Twin Peaks and Mumbai, this problem was replicated to a lesser degree by the fact that it was often unclear whether the militants were acting against, with the permission of, or with the express support of the Pakistani government.

This problem manifests in a second difficulty for future Indian strikes, the difficulty of determining who, what, and when to strike. As George Perkovich has discussed, the decision to strike a militant base in Pakistani Kashmir may have dramatically different implications for a Pakistani response than a strike within the Pakistani heartland. Here, it is interesting that both Indian and Pakistani defense officials consider attacks on non-state targets in Kashmir as inherently less provocative. As a foreign policy advisor to the BJP put it in an April 2014 interview, “India must react if there is another Mumbai-like attack. The only option is to do some sort of surgical strike in Pakistani Kashmir. This is territory that is legally disputed, that both sides acknowledge is disputed.”\(^{183}\) If Pakistan then retaliated by expanding the conflict beyond Kashmir, India would then be seen as justified in mounting wider operations in Pakistan.\(^{184}\)

At the same time, there exist an equal-and-opposite implication for whether such a strike would have the deterrent/compelling impact that India intends. Many of the more threatening Pakistan-based terror organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) have headquarters within Punjab. LeT, for example, is informally based in Muridke, a small town only 35 km from Lahore, Pakistan’s second largest city.\(^{185}\) “The LeT campus at Muridke also reportedly contains a madrassa, hospital, market, residences, and farms, making it very likely that a strike would also kill non-combatants.”\(^{186}\) Seeing as Pakistan only began to truly address its internal security concerns once they spread to population centers in the Punjab, an Indian strike in


\(^{184}\) Ibid, ch 3


\(^{186}\) Perkovich and Dalton, *Not War*, ch 3.
Punjab would likely yield a harsh response, to say the least. In addition to the uncertainty caused by the attribution problem, a future Indian strike faces a tradeoff between the potential to actually impact change (which is the whole point of such a strategy) and the potential to upset Pakistan enough that it may actually respond in a tit-for-tat manner – which inherently introduces more instability. Such a tit-for-tat exchange would directly contradict India’s assumption that it could control the escalatory spiral.

The third problem with India’s strategy, then, is that this assumption is inherently problematic. Beyond the reasons outlined above, the problem is that, no matter how precise India tries to be with its signaling and limited intentions, cross-border strikes will almost always be viewed at as escalatory. What to Indian decision-makers may be viewed at as a justified punitive measure may very likely be viewed within Pakistan as a bellicose act of war. For example, in a crisis simulation administered by the US Naval Postgraduate School, an Indian decision to escalate a crisis with a naval blockade was seen as an inherently escalatory step by the Pakistani team, while the Indian team had seen it as a punitive but clearly limited retaliatory measure. As Perkovic notes, “Part of the analytic challenge here is the inherent difficulty of predicting how an adversary will interpret one’s military action. Indian decision makers may believe certain reprisals are restrained, but Pakistani leaders could actually perceive them very differently, as acts of war.” The differences in perception reflect what experimental psychologists and neuro-scientists call ‘prediction errors’. Nicholas Wright summarizes the problematic dynamic that ensues:

“When we make an action, we largely know when, where and how we will make the action. But the adversary does not have such insider knowledge. So, to the adversary the action is more unexpected, has a larger associated prediction error and so has a stronger psychological impact than we understand ourselves. As this occurs with the actions of both sides, it can lead to a spiral of inadvertent escalation.”

In order to understand how these three problems can combine and manifest in some form of conflict escalation, posit the following scenario: Should India respond to another cross-border

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187 Perkovich and Dalton, Not War, ch 3.
188 Nicholas Wright, "Neural Prediction Error is Central to Diplomatic and Military Signaling" [White Paper on Leveraging Neuroscientific and Nerotechnological (NeuroS&T) Developments with Focus on Influence and Deterrence in a Networked World], Department of Defense Joint Staff, 2014, 17, PDF.
terror attack with a surgical strike. The following factors would impact the chance of escalation. First, if attribution is clear, that gives India the legitimacy to respond in a proportional manner without too much worry of an international reprisal. At the same time, clear attribution doesn’t necessarily reduce the risk of escalation with Pakistan. If attribution is unclear, however, this raises the chance both that Pakistan responds or that the international community cannot serve as a guarantor for India. While on one hand this will likely make Pakistan more willing to escalate, it may also have the paradoxical effect of making international actors more willing to intervene as conflict negotiators. The extent to which attribution will play a role in either contributing to/taking away from the risk of conflict escalation depends then on where and in what manner India decides to strike.

None of this scenario even takes into consideration the concern that Pakistan will likely evolve its own strategy in the near future. India cannot rely indefinitely on the Pakistani military’s decision to deny that the Uri strike (and strikes like it) occurred. If the military were to decide that it wanted to respond with conventional strikes or surgical operations of its own, the tit-for-tat game would have little to prevent overt escalation. There are also other concerns borne out of the uncertainty associated with Indian strikes. What if Pakistan were to invest in an anti-missile system designed to intercept Indian rockets before they land? What if an Indian strike were to incidentally hit a Pakistani military base and kill army troops? All of these caveats and considerations suggest that India is treading on remarkably thin ice and that its decision to move to a more proactive strategy carries with it serious risk.

Theme III: Nuclear Posturing and Enabling Terrorism Under the Nuclear Umbrella

The three case studies show that there is a direct link between cross-border terror attacks and the risk that conflict between India and Pakistan could escalate to nuclear proportions. To that effect, they thoroughly explore how a militant attack, subsequent troop mobilization, or surgical counterstrike can all contribute to an escalatory spiral that would result in nuclear conflict. Another place that the relationship between nuclear conflict and cross-border attacks becomes manifest is the relationship between Pakistan’s nuclear posturing and the willingness of militant groups within Pakistan to strike targets within India. As discussed in the Twin Peaks and Mumbai case studies,

\[189\] A similar NATO incident occurred in 2014, who’s to say that India wouldn’t make the same intelligence error?
Indian mobilization ultimately served of little benefit to India both in deterring militant action or in compelling Pakistan to change its internal calculus towards terrorists. This was due in large part to the fact that Indian security analysts viewed Pakistan’s nuclear first use doctrine as a credible threat (at the very least, they didn’t want to test to see if it was credible because the consequences would be immense). As Vipin Narang suggests, this promoted a curious dynamic between the Pakistani military establishment and the militants it putatively supported. On one hand, pledged first use has been a remarkably successful strategy for Pakistan in that it has (until Uri) prevented any border incursions by Indian troops. Because militants working with LeT and JeM recognized this dynamic, however, first use inadvertently provides an ‘umbrella’ whereby they don’t have to worry about Indian reprisal because their Pakistani ‘guardians’ prevent it. Once again echoing the stability-instability paradox, Pakistan’s first use doctrine would seem to promote instability at low levels of conflict while maintaining stability at high levels of conflict.

Until 2016, this is a dynamic that the Pakistani military appears comfortable with. Although pledged nuclear first use may have contributed to the events of 2001 and 2008—events that the subcontinent to the brink of nuclear war—so long as Pakistan proper was protected from Indian intervention the goal of Pakistani strategy is achieved. Two trends may soon conspire to change this calculus for Pakistan, however. First, as mentioned above, now that India has begun to take a more proactive position on curbing terrorism within Pakistan, it has begun to pose a direct challenge to the pledged first use doctrine. In the immediate aftermath of Uri, Pakistan responded to this by simply denying the existence of the strikes—thereby ignoring their implication on Pakistan’s first use doctrine. This has the effect of undermining the credibility—if not the outright resolve—of the first use doctrine. It is important to note that Pakistan’s first-use doctrine works in part because it maps very well onto India’s own pledged no-first-use (NFU) doctrine. Some evidence suggests that this dynamic may be shifting as well. In particular, some analysts have pointed to the 2014 memoirs of former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon as evidence that India is reconsidering NFU. Menon’s book suggests that:

“If Pakistan were to use tactical nuclear weapons against India, even against Indian forces in Pakistan, it would effectively be opening the door to a massive Indian first strike, having crossed
India’s declared red lines. There would be little incentive, once Pakistan had taken hostilities to the nuclear level, for India to limit its response.”  

Some, like Narang, have suggested that this is evidence of a seismic shift for Indian nuclear use doctrine. Others, like Abhijnan Rej, counter this claim by noting “Despite Narang’s claims, we still do not have sufficient evidence that India has reversed its no first-use policy or — for that matter — any other major tenets in its public nuclear doctrine. Indeed, at a time when there are growing calls inside India to revisit its nuclear doctrine, it is worth keeping in mind that India’s doctrine already allows considerable space for innovation.” As though to cast further doubt on the exact nature of Indian nuclear posturing, Menon later noted “India’s nuclear doctrine has far greater flexibility than it gets credit for.” In other words, India’s extant doctrine can absorb the consequences of future Pakistan-related contingencies without any major changes.”

Regardless of whether or not India is truly changing its doctrine, Menon’s recent claim introduces ambiguity into what India’s doctrine will be from here on out. This returns back to the role of ambiguity and uncertainty in signaling Indian retaliatory resolve. If India was to signal that it is no longer tied to a strictly counter-value retaliatory posture (the one that it has held thusfar) and that Islamabad would not know of the exact nature of India’s “massive” retaliation, it would enhance, not diminish, deterrence. To publicly signal that India’s retaliatory posture is not tied down to a single option would create further uncertainty in Pakistan’s calculations, all the while staying faithful to the public doctrine. Menon’s book, by accident or design, and Narang’s analysis—ironically enough—have accentuated this uncertainty.

This ambiguity is further accentuated by the fact that India is posturing to take a more proactive stance against militants within Pakistan. To Thomas Schelling the value of nuclear weapons lay in the persuasive threat they posed to an adversary, even if little of value could accrue to oneself by implementing this threat. What matters now is that Pakistan now has to consider a range of retaliatory responses from India. On the other hand, if India was to promise Pakistan a fixed

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191 Ibid.  
192 Ibid.
response, but Pakistani leaders did not believe it, Islamabad may be tempted to ignore India’s threats of what follows should deterrence break down. With a wider variety of options to deal with, Pakistan may soon be forced to revisit its first-use doctrine. If such a revision occurs, it would be proof that Pakistan realizes that there is a stronger link between militant activity, low-level conflict (in the form of surgical strikes), and nuclear posturing (i.e. threat of high-level nuclear conflict) than would be explained by stability-instability.
Chapter VI: Conclusion

As the above analysis suggests, a confluence of forces threaten to further destabilize the already precarious security balance in South Asia. Because India appears to be adopting a strategy of coercive diplomacy through compellance while Pakistan continues to struggle with its domestic and cross-border terror problems, the potential for conflict escalation will likely increase in the coming years.

To make matters worse, the United States, a traditional guarantor of conflict mitigation and channel for 3rd party diplomacy, is on a trajectory of retrenchment in international affairs. As of the writing of this thesis, the Trump Administration is engaged in an active effort to reduce the size and capacity of the State Department. As the cases of Kargil, Twin Peaks, and Mumbai show, third party diplomacy works best to reduce bilateral tensions both when the third party actor is viewed as impartial, when their efforts match the interests of the parties in crisis, and when said actor makes a concerted effort to engage in personalized, intensive diplomacy. The current capacity of the State Department makes it unlikely that a current diplomatic mission could engage in Powell and Armitage’s hallmark shuttle diplomacy. Additionally, as US-Pakistani relations show no indication of improving significantly in the near future, the chance that the US can return to its former status as a trusted, impartial negotiating partner is slim.

Although the overall trajectory of risk cannot change unless both India and Pakistan adopt different conventional, nuclear, and counterterrorism strategies, there are a few potential ways to reduce the overall risk of conflict escalation. In the short term, both Pakistan and India should make a concerted effort to reintroduce effective Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and de-confliction channels in order to provide maximum information in the advent of another “surgical strike.” CBMs allow high level actors on both sides to communicate directly on short notice should another attack occur. As part of the Lahore and Agra peace processes after the Kargil War, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and New Delhi established CBMs in order to foster open communication in the advent of another crisis. These CBMs evaporated following Twin Peaks and their absence played a major role in poor cross-border signaling between the Parliament and Kaluchak peaks. Reintroducing these CBMs, although not a cure-all, would allow New Delhi to directly inform
Rawalpindi about pending strikes into Pakistani territory. While tipping off the Pakistani military may seem counterintuitive, ensuring that civilians and military personnel are evacuated before a strike can serve to significantly reduce the risk that said strike leads to major conflict escalation.

In the short term, India can and should redouble its efforts to improve its domestic counterterrorism apparatus. The Mumbai crisis showed that, despite concerted efforts to develop Indian conventional deterrence (through Cold Start), the inability of Indian police and intelligence to prevent an attack obviated any deterrent preparation. In this sense, if the Indian government can prevent the ‘spark’ to a conflict with India, it can avoid the calculation and strategic game-making that comes with an escalatory spiral with Pakistan. As the K. Subrahmanayam report showed, improved integration and communication between local law enforcement, intelligence gathering, and the military is a necessary first step to improving CT in India.

Pakistan can and must do its part to prevent cross-border proliferation as well. Such an outcome will not be possible, however, until the Pakistani military resolves its relationship with and tacit support of militant organizations like LeT and JuD. This resolution will not occur until Pakistan can resolve the long-term civil-military dispute. In turn, this civil-military dispute cannot be resolved until a serious, society-wide re-evaluation of the anti-India pathology occurs. A large portion of the Pakistani population continues to believe (maybe to some degree correctly) that India poses a constantly menacing, religiously eschatological, and territorially existential threat to the Pakistani state. In turn, this pathology empowers the Pakistani military to occupy a garrison-state role and excuses any military behavior that is viewed to be in the best interest of Pakistan vis-à-vis India. So long as this continues to be the case, no meaningful public policy change will occur in either Islamabad or Rawalpindi. In the long term, some of this rapprochement can occur through improved economic ties between India and Pakistan. Although India granted Pakistan Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status in 1996, Pakistan has yet to reciprocate. Such issues are outside the immediate scope of this paper, but need to be addressed and should form the basis for future research on the topic.
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