

IMPLICATIONS

Regional Security and Stability

Deployment of a nuclear force would doubtless have a range of implications for political and military relationships in and around the region.

Yet some argue that the creation of further instability is not self-evident. Subrahmanyam contends that properly structured, MND offers the safest and most stable nuclear doctrine possible. Given secure, survivable second-strike forces and a NFU doctrine, force size can be relatively finite, the need for forward deployments, tactical nuclear systems and war-fighting doctrines would be eliminated, and incentives to adopt "hair-trigger" alert postures would be reduced.²⁵

Furthermore, little evidence suggests that the introduction of such a deterrent would lead regional actors to behave irresponsibly. Past Indo-Pakistan conflict in fact indicates an emerging pattern of restraint between the contestants – with each exhibiting a progressive unwillingness to breach thresholds and risk escalation for the stakes at issue. Objectives on both sides have been strictly limited and non-ideological in character. And even in the case of Kashmir, escalatory pressures are mitigated by the fact that Kashmiris are ultimately a distinct people with a separate ethnic identity.²⁶

Most reassuring is the fact that regional actors would be keenly aware of the dangers which the introduction of nuclear weapons would impose. In fact, the close proximity of potential adversaries would underline the fact that any nuclear exchange could not only occur with the utmost speed but would take place on home soil – a prospect which would reinforce incentives to exercise caution and restraint.²⁷

Yet while such observations may remove grounds for excessive pessimism, they fall short of providing comfortable reassurance. True, past crises reveal some tendencies toward growing restraint, yet they have also featured intelligence failures and tendencies toward misperception on both sides which dangerously increased the chances for escalation. While the intrinsic value of Kashmir may well be limited, a future crisis could work to generate reputational stakes which could be harder to concede. And if such a crisis were to involve armed conflict and significant losses – concern over "sunk costs" could work to harden the positions of the disputants even more. Indeed, under such circumstances worries over escalation would hardly be far-fetched.

²⁵ P.K. Subrahmanyam, "A Reasoned Policy in South Asia".

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*