

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent proposal by India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) calling for adoption of a policy of minimum nuclear deterrence has generated considerable concern and controversy. This report critically assesses 1) the doctrine's justification, 2) the economic and technical feasibility of attaining it, and 3) its potential impacts on both regional security and ongoing international disarmament initiatives.

While the draft report offers a relatively clear blueprint of the basic prerequisites essential to the creation of a secure and effective minimum nuclear deterrent, the rationale underlying the development of such a force, along with the capacity to build and maintain it are questionable. While some observers have noted that there is an emerging pattern of restraint between India and Pakistan (with each exhibiting a progressive unwillingness to breach thresholds and risk escalation), past crises have also featured intelligence failures and tendencies toward misperception on both sides which dangerously increase the chances for escalation. A future crisis could generate reputational stakes and concerns regarding the "sunk costs" of conflict, which could make concessions harder to achieve. The proposed doctrine could also invite a Pakistani response which could, for reasons of a lack of strategic depth, be inherently destabilizing. Beyond this, Indian reassurances concerning likely reactions to an "ideal" minimum deterrent tend to ignore the fact that at present, such a force is nowhere near implementation and would take years to develop. They avoid any discussion of the likelihood that such an ideal could ever be achieved, and ignore the manner in which other states could react during the period under which such a force is being constructed. Continued movement toward a weaponized deterrent also complicates the viability of arms control, disarmament and confidence-building both within the region and beyond it.