

## **Off Ramps from Confrontation in Southern Asia**

*Reviewed by Sonia Naz\**

Editors: Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler and Liv Dowling

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‘Off Ramps from Confrontation in Southern Asia’ discusses the nuclear competition between India, Pakistan and China, which is fast accelerating post the induction of the latest ballistic and cruise missiles. The strategic environment of South Asia has become alarmingly hostile, particularly after the Pulwama incident. Hence, this work is not just contextually relevant but also offers ideas that can help decelerate the increasingly dangerous nuclear competition between Pakistan-India and between India-China.

The book consists of 18 chapters, penned down by different authors. The chapters cover broad thematic underpinnings; discussing issues between Pakistan, India and China. The authors, through their respective chapters, attempt to offer ideas for confidence-building mechanisms to facilitate reduction in the risk of conflict, essentially by emphasizing on active role that can be played by regional stakeholders. Each chapter includes creative problem-solving techniques of great help to policymakers, analysts and students engaged in discourse pertinent to the region’s nuclear politics. The book also recommends that governments ought to adopt useful diplomatic initiatives; in case such initiatives are eschewed, it becomes the responsibility of analysts to meticulously construct rapprochement initiatives as merited by the prevalent political conditions.

The development of ballistic and cruise missiles in Pakistan, India, and China has paced up with multiple tests carried out since 2016. This has not just heightened arms race, but has also added to the security dilemma in the region. All three countries are actively engaged in nuclear competition, growing in intensity ever so alarmingly. The induction of nuclear-capable or nuclear armed cruise missiles into

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\* Sonia Naz is a visiting lecturer at Quaid-i-Azam University and International Islamic University Islamabad.

the nuclear arsenal is on the cards, in the context of growing importance of cruise missiles in conventional force postures and war plans.

The authors propose innovative confidence-building and risk reduction measures to mitigate the risks of intensified missile competition. Pakistan and India are parties to a bilateral agreement to inform each other about ballistic missile tests. Similarly, the United States (US) and Russia, Russia and China also have a framework in place to inform each other of ballistic missile tests. In various chapters of the book, the authors suggested that the aforesaid India-Pakistan, US-Russia and Russia-China agreement should be combined and expanded. This combined agreement shall have multiple positive impacts on new confidence-building and risk reduction efforts in South Asia and between major powers.

Official lists of nuclear facilities in Pakistan and India were shared with the respective government of each country in 2017. This was done to ensure that nuclear installations in either country are never attacked, per the bilateral agreement between Pakistan and India. The authors propose that it should be expanded to include critical infrastructure too, including dams and nuclear weapons related facilities in the region, the destruction of which could result in severe environmental and humanitarian catastrophes. In addition, they recommend the establishment of a viable mechanism to share information about terrorist threats, aimed at the destruction of non-state actors' networks.

The South Asian region is entering a new stage of ballistic missile competition, characterized by a constant search for countermeasures to defend against missiles through means of the ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability. China's ballistic missiles can reach any target in India whereas India's 5,500 km-range *Agni-V* ballistic missile, once included in its arsenal, can potentially threaten key Chinese targets. In addition, Pakistan's 2,750 km-range *Shaheen-III* missile can reach India's southern territories. In order to deter these ballistic missile threats, all three states are currently engaged in implementing BMD systems and increasing missile inventories among other countermeasures. Such competition could

have serious implications for strategic stability. In order to decelerate the competition and deter conflict among China, India and Pakistan, a trilateral anti-ballistic missile (ABM) treaty between regional powers, specifying constraints and limits on the development of ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems, would certainly be advantageous.

The induction of Multiple Independently Targetable Re-Entry Vehicles (MIRV's) in South Asia can be consequential in terms of the unfolding triangular nuclear competition involving China, India, and Pakistan. The bilateral and trilateral political agreements between China, India and Pakistan backed up by willingness to conform to the agreed upon limitations on the MIRVs are necessary.

The book also highlights India's BMD as one of the key drivers behind Pakistan's MIRV program. Sadia Tasleem suggests that India should stop the testing of interceptor missiles in an anti-ballistic missile mode, including the *Ashwin* Advanced Defence interceptor missiles and the *Prithvi* Defence Vehicle. In addition, it ought not to deploy BMD launchers as well as interceptor missiles at sea, on land, in the atmosphere and in space. In return, it is suggested that Pakistan should not test and deploy multiple warheads atop a single missile (i.e. both MIRVs and manoeuvrable but not independently targetable re-entry vehicles).

The contributors further propose a joint India-Pakistan Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons alongside a joint commission on the consequences of nuclear war in South Asia, to increase public understanding of the outcomes of any nuclear conflagration. There should be a joint forum of the US and China on South Asia, which could work to lessen the tensions between India and Pakistan and to prevent a nuclear disaster in South Asia, as these two powers can play a significant role in mitigating tensions between the neighbouring countries.

Besides, India and China should also negotiate an 'Incidents at Sea Agreement' with similar objectives and scope as the US-Soviet Union Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) agreement. China and

India, as nuclear armed states should respect the Line of Actual Control (LAC) because it is in the economic, political, and strategic interests of both the countries.

In addition to the aforementioned, the authors also put forward a rather excellent solution to lessen the growing competition between India and Pakistan in both, conventional and nuclear fields. All unsafeguarded civil nuclear fissile material stockpiles and production facilities, designated as part of the civilian nuclear energy programs in the region, should be covered under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Additionally, a framework for clear and verifiable separation between the civil nuclear powered reactor, associated fuel-cycle facilities and military activities through the IAEA should be enforced. There should also be voluntary information sharing declarations negotiated on nuclear material as a communication tool between nuclear armed states with the potential to strengthen global security and stability.

The authors propose that Indian and Pakistani army chiefs as well as the respective National Security Advisors (NSAs) should meet periodically at a mutually agreeable and neutral location to discuss professional matters and security issues that affect the militaries of both the countries. In addition, they should launch a hotline between National Command Authorities to manage tensions on nuclear issues.

In a nutshell, this book suggests that Pakistan, India and China should expand existing confidence-building Measures (CBMs). They should follow the path of nuclear restraint, settle their border disputes, increase transparency on nuclear materials and improve communication.

This book is a well-orchestrated academic work which not only provides an insight into nuclear competition between Pakistan, India and China, but also proposes new and sound pragmatic approaches for conflict management and risk mitigation. Moreover, the authors are clear-eyed and candid about the challenges that such proposals shall face. Nonetheless, though not easy, if China,

Pakistan, and India pursue the policies suggested in the book, they can improve their relations and make South Asia peaceful.