**[Toying with nuclear stability](https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2020/toying-with-nuclear-stability" \t "_new)**

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“We beheld in the sky what appeared to us to be a mass of scarlet cloud resembling the fierce flames of a blazing fire. From that mass many blazing missiles flashed, and tremendous roars, like the noise of a thousand drums beaten at once. And from it fell many weapons winged with gold and thousands of thunderbolts, with loud explosions, and many hundreds of fiery wheel.”

Vaimānika Śāstra

Challenges to Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia are far more real and imminent than the theoretical Cold War. There is no standoff, no early warning, no détente and plenty of Vedic Ritualism. The hostilities are real, eyeball to eyeball and along a live line of control. Religious nationalism provides cause for toying with nuclear weapons as a claim to ‘Paradise Lost’.

Indian military and nuclear strategy perceives a two front war much like Erich Friedrich Wilhelm Ludendorff executed in Germany or Israel in 1973 against Egypt and Syria. In essence, Ludendorff’s concept of a ‘total war of annihilation’ impacted Nazi military thinking hence the wars against Poland, neutral Belgium, Russia and the Allies. This streak is also visible in the Israeli mind-set of expansionism. To understand, compare the boundaries of Israel after the resettlement and what they are today. India is not far behind. Compare the boundaries of India in August 1947 to what they are today. Complicating still, Saffron Wave is a reincarnation of Nazi Germany and nukes a tool for greatness.

Indian military thinkers have read too much German and Israeli war history. India is hegemonic, expansionist and now racist and fascist. In quest for reclaiming the Vedic glory, Indian military rhetoric ignores the dangers it poses to nuclear stability. India demonstrated this steak in 2019.

The Army Chiefs consistently maintain that an outbreak of war could occur in case ‘salami slicing of India continues by China’ and proxy wars of Pakistan. This is where the glaring disconnects about Indian military and nuclear thought begins to take shape. According to Indian critics, “Indian operational doctrines are not nested in a realistic political context.” Each service is at its own while civilian control nukes.

Though India’s ad hoc force structure argues in favour of oversized armed forces (sustenance rationale), Pakistan and not China is where they can be deployed. India does not have the capacity and freedom to push these forces en masse into Pakistan. Hence an incremental push into Pakistan with terms such as ‘surgical strikes’ and ‘cold start’ etc. Consequently, India not only becomes vulnerable to tactical strikes by Pakistan but also exposes its concentrated strategic forces in depth to Pakistan. The rational of logic is missed out.

To overcome this dilemma, India is investing heavily in its electronic capability, air force, navy and missile defence. The strategic logic is that air and naval preponderance will prevent a stalemate on ground by crippling and quarantining Pakistan. Theoretically, a limited conventional conflict would result in defeat under a massive Indian nuclear shadow and favourable international environment. This is a lopsided concept as triggers are in two hands and not one. The term General Jehanghir Karamat used for this myopism is, ‘Alice in Wonderland’.

Strategic and military planners must understand that the biggest obstacles to stability of nuclear deterrence in the Cold War were tactical missiles and missile defence. Eyeball to eyeball situation and asymmetry makes nuclear calculus complicated. How India manages to factorise both in war making capability is an impossibility, whose only logical outcome remains the cost of punishment Pakistan could incur. So what happens to the Indian dissuasive logic of the ‘cost of punishment’ to Pakistan?

Military and nuclear planning must have points of convergence and complementary overlap. This is absolutely necessary for graduated escalation control. In Indian strategic thinking, there is an obvious disconnect. Is nuclear preponderance the only option left for war avoidance? This puts the Indian armed forces in an impractical war fighting mode. Yet Indian deployments, training and war games indicate a shift from a space-oriented to a destruction-oriented strategy under a nuclear shadow

It would be more logical to settle the Kashmir issue and make peace with Pakistan. Force reductions, arms limitations and nuclear détente would follow. The people of Great South Asia would benefit. But Indians think otherwise. As long as there is Pakistan, there is no Akhand Bharat or Bharat Versha. This is how the Saffron Wave views the hostilities and hence a two front conflict under a superior nuclear shadow. Is this nuclear sabre rattling or something much beyond and catastrophic?

Planners in India are in a jigsaw. This doctrinal disconnect was highlighted by India’s National Security Secretariat that stated, “If the nuclear shadow demanded war avoidance as a political outcome, the operational sphere attempted to keep alive the notion of victory despite the risk of mutual annihilation”. Indian Ludendorff like Modi fantasise to subdue Pakistan below a nuclear threshold. To sell the idea, they romanticise with the Vedic idea of a nuclear India spewing fire from skies. Modi the Indian Prime Minster flying a massive Vimana with thousands of airborne chariots makes believe that he is the reincarnation of Arjuna in Baghavad Gita. In essence this means massive pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Pakistan?

This is exactly what the world witnessed in February 2019. Is this a realistic political context and does Pakistan’s defensive nuclear capability deter limited Indian offensives? As evident, Pakistan exercised far more professionalism and restraint in the sequence of events.

In February 2019, when India launched its ill-fated Balakot strikes, it was already in a very high a state of nuclear deployment. The triad of Indian nuclear systems was is a high state of readiness. Launch pads already had Pakistan’s vulnerable points in crosshairs.

A flight of Mirage 2000 supported by Israeli AWACS, jammers, drones and interceptors were challenged by Pakistan Air Force. The incursion was supported by diversions in Punjab and Sindh. The armada of RUKMA VIMANA then conducted an exit loop violating Pakistan’s airspace and hastily dropping their payload in a forest. Pakistan retaliated shattering the myth of Indian surveillance and electronic warfare. The Indian military chief was deliberately spared his life. Two Indian aircrafts were shot while in a state of confusion, Indian missile defence shot down its own chopper.

But the pursuit for Vedic glory continued. On 27/28 February, India locked six sites in Pakistan with surface to surface missiles while its nuclear powered Arihant-class submarine stealthily crept into Pakistan’s Exclusive Economic Zone. UN Security Council members were engaged and told that Pakistan would respond the moment Indian missiles are fired. Pakistan’s would hit Indian targets before Indian missiles hit Pakistan. Modi, the self- incarnated Arjuna of Baghavad Gita blinked or did he?

By 4 March 2019, Pakistan Navy detected and localised the Indian nuclear powered Arihant-class submarine. Had Pakistan wanted, the submarine was a sitting duck for engagement. But Pakistan exercised restraint to give peace a chance.

Just imagine the nuclear contamination in the Arabian Sea had Pakistan destroyed this submarine. Was it carrying nuclear weapons is a blunder India must investigate. The incident marked a low point in Indian ability at nuclear management and over exposed its nuclear ambivalence.

Henceforth, nuclear stability in South Asia is degraded by many disconnects within India, toying and resorting to the ultimate nuclear options and Rukhma Vimana. As USA, France and Israel move to augment Indian survivability through preponderance, they must realise that they are endangering the future of mankind.

As for Pakistan, the only option left to maintain balance of terror is to increase the cost of punishment manifold. This means developing multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles, hypersonic cruise missiles and much more. The nuclear arms race is on.