



**The Long Shadow:
Nuclear Weapons
and Security in 21st
Century Asia**
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Nuclear Weapons Reinforce Security and Stability in 21st Century Asia

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from *The Long Shadow: Nuclear
Weapons and Security in 21st
Century Asia*. A longer excerpt of
this section of the book can be
found on the Global Asia website
at www.globalasia.org.**

1 This article draws on my chapters in *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia*, Muthiah Alagappa, editor, Stanford University Press 2008. The focus on this article is on nuclear weapons in inter-state relations which has received considerably less attention than the concern with nuclear terrorism. For those interested on the prospect of nuclear terrorism in Asia, a chapter has been devoted to this topic in *The Long Shadow*.

CONTINUING EMPHASIS ON non-proliferation and calls for elimination of nuclear weapons notwithstanding, it appears likely that nuclear weapons will persist and influence national security policies and strategies of major powers, as well as certain second-tier powers and isolated states in the foreseeable future.¹ Initial anticipation in the West especially in the arms control and nonproliferation community of the decreasing security relevance of nuclear weapons was ill-founded. The effort in the last decade and a half to arrest and reverse the spread of nuclear weapons has not been any more successful than earlier ones. Leaders and governments in nuclear

weapon states, their allies, and aspirants to the nuclear club believe that their nuclear forces or those of their allies can advance national security. Nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and strategic defense have entered or reentered the security thinking of the old, new, and prospective nuclear weapon states and their allies in a fundamentally different strategic environment and in a nuclear era that is substantially different from that of the Cold War. It is important to understand the security significance and roles of nuclear weapons in the new era, investigate national strategies for their employment, and explore their implications for international security, stability, and conflict resolution in the 21st century. This is particularly important in the broadly defined Asian security region which confronts serious security challenges and includes five of the seven declared nuclear weapon states (United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan), one undeclared nuclear weapon state (Israel), two aspirant states (North Korea and Iran), and several states (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia) that rely on the American nuclear umbrella for their security.

The grim scenarios associated with nuclear weapons in Asia frequently rely on worst-case political and military situations and draw upon a certain view of the role of nuclear weapons in Cold War Europe or on the claim that Europe's experience does not apply to Asia. Three contending views have been advanced on the consequence of nuclear weapons for peace and security in Europe during the Cold War. One view is that nuclear weapons contributed to the long peace and stability in Europe (Gaddis 1992; Jervis 1988; Waltz 2004). The second view does not contest the idea of a long peace but disputes that nuclear weapons contributed to it (Mueller 1988, 1998). The third view contests the claim that the Cold War was a period of stable peace. In this view, the nuclear standoff during the Cold War was highly dangerous and should be avoided. In terms of relevance for the contemporary era, some Western analysts (mostly non-proliferation scholars and advocates) argue that the contribution of nuclear weapons to the long peace in Europe would not apply to Asia. Asian countries are culturally different; their militaries view preventive war in a favorable light and are not interested in developing invulnerable strategic forces; and insecure command and control ar-

rangements make them more prone to accidents and unauthorized use (Feaver 1992–93, 1993; Sagan 1994, 1995). Adherents of this perspective argue that the Indian, Pakistani, and most recently North Korean nuclear tests would set off a domino effect, with negative consequences for security and stability in Asia and the world. The view that nuclear weapons would contribute to insecurity and instability in Asia seems to have become dominant in the West. It resonates with and reinforces earlier views in Europe and the United States that Asia was ripe for rivalry and that its future would resemble the war-torn Europe of the nineteenth century (Buzan and Segal 1994; Friedberg 1993–94).

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MY ARGUMENT

The primary argument of this article is that although there could be destabilizing situations, on net, nuclear weapons have contributed to peace, security, and stability in Asia. This argument is supported on the following grounds. First, nuclear weapons have not fundamentally disrupted the regional distribution of power or intensified security dilemmas. In fact by assuaging the security concerns of weak and vulnerable states they promote stability in conflict prone dyads. Second, fear of the devastating consequences of a nuclear exchange prevents the outbreak and escalation of regional hostilities to full-scale war, strengthens the political and military status quo, and impels conflicting parties to freeze the conflict or explore a negotiated settlement. Third, the combination of minimum deterrence strate-

gies and general deterrence postures enhances stability among major powers and avoids strategic arms races like that during the Cold War. Finally, nuclear weapons reinforce the trend in the region to circumscribe and transform the role of force in international politics.

The article further argues that the oftenposited destabilizing effects of nuclear weapons (dangers associated with new nuclear-weapon states, domino effect, preventive military action, and early use postures) have not materialized. There are indeed risks associated with nuclear weapons. However, they must be addressed on their own merits and not be advanced as a reason to deny the security relevance of nuclear weapons. The effort of the non-proliferation community to stop the spread of nuclear weapons on the basis of risks associated with nuclear weapons in the hands of “new” states generates an unproductive and futile debate. Arms are symptomatic of insecurity, not its cause. To be successful arms control policies must not only address the supply side but also deal with the demand side of the equation. The real cause of insecurity and armament lies in political disputes.

Two clarifications are in order. One, I am not arguing that security and stability in Asia rests only or even primarily on nuclear weapons. As I have argued elsewhere peace, stability, and prosperity in Asia since 1979 rests on several pillars (Alagappa 2003a). Nuclear weapons strengthen that peace and stability by reinforcing deterrence dominance and further circumscribing the offensive roles of force. Second, I am not making the case for unlimited proliferation on the ground that more may be better (Waltz 1995). My case is that that proliferation thus far has been gradual and has not undermined peace and stability as predicted. In fact gradual proliferation has reinforced peace and stability in Asia. Preventing proliferation should continue to be a key goal of the international community; proliferators must face serious cost and supply obstacles. In such context only countries that feel severely threatened will pursue the nuclear weapon route and the acquisition process will necessarily be prolonged. The international community will have opportunities and measures to stop specific acquisition(s) and/or time to adjust to the changing nuclear situation. In addition to limiting and slowing proliferation, the nuclear order must be able to gradually accommodate new nuclear weapon states

and promote deterrence and stability especially during potential moments of instability. Any attempt to freeze and rigidify the Cold War nuclear order will increase the gap between the formal regime and reality, weaken it, and possibly lead to its eventual collapse. I will deal with possible critiques of my argument later. First I will elaborate and support my primary argument that nuclear weapons have contributed to security and stability in Asia.

NO FUNDAMENTAL DISRUPTION IN POWER DISTRIBUTION OR INTENSIFICATION OF SECURITY DILEMMAS

Nuclear weapons have not disrupted or destabilized the overall distribution of power or fundamentally altered the patterns of amity and enmity in the Asian security region. The unipolar structure of the present system and the anticipated changes in the distribution of power in the Asian security region are consequences of change in the overall national power of states that has several dimensions. Military power is an important component of national power; and having nuclear weapons makes a significant difference in national military capability. However, military power by itself is not a sufficient basis for major power status. The enormous destructive power of nuclear weapons is also less fungible and less relevant to the pursuit of high priority non-traditional security goals. Nuclear weapons add to but are not a sufficient basis of national power.

The present dominance of the United States, the decline in the position of Russia, and the rise of China and India are not due to their nuclear weapon capabilities. U.S. dominance is grounded in its vast lead in several dimensions of power. Although Russia still has a formidable nuclear arsenal, it is not a superpower or even a top-tier regional power in Asia. China has long had nuclear weapons but only since the mid-1990s has it been recognized as a major power. The rapid and substantial increase in China's national power and the apprehension it creates are primarily due to its sustained high rate of economic growth, which in turn produces the resources for accumulating and exercising international power and influence. Likewise, the rise in the power and status of India is due in large measure to its economic growth, political stability, change in foreign policy, technological advancement, and human resource potential.

Although they do not affect the regional distribution of power, nuclear weapons strengthen weaker powers by canceling or mitigating the effects of imbalance in conventional and nuclear weapon capability and thereby reducing their strategic vulnerability. By threatening nuclear retaliation and catastrophic damage in the event of large-scale conventional or nuclear attack, and exploiting the risk of escalation to nuclear war, weaker powers with nuclear weapons constrain the military options of a stronger adversary. This is most evident in the cases of Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel. Pakistan is much weaker than India in several dimensions of national power. It suffered defeats in two of the three conventional wars it fought with India in the pre-nuclear era, with the 1971 war resulting in humiliating defeat and dismemberment. In the nuclear era, which dates from the late 1980s, Islamabad has been able to deter India from crossing into Pakistan proper and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir even in the context of Pakistani military infiltration into Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1999. India did not follow through with the limited-war option in 2001–02 because of the grave risk it entailed. India was also forced in part by the risk of nuclear war to engage in a comprehensive dialogue to explore settlement of disputes between the two countries, including the Kashmir conflict. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal has blunted the potency of India's large conventional military force. Although it has not canceled out all the consequences of the large power differential between the two countries, it has had significant constraining impact on India's military options and assuaged Pakistan's concern about the Indian threat.

The leveling and cautionary effects of nuclear weapons are also evident in the relationship of the weak and isolated North Korea with the vastly superior United States. Although North Korea does not have an operational nuclear arsenal and the United States can destroy that country many times over, the risk of quick and substantial damage to its forces and allies in the region induces caution and constrains U.S. military options. If in the future North Korea develops nuclear weapons and marries them to its missile capability, the risks associated with preventive military action against that country would multiply. Instead of simply suffering the will of the mighty United States, North Korea's nascent capability has provided it with security and bargaining leverage in

its negotiations with major powers in the region (Park and Lee 2008). The security effect of an opaque nuclear force like that of Israel is more difficult to demonstrate, especially as that country also has superior conventional military capability. Nevertheless it is possible to argue that the Arab countries' tacit acceptance of Israel's nuclear deterrence posture has contributed to Israel's security and to regional stability by lowering the intensity of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in some instances even contributed to peace

As with structure, nuclear weapons have not fundamentally altered lines of amity and enmity in the Asian security region. The principal effect of nuclear weapons has been a function of strategies for their employment. Offensive strategies have intensified existing security dilemmas; but deterrence strategies have not. And deterrence has and continues to be the dominant role and strategy for the employment of nuclear weapons in Asia. Enmity in the India-Pakistan dyad, for example, dates to the partition of British India,

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settlements, like that between Israel and Egypt (Cohen 2008). Israel perceives nuclear weapons are the ultimate security guarantee. They enhance Israel's self-confidence and demonstrate its resolve to survive.

For non-nuclear weapon states like Japan and South Korea, the U.S. extended deterrence commitments have been a significant factor in assuaging their security vulnerabilities in the wake of the North Korean nuclear test. Both countries insisted on reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment, and Japan is exploring measures to increase the credibility of that commitment. In reassuring Japan, the U.S. commitment is a significant factor along with others in forestalling exploration of an independent nuclear option by that country. The U.S. commitment enables South Korea to maintain a nonnuclear posture, provides time to build a self-reliant defense capability, and is a fallback in dealing with a nuclear-armed North Korea.

their conflict over Kashmir, and Pakistan's quest for equality with India. Nuclear weapons have both ameliorated and intensified threat perceptions in this dyad. As noted earlier they have mitigated Pakistan's sense of insecurity by constraining India's military options. However, Pakistan's policy to exploit the risk of escalation to nuclear war to alter the political and territorial status quo in Kashmir, and India's coercive response to preserve or restore the status quo intensified both countries' vulnerabilities and threat perceptions, resulting in crisis situations early in the overt nuclear era. Since then, however, the situation has stabilized. A mixed strategic picture (conflict, dialogue, and negotiations between the two countries) along with other priorities and international pressure has helped to reduce the threat intensity between them. Recognition of the grave risks associated with offensive strategies under nuclear conditions is a factor as well. Although both countries continue to develop their nuclear

and missile capabilities with reference to each other, the anxiety surrounding missile tests and military exercises has declined. Further, the crises precipitated by offensive strategies deepened the security interdependence between the two countries, providing a basis for limited confidence building and arms control measures to prevent unintended escalation of hostilities.

Likewise the enmity in U.S.-North Korea, North Korea-Japan, and North Korea-South Korea relations preceded the development of North Korean nuclear weapon capability. Although the North Korean nuclear test heightened the sense of insecurity in Japan and to a lesser degree in South Korea, it has not fundamentally altered the security situation in Northeast Asia. Should North Korea develop an operational arsenal and seek to use its nuclear weapons in an offensive manner that could intensify related security dilemmas. For reasons explained later, this is highly unlikely. Deterrence will be the primary role of North Korea's small nuclear weapon capability. Iran's nuclear quest may have the potential to alter the pattern of enmity and amity in the Middle East. A nuclear Iran is likely to intensify the Israel-Iran line of enmity and bring about change in Israel's nuclear posture, making nuclear weapons more prominent in Middle East security. The animosity between Iran and the Arab states may also intensify, while that between Israel and certain Arab states could become tempered.

Among the major powers, nuclear weapons have created apprehensions but not fundamentally altered the basis and nature of their security interaction, which is characterized by cooperation and conflict. The vastly superior American nuclear arsenal and especially Washington's emphasis on offensive and defensive strategies have raised concerns in Beijing and Moscow. Talk of U.S. nuclear primacy with a disarming capability created disquiet in these countries. The United States clarified that its offensive and defensive strategies are specifically directed at rogue states, and there is increasing doubt that the United States could develop effective strategic defense capabilities against China and Russia. Nevertheless, these countries can be expected to strengthen their strategic deterrent forces and increase their policy options in relation to the United States. At the same time, China has not abandoned its minimum deterrence strategy to engage in direct nuclear competition with the United States. The

Chinese response has been deliberately indirect and muted. By retaining a posture of dynamic minimum deterrence and an NFU policy while continuing to modernize its nuclear force, China seeks to prevent deterioration of its security interaction with the United States. In the case of Russia, its strong opposition to the U.S. ballistic missile defense deployment in Eastern Europe and its suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty further strained U.S.-Russia relations. However, Russia has not articulated a nuclear strategy to directly challenge or compete with the United States. The United States also does not appear to have altered its view of not treating Russia as an enemy state.

Nuclear weapons have not substantially altered Sino-Indian security interaction, which appears to be proceeding on dual tracks: engagement and

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cooperation along with mutual suspicion and quiet competition. Although China condemned the Indian nuclear tests, and India is concerned about the strategic imbalance, neither country has emphasized nuclear weapons in their relationship. India seeks to build a robust deterrent against China, but it has not pursued this goal with urgency. China too has deemphasized its nuclear

force in relation to India. The low-key general deterrence postures of both countries reflect their common desire to improve bilateral relations.

Evidence from Asia supports the general proposition that arms per se including nuclear weapons are not the primary drivers of insecurity, but strategies for their employment may intensify or ameliorate insecurity. Except during 1999-2002 in India-Pakistan relations, deterrence has been the dominant role and strategy for employment of nuclear weapons in Asia.

DETERRENCE DOMINANCE PROMOTES STABILITY

Only the United States is seeking to develop significant offensive and defensive nuclear weapon capabilities. Technological limitations, funding constraints, the relatively low cost of maintaining a strike force that can penetrate ballistic missile defense systems, the preference and capabilities (conventional and nuclear) of other states, and the generally stable strategic environment in the Asian security region are likely to limit the employment of nuclear weapons in these roles. The offensive and defensive roles of nuclear weapons are likely to remain marginal in utility and unlikely to surpass the deterrence role. Deterrence dominance advances stability by helping prevent the outbreak and escalation of regional hostilities, entrenching the political and military status quo by making the cost of violent change prohibitive, and impelling conflicting parties to explore peaceful settlement of disputes.

Help Stabilize Regional Conflicts: Nuclear weapons contribute to regional stability by preventing the outbreak of major hostilities and their escalation to full-scale war in key regional conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, on the Korean peninsula, and over Kashmir. Nuclear weapons are relevant in the U.S.-PRC dimension of the Taiwan conflict. Beijing sees the implicit risk of escalation and the prospect of a nuclear retaliatory strike on the United States as inducing caution in Washington, deterring American military intervention, and compelling Washington to rein in independence oriented Taiwanese leaders. The American military objective is to deter Chinese military action against Taiwan and prevent unification by force. Although American deterrence is primarily conventional it inevitably includes a nuclear dimension. The 2002 NPR identifies Taiwan as a nuclear contingency. Although both

the U.S. and China have not articulated a policy or strategy that will involve nuclear weapons, the risk of escalation is an ever-present possibility. That risk constrains the military options available to China and the United States and deters the outbreak of major hostilities making large-scale war unlikely. Similarly nuclear weapons help strengthen deterrence and stabilize the conflict on the Korean peninsula. North Korea feels more assured of its deterrence capability while South Korea is assured by the U.S. extended deterrence commitment. It is possible to argue that there has not been a deep crisis in the conflict across the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate the restraining and stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons and, further, that stability in the Taiwan and North Korea conflicts is due to a number of factors including conventional deterrence. It is difficult to refute these claims. The deterrence effect of nuclear weapons cannot be isolated and quantified in the absence of severe crisis. However, this does not imply irrelevance or that nuclear weapons do not contribute to stability.

The stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons may be better illustrated in India-Pakistan relations, as the crises between these two countries during the 1999-2002 period are often cited as demonstrating nuclear weapon-induced instability. Rather than simply attribute these crises to the possession of nuclear weapons, a more accurate and useful reading would ground them in Pakistan's deliberate policy to alter the status quo through military means on the premise that the risk of escalation to nuclear war would deter India from responding with full-scale conventional retaliation; and in India's response, employing compellence and coercive diplomacy strategies. In other words, particular goals and strategies rather than nuclear weapons per se precipitated the crises. Further, the outcomes of these two crises revealed the limited utility of nuclear weapons in bringing about even a minor change in the territorial status quo and highlighted the grave risks associated with offensive strategies. Recognition of these limits and the grave consequences in part contributed to the two countries' subsequent efforts to engage in a comprehensive dialogue to settle the many disputes between them. The crises also led to bilateral understandings and measures to avoid unintended hostilities.

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crisis in 1962, the 1999 and 2001–02 crises between India and Pakistan mark a watershed in their strategic relations: the danger of nuclear war shifted their focus to avoiding a major war and to finding a negotiated settlement to bilateral problems. Large-scale military deployments along the common border, Pakistan-supported insurgent activities in India, and cross-border terrorism continue; and the two countries regularly conduct large-scale military exercises and test nuclear-capable missiles that have each other's entire territory within range. Despite these activities, the situation has become relatively less tense; stability with the ability to absorb shocks even like that created by the November 26 terrorist attack in Mumbai has begun to characterize the bilateral relationship.

Reinforce the Political and Military Status Quo: Reviewing the Cold War experience, Robert Jervis has argued that nuclear weapons strengthen the status quo. However, he excludes situations where the status quo is ambiguous or when a revisionist power has the power to implement threats, has high resolve, and sees the domestic and international situations as precarious enough to merit great risk and cost (Jervis 1989: 32–34). Along these lines Paul Kapur (2006) argues that nuclear weapons may provide incentives for a weaker, revisionist state to engage in limited conventional military action to alter the status quo. Such a state would not engage in aggressive behavior in a conventional world because it would most likely result in failure. In a nuclear world, the stronger state is inhibited from employing its full military might for fear that hostilities would escalate to nuclear war. This risk of escalation emboldens a highly motivated state to behave aggressively.

I argue that the risk of escalation cuts both ways and that the net effect of nuclear weapons has been to reinforce the status quo and enhance stability in two ways: they make change through violence more difficult and highly costly; and they dramatically increase the political cost of “adventurist” behavior by nuclear weapon states. The limit to forcefully alter the status quo and the associated political risks disadvantage the challenger and help entrench the status quo. These points are best illustrated by the India-Pakistan case. They are also evident in a limited manner in the conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

I begin with the basic observation that the attempts by Pakistan to alter the territorial status

quo in Kashmir and by China to force a particular political outcome in Taiwan through the threat and use of force failed. Jervis's qualification of his argument and Kapur's extension of that argument may explain why Pakistan resorted to military action in 1999, but cannot account for the failure and implications of that action. To begin with, the relatively small-scale Pakistani military infiltration, even if successful, could not have substantially altered the territorial status quo in Kashmir, although it could have set a precedent for further “salami tactics.” In the end, it did not bring about even a minor change in the territorial status quo. On the contrary, the outcome of the military action helped entrench the territorial status quo. India responded firmly to the military intrusion. It defeated and compelled the withdrawal of the Pakistani infiltration force. After initial denials, Pakistan acknowledged that regular troops undertook the military intrusion and eventually had to withdraw that force. The risk of escalation cut both ways. It constrained India's military options, but it also circumscribed Pakistan's response to the Indian military reaction. Pakistan could not openly support its forces in Indian-held Kashmir or escalate the war. By strictly limiting its military response to territory under its control, India gave credence to and legitimated the LoC. And since the conflict, New Delhi has insisted that although it is open to new thinking on the Kashmir issue, it would not condone altering the LoC. International support for this position has since increased.

India emerged from the conflict as a responsible status quo power, whereas Pakistan's “adventurist” behavior further tarnished its shaky international image. The rise of Islamic extremism in Pakistan, Islamabad's support for the Taliban regime when that regime was in power in Afghanistan, the wide and substantial damage done by the A.Q. Khan network, military authoritarianism, and political instability, among others, had raised concerns about Pakistan as a viable state and a responsible nuclear weapon state. The 1999 adventure added to these concerns. The inability to bring about even a minor change in the territorial status quo and the grave risks associated with a limited conflict under nuclear conditions appear to have led to a sober assessment of the role of nuclear weapons in this dyad. The net effect of nuclear weapons has been to enhance deterrence dominance and entrench the political and territorial status quo.

The Taiwan case is less instructive as the role of nuclear weapons is implicit, and there has not been a severe crisis. Further, in 1995 China was not trying to alter the territorial status quo through force but to influence the political outcome of the Taiwan presidential elections. That

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effort failed. Not only did the result of the election go against the outcome desired by Beijing, the United States responded in a firm manner by deploying two aircraft carriers and warning China that it would not tolerate intimidation and forceful change in Taiwan's status. China refrained from escalating the military conflict out of concern that it could not achieve conflict escalation dominance and that escalation would risk bringing nuclear weapons more directly into the conflict. Although China has not renounced the use of force and continues to build up its missile and amphibious capabilities, that crisis highlighted the dangers and drawbacks of relying on the force option (including the negative consequences for its image as a responsible rising power), leading Beijing to deemphasize forceful

unification. That incident as well as the public discussion in China of the merits of its no-first-use (NFU) policy and the advocacy in certain Chinese quarters for using nuclear weapons in a war-fighting role in the event of a military conflict across the Taiwan Strait has also chastened the United States. Since the 1995–96 crisis, the emphasis in both China and the United States has been on preserving the status quo. Reversing its earlier strong support, the Bush administration leaned heavily on the Chen administration in Taiwan not to take any unilateral action that would alter the status quo. In the India-Pakistan case and in the conflict across the Taiwan Strait, nuclear weapons have further reduced the prospects for military victory and strengthened the status quo and stability.

Assurance and Stability in Major Power Relations: Nuclear weapons feature primarily in deterrence and insurance roles in the interaction of major powers. These roles are not threatening to other parties. The caution induced by nuclear weapons, their leveling effect, the strategic insurance they provide to cope with unanticipated contingencies, and general deterrence postures reduce anxieties and constrain the role of force in major power interaction. This enables major powers to take a long view and focus on other national priorities. In this context modernization of nuclear arsenals and the development of additional capabilities have proceeded at a moderate pace; they have produced responses but not intense strategic competition. The net effect has been stabilizing.

The stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons in the immediate security issue in Sino-American relations has been discussed earlier. Here I will discuss how deterrence dominance has enabled a measured Chinese response to the U.S. emphasis on offensive strategies and its development of strategic missile defense and helped avoid strategic competition. Perceiving the offensive strategies and BMD development as undermining the robustness of its strategic deterrent force, China seeks to strengthen the survivability of its retaliatory force and is attempting to develop capabilities that would threaten American space-based surveillance and communications facilities in the event of hostilities. However, these efforts are not presented as a direct challenge to or competition with the United States. Beijing has deliberately sought to downplay the modernization of its nuclear force. This is not simply deception,

but a serious effort to develop a strong deterrent force without entering into a strategic competition with the United States, which it cannot win due to the huge imbalance in military capabilities and technological limitations. Strategic competition will also divert attention and resources away from the more urgent modernization goals. A strong Chinese strategic deterrent force blunts the military advantage of the United States, induces caution in that country, and constrains its military option in the event of hostilities.

Limits and risks associated with nuclear weapons are one inducement. Ultimately, the peaceful settlement of these conflicts will hinge on working out compromise agreements. Such compromises become more (or less) possible with domestic political change.

India's strategic deterrence force does not compare with China's, but its nuclear, missile, and conventional military capability give New Delhi a relatively high degree of self-confidence in managing relations with Beijing. The insurance provided by its small nuclear force and strong conventional capability, combined with technological and resource limitations, and improving bilateral relations, explain India's gradual development of a nuclear deterrent capability against China. India's minimum deterrence nuclear posture and its gradual nuclear buildup also reassure China, which sees the United States as its principal security concern. In recent times, Japan has been more sensitive than India to China's nuclear force modernization and the development of North Korea's missile and nuclear capabilities. In part, this is due to the lack of its own nuclear weapon capability. However, Japan has not sought its own nuclear weapon capability to compete with China or North Korea, a move that could be unsettling. Instead it has sought reaffirmation of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment, denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, an increase in its own conventional military ca-

pability, and development of strategic defense, all of which can be stabilizing.

Because they are not immediately threatening, the general deterrence postures adopted by all the major powers have contributed to regional stability as well. Patrick Morgan (2003: 80–115) has argued that general deterrence suffers an inherent credibility problem as it is vulnerable to military probes that could lead to deterrence failure. It is possible to depict the Chinese missile firings in 1995–96 and the 1999 Pakistani military infiltration into Kargil as probing the general deterrence postures of the United States and India, respectively. The firm and quick response in both cases established the credibility of American commitment to the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and the Indian determination to preserve the status quo in Kashmir. When established, immediate deterrence (as opposed to general deterrence, although the difference between the two is not clear-cut) may be more credible, but this is not certain. The risk of escalation to nuclear war and the devastation that can be inflicted by nuclear weapons make general deterrence more effective than conventional deterrence. Periodic demonstration of resolve may be necessary to shore up the credibility of general deterrence. From the perspective of stability, which is the primary issue addressed here, general deterrence is less directly threatening than immediate deterrence and more effective than conventional deterrence. It does not aggravate security relations or feed competitive strategic armament. Likewise the strategies of minimum deterrence adopted by China and India are less aggressive. They do not feed strategic arms races like the assured retaliation strategies that characterized the Cold War nuclear postures of the United States and the Soviet Union. Minimum deterrence and general deterrence are more defensive in character than assured retaliation and immediate deterrence, both of which can have a strong aggressive component. All these features of contemporary deterrence strategies contribute to stability.

Not a Barrier to Peaceful Conflict Resolution: Although nuclear weapons increase the barrier to conflict settlement or resolution by force they are not a barrier to peaceful settlement. The three key conflicts in Asia (on the Korean peninsula, across the Taiwan Strait, and over Kashmir) cannot be settled by force without huge costs. By dramatically increasing the speed and scale of

destruction that can occur from their use, nuclear weapons have made the barrier to settlement by force prohibitive. In this sense, it is possible to argue that nuclear weapons have helped freeze conflicts. However, nuclear weapons are not a barrier to peaceful settlement of these conflicts. In fact, the impossibility of military victory and the grave risks associated with nuclear war may have led states to alter their immediate goals and explore a diplomatic settlement. Recognizing the risks associated with military action (including possible escalation to nuclear war), the unlikely prospect that the Taiwan conflict will be resolved peacefully to its satisfaction in the foreseeable future, and a belief that the present trend in cross-Strait relations is in its favor, China has in recent years begun to shift its emphasis from unification to preventing Taiwan independence and preserving the status quo. On the Korean peninsula, recognizing the limits and risks of attempting an offensive strategy, the United States altered course to seek a diplomatic settlement of the nuclear problem and other disputes there. In India-Pakistan relations as well, the grave risks associated with the military standoff between the two countries have forced them to explore negotiated settlement of the multiple disputes, including the status and control of Kashmir.

Multiple factors account for the shift in objective (in the Taiwan conflict) and the decisions to enter into dialogue and negotiate diplomatic settlements (of the North Korea and Kashmir conflicts). Limits and risks associated with nuclear weapons are one inducement. Ultimately, the peaceful settlement of these conflicts will hinge on working out compromise agreements. Such compromises become more (or less) possible with domestic political change. Recent government change in Taiwan has created a positive atmosphere for reducing tension and negotiating bilateral agreement to establish stable and peaceful relations in the hitherto tension-ridden dyad.

It is pertinent to observe here that nuclear weapons may have helped freeze the Cold War confrontation, but they did not prevent its termination. That confrontation came to an end with change of government in the former USSR. Although China was not locked into a nuclear confrontation, the transition from Mao Tse Tung to Deng Xiao Ping and the latter's open-door policy and modernization program were crucial in changing China's

international orientation. The general point is that resolution of disputes hinges on willingness to make deep political compromise; this can only come about through fundamental change in policy, which in turn becomes possible with idea-driven change in government. Nuclear weapons are instruments of policy and need not be a barrier to settlement of political disputes.

Over the past three decades, the use of force has been limited to border clashes, militant insurgencies, and occasional clashes at sea, where the danger of escalation is low. A major war could still occur, but the probability has declined dramatically since the early phase of the Cold War, when Asia was the site of several large-scale wars.

REINFORCING THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF FORCE

Finally nuclear weapons contribute to stability by circumscribing and transforming the role of force. In 2003, I argued that the offensive role of force in Asian international politics was declining and that assurance, deterrence, and defense were becoming the primary missions of Asian armed forces (Alagappa 2003b). I attributed the declining salience of the offensive role of force to several developments: the consolidation of Asian states and their willingness and ability to enter into international obligations; the general acceptance in Asia of the prevailing political and territorial status quo, which reduces the need for a forceful defense of a state's core interests and makes conquest and domination unacceptable; an increase in the political, diplomatic, and economic cost of using force in a situation of complex interdependence; and the impracticality of resolving conflicts through force. Over the past three decades, the use of force has been limited to border clashes, militant insurgencies, and occasional clashes at sea, where the danger of es-

calation is low. A major war could still occur, but the probability has declined dramatically since the early phase of the Cold War, when Asia was the site of several large-scale wars.

Nuclear weapons reinforce the declining salience of the offensive role of force in the Asian security region and increase the importance of deterrence, defense, and assurance. The logic of the enormous destructive power of nuclear weapons and the lack of defense against them also applies to Asia. None of the key regional conflicts can be resolved through the use of force, including conventional military force. The danger of escalation limits the offensive role of conventional military force among nuclear weapon states. The salience of deterrence and defense, already on the rise in the context of wide acceptance of the status quo, is now becoming entrenched. Nuclear weapons make nuclear deterrence and conventional defense the dominant strategies. Despite the U.S. effort to build a strategic defense system, deterrence dominance is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Target nuclear weapon states can and will take measures to increase the robustness of their strategic deterrent forces. In situations of stark asymmetry, limited strategic defense may make a difference and make offensive use of force under nuclear conditions more attractive. However, it is unlikely to eliminate all uncertainty; continued caution is likely counsel against offensive military action.

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