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**Strategic Ambiguity in Nuclear Doctrines: A  
Case Study of India and Pakistan**

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# Strategic Ambiguity in Nuclear Doctrines: A Case Study of India and Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The genesis of nuclearization can be traced back to when the atomic bomb was first used in World War II by the US on Hiroshima. After this event, Russia, Britain, France and China were officially recognised as nuclear weapon states. Among these five states, only China has openly declared its nuclear policies while other countries has kept their nuclear policies ambiguous. Later, India and Pakistan joined the nuclear club in 1998, openly declaring their possession of nuclear weapons but still maintain deliberate ambiguity in their nuclear policy. Studies indicate that states aim to maintain ambiguity in terms of Nuclear First Use (NFU). Considering the lack of extensive research on strategic ambiguity in India Pakistan nuclear doctrine, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of the strategic ambiguity in the nuclear doctrines of both the countries. This research takes a deeper look at the nuclear policies of India and Pakistan and carries out a comparative analysis, with attention on similarities and differences in India's No First Use (NFU) doctrine and Pakistan's Minimum Credible Deterrence posture. The primary goal of the comparison is to show how the strategies of these two states regarding nuclear capabilities are similar and different. Additionally, the paper also investigates how strategic ambiguity functions*

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*in India and Pakistan's nuclear policies. While strategic ambiguity poses risks such as escalation and miscalculation, it can also provide flexibility in the fragile security landscape of South Asia.*

## **Introduction**

The development of nuclear weapons dramatically changed the world balance of power and security dynamics. The United States of America had a monopoly in the nuclear program until a nuclear deterrence regime was established with the development of nuclear capabilities by the Soviet Union in 1949, leading to the establishment of nuclear deterrence. The early 1950s saw a dramatic change when in 1952 the United Kingdom emerged as the third nuclear state, followed by France in 1960, which joined the nuclear club as the fourth nuclear-armed state after testing a large nuclear device in Algeria. In 1964, China became the fifth nuclear weapon state worldwide.

During the Cold War era, five states aimed to maintain their dominance in the nuclear field. Despite efforts for disarmament, nuclear weapons development continued in a number of states, including India and Pakistan. The nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan added new dimensions to the security perceptions in the already hostile region. India outlined its nuclear doctrine after these tests with a task team formed in 1998 to create the policy. The National Security Advisory Board expedited work on the draft after the Kargil crisis in 1999, leading to official publication of India's nuclear doctrine on January 4, 2003. The doctrine initially declared that India has nuclear weapons but pledges not to use them unless faced with nuclear attack. However, an amendment allows for a response if Indian forces are attacked on Indian territory. But the document does not

provide details on how India would retaliate in the event of a nuclear threat.

Since Pakistan conducted nuclear test in May 1998, it does not have a formal nuclear doctrine. However, statements from top government officials offer insight into Pakistan's potential nuclear doctrine. While there is no official public doctrine, there are indications of Pakistan operational doctrine through official statements, interviews, and nuclear weapons. Initially, both countries adhered the concept of credible minimum deterrence and pledged not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. However, they have diverged nuclear doctrines India's adoption of a 'No First Use' (NFU) policy, that allows for a response with nuclear weapons to chemical or biological attacks. In contrast Pakistan's ambiguous stance on NFU indicates strategic flexibility in its nuclear response. India's doctrine further elaborates on 'massive retaliation' in response to a nuclear first strike.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the study also addresses ideological uncertainties in India-Pakistan relations caused by statements made by senior decision-makers regarding nuclear advancements. India's Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) of 1999, which was formally adopted in 2003, has faced criticism for its perceived inconsistencies and unclear elements, for instance, maintaining a no first use (NFU) against China, while retaining the option of a first-strike against Pakistan. There are some concerns about the 2003 document, with fears that undisclosed parts may exist, indicating internal disagreements or a secret war strategy with Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan's nuclear doctrine, starting from 1980, is unclear. The country became a de facto nuclear state in 1998 but it has intentionally kept its doctrine ambiguous to enhance the

perceived value of Pakistan's deterrence posture. For a state such as Pakistan, ambiguity is recognised as being more efficient in both conventional and nuclear areas. According to Michael Krepon, strategic ambiguity prevents national leaders from initiating full-scale war by creating uncertainty about the locations in South Asia area where possible nuclear retaliation might occur. This lack of clarity makes decisions more complex and potentially makes things worse, thus slightly adding to strategic stability. As Narang states, while unclarity can be effective in deterring misunderstandings and unintentional confrontations, zero communication may lead to terrible miscalculations.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the formal declaration of their distinct nuclear doctrines, there is still a misperception regarding India's and Pakistan's nuclear policies. It is unknown what each country's nuclear policy is however, this ambiguity generates significant apprehensions regarding the stability in the region, the effectiveness of deterrence tactics and chances for misinterpretation or unintentional proliferation. This paper aims to provide a balanced assessment of India's and Pakistan's nuclear doctrines. Considering the unavailability of precise specifications for the motivations that a state has in developing certain policies or doctrines, and it is always possible to find several causes and effects including intentional and unintentional ones. I argue that there is no guarantee that making nuclear policy more transparent, rational, incremental and stabilising will ultimately result in strategic stability. The intentional use of ambiguity by India and Pakistan as a deterrence strategy is unclear, and whether this has served to stabilise forces in their region remains open to discussion.

## **Strategic Ambiguity in Nuclear Doctrine**

This literature review explores the use of strategic ambiguity in the nuclear doctrines of India and Pakistan, two neighbouring countries in South Asia with nuclear capabilities, amidst regional tensions. In context of South Asia, India publicly revealed its nuclear doctrine in 2003, but the recent statements from policymakers have hinted at the potential shift, creating uncertainty. Pakistan, known for its preference for ambiguity, did not openly declare its doctrine. Instead, it occasionally issued vague statements through various official channels that provided some insight into its nuclear policy, although these statements were multivocal. This deliberate ambiguity has worked in Pakistan's favour, granting the country greater flexibility in adjusting its policy, while India continued to evolve and develop both its conventional and nuclear posture. Therefore, Pakistan's nuclear policy has consistently been reactive to India's actions. As India modified its nuclear and conventional posture over time, Pakistan's response also evolved. Key milestones include Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998 and the development of a robust nuclear weapons delivery system in the 1990s, which included the Ghaznavi, Ghauri and Shaheen missile systems. These developments were responses to India's advancements in the Prithvi and Agni strategic missile series during that period.<sup>4</sup>

India's nuclear posture has evolved somewhat since the 1999 draft doctrine, which stated, 'we will not be the first to start a nuclear war but if our prevention attempts fail then we are going for punitive revenge.' Its 2003 draft doctrine added the choice for responding with nuclear retaliation under the condition 'if there's a big attack against India or Indian forces anywhere by biological or chemical weapons. In a speech to the

Conference on Disarmament on 14 October 2020, Indian Ambassador Pankaj Sharma reiterated India's commitment to not using nuclear weapons first, also known as No First Use, or NFU. This confirmation comes after earlier remarks that suggested India would reevaluate its commitment. India's defense minister, Manohar Parrikar, questioned in 2016 whether the government needed to commit to the NFU, and his successor, Rajnath Singh, stated in 2019 that the country's NFU policy may alter based on circumstances in the future. Even though Parrikar clarified that Singh's statement was merely his personal opinion and there have been debates regarding Singh's true intentions, Sharma's words have been contextualised in light of India's recent efforts to reduce border issues with China.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan has chosen to gradually reveal its nuclear policy in a way that neither explicitly affirms nor refutes a first use policy. The reason this piecemeal strategy works is that Pakistan reacts to India's activities in a dynamic manner. Pakistan's stance is intentionally vague in order to create deterrence against a conventional strike that may be preempted rather than actually starting a nuclear conflict. For this reason, in response to a preemptive conventional war policy, Pakistan has created a sufficient conventional retaliation mechanism. Despite the fact that Pakistan's nuclear program is only for defense, a far more powerful military force has continuously threatened to destroy it.<sup>6</sup>

Retired Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai discussed the country's nuclear doctrine and reiterated many old views about Pakistan's nuclear policy, such as the power of the triad system it possesses: on land, in the air and under the Sea. This triad system is designed to deter any potential attack from India, especially if it involves the Indian military's strategy for rapid warfare known as the Cold

Start Doctrine. This doctrine aims to initiate small-scale conflicts using fast-moving combined battle groups within Pakistan without crossing Islamabad's nuclear threshold. Lt. Gen. Kidwai also emphasised the concept of full-spectrum deterrence, which is a policy aimed at responding to various threats from India. Kidwai's articulation of vertical and horizontal dimensions within nuclear doctrine represents a significant expansion of strategic understanding. It includes having missiles on land with the Army Strategic Force Command, the ASFC; at sea with the Naval Strategic Force Command, NSFC; and in air space through Air Force Strategic Command AFSC."

"The spectrum range coverage, in a vertical manner, goes from 0 meters to 2,750 kilometers (around 1,700 miles). Also, the destructive yields of nuclear weapons are categorised into three tiers: strategic level; operational level and tactical level." The minimum range being lowered to zero is something new and shows that there could be big changes happening in how Islamabad thinks about its nuclear policy. Pakistan has maintained its nuclear policy unclear and intentionally ambiguous all along. Yet, the missile ranges are the only part consistently declared in public through an official press release after each test of a missile. Before Kidwai, the officially stated lowest range in Pakistan's nuclear inventory was Nasr, also known as the Hatf-9 ballistic missile with a distance of 60 kilometers (about 37 miles). This solid-fueled tactical ballistic missile was expected to counter India's Cold Start doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Ambiguity can help stabilise situations because it makes adversaries unsure about the intentions of others, which decreases chances for a first attack or escalation.<sup>8</sup>



## **Evolution of India's Nuclear Policy**

The Chinese nuclear test of 1964 acted as a trigger for India's ultimate decision to carry out an alternative nuclear test. However, given that the Chinese test and India's Pokhran-I in 1974 were conducted ten years apart, it is possible that India's nuclear testing program was shaped in large part by domestic political dynamics as well as technological constraints.<sup>9</sup> This alteration indicates the complex interplay that shaped India's nuclear trajectory during this critical period balancing geopolitical demands, scientific objectives, and strategic calculations. The era from 1966 to 1971 marked a significant phase in India's nuclear development, characterised by a deliberate pursuit of nuclear capabilities under the guise of ambiguity and a policy of recessed deterrence. In May 1974, India saw a 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosion' (PNE) at Pokhran. Raja Ramana, who previously directed India's Nuclear Program said: "The Pokhran test was a bomb explosion - an explosion is an explosion; be it on someone or on the ground... I just wish to clarify that this test wasn't peaceful."<sup>10</sup>

### **Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND)**

The Draft Nuclear Doctrine, an offensive war fight doctrine that promotes a forward posture, has the potential to lead arms race in the region. The ideas of No First Use and 'retaliation only might be part of a deception strategy to align with nuclear weapon countries. In truth, this is basically first-use doctrine where NFU is used as a means for gaining Western support. It provides a rough structure for India's big plan and sets out meticulous tactics regarding future nuclear policy. India is striving for regional supremacy and worldwide acknowledgement by building up a strong conventional force and keeping a substantial

nuclear inventory.<sup>11</sup> The operationalisation of the Indian nuclear doctrine shows a significant departure from the DND of August 1999. This document was reviewed by the Indian Cabinet Committee on Security on January 4, 2003, and it altered the principles outlined in the DND. The concept of no first use has been modified to align with Indian needs and necessity. Initially, this principle stated that India possesses nuclear weapons but commits not to use them unless faced with a nuclear attack. However, during operationalisation, the modification allows for a response if Indian forces are attacked on or outside Indian territory, potentially leading to full-scale war with the use of nuclear weapons from both sides. The document does not provide details on how India would retaliate in the event of a nuclear threat. The idea of credible minimum deterrence is also addressed in the DND, but the construction of a triad of strategic nuclear forces is not included in the operationalisation process. These developments have long-term objectives. While India has declared a moratorium on further nuclear explosions, it retains the ability to conduct nuclear tests in the future as seen in Indo-US Nuclear Agreement. The operationalisation related features contradict the initial declarations of the DND.<sup>12</sup>

### **Transition from No First Use Policy to Contingent Strategy**

India's nuclear doctrine transitioning from a clear No First Use policy to enigmatic stance, reflects the complex security dynamics in the South Asian region. The draft nuclear doctrine of credible minimum deterrence was initially introduced. Later in 2003, allowing for nuclear retaliation in response to biological or chemical attacks, adding a layer of ambiguity to India's nuclear

posture. However, nuclear experts have been debating the needs to revisit India's CMD doctrine and criticising the credibility of its No first use policy. In view of contemporary regional security challenges in the 2014 Indian Elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also pledged in its Party manifesto to revisit and modernise India's CMD in line with existing realities.<sup>13</sup>

The evolving nuclear doctrine of India, marked by a potential deviation from its No First Use (NFU) policy to a posture that could embrace First Use (FU), embodies significant strategic ramifications for the region, especially concerning Pakistan. As India policies shift towards thinkable first use stance, Pakistan strategic calculations must be reassessed, indicating the need for Islamabad to adopt its nuclear posture in response.

### **Repercussions of Contingent Strategy**

Such doctrinal shifts contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty, compelling Pakistan to consider parallel advancements in its nuclear arsenal and delivery mechanisms to ensure credible deterrence. Moreover, India's pursuit of modernising its nuclear capabilities through the acquisition of advanced technology further exacerbates the strategic imbalance in the region, prompting Pakistan to seek similar technological enhancements. India's strategic build ups and missile program developments are likely to cause the South Asian region to become involved in an arms race. These missile and strategic developments of India have created a security dilemma in the region, potentially leading towards an arms race. The possible shift from No First Use to First Use nuclear doctrine by India not only intensifies tensions but also forces Pakistan into contemplating a more aggressive nuclear stance.<sup>14</sup> On the

anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh stated that India's nuclear policy has always been based on the doctrine of 'no first use'. He said, "in Pokhran we saw Atal Ji's determination to make our country powerful with nuclear energy and stay true to this doctrine. India has followed it strictly and will take actions according to situations."<sup>15</sup>

On 20 March 2017, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Vipin Narang attended an international conference on nuclear policy organised by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He questioned India's counter-value approach to Pakistan's tactical nuclear attack and suggested a pre-emptive nuclear counterforce strike by India. He signaled a shift in India's nuclear policy towards a potential full-scale counterforce strike to disarm Pakistan of its nuclear weapons. This represents a splitting of India nuclear policy from China and Pakistan, with a focus on ensuring a credible deterrent against China and potential aggressive strategies against Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> Regarding Pakistan, there is a growing concern about its potential for first use or pre-emptive strikes. In an apparent change, Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar previously expressed that having a written policy on nuclear weapon use could weaken India's position, questioning why India should limited itself to not using them first.<sup>17</sup>

Experts from India have supported Narang's suggestion of a pre-emptive nuclear counterforce strike. Shashank Joshi commented: "If Pakistan goes first, and India goes second, why should India leave Pakistan with the ability to go third? Indeed, if Pakistan is trying to go first, why doesn't India simply slip in first?"

This indicates that India is not completely committed to its 2003 NFU policy and might soon move away from it. The shift in India's No First Use policy comes as little surprise to Pakistani nuclear experts and strategic analysts. India had failed to adhere a strict NFU policy since 2003, making its continuous advancements in nuclear capabilities and military modernisation efforts evident.

On the other hand, Pakistan's nuclear weapons capabilities are purely defensive and aimed at deterring India from any kind of aggression against Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> Interpretations of these statements by senior Indian officials suggest a potential strategic shift in India's nuclear doctrine, hinting at less ambiguity and possibly a move towards a First Use posture particularly over issues like state-sponsored terrorism and the contested region of Jammu and Kashmir. The growing evidence suggests that possibly, India could launch a complete 'counterforce strike' that aims to completely disarm Pakistan of its nuclear weapons before they are used (Narang). It shows the "detachment" of Indian nuclear policy from China and Pakistan because it requires more force for India to legitimately threaten guaranteed counterattack against China and aggressive intentions like dominance through escalation or a first impressive hit on Pakistan.

### **Pakistan Evolving Nuclear Posture**

The nuclear explosion of 1974 at Pokhran, 'Smiling Buddha' intensified Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear capabilities. This explosion changed the power dynamics between India and Pakistan, heavily favouring India, and initiated a journey that led to Pakistan's nuclear capability despite difficulties along the way. On May 28, 1998, Pakistan conducted its first nuclear test in

response to India's nuclear test at Ras Koh Hills situated in Chaghi district of Balochistan.<sup>19</sup> After Pakistan tested its nuclear devices in May 1998, no specific official policy was made for Pakistani's nuclear strategy. However, policy statements of the top government officials provide sufficient material to construct the putative Pakistani nuclear doctrine and policy. Analysts contend that Pakistani officials favour ambiguity as a strategic edge, withholding explicit details about nuclear thresholds to prevent adversaries from exploiting potential vulnerabilities in their plans.<sup>20</sup> With regard to its nuclear arsenal, Pakistan does not adhere to the no first use concept like India does.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared that Pakistan's bomb was developed in interest of national self-defense to deter aggression, whether nuclear or conventional. Soon after the tests in 1998, President Pervez Musharraf stated in 2002 that if Pakistan is attacked, they will "respond with full might." In September of that year only a few months after our nuclear tests, during an address at United Nations General Assembly meeting, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made it very clear that Pakistan's nuclear Tests were conducted not to challenge the existing non-proliferation regime, nor to fulfill any great power ambitions. Our test in response to India actually aimed to create peace and stability in the region. Regarding its arsenal size, options for targeting, and thresholds for nuclear use, Pakistan has purposefully remained vague. As India's threat perception changed over time, all of these components changed as well. Another viewpoint of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine in its early stages is the concept of credible minimum deterrence. This was presented through various official statements, such as one made by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif after nuclear tests a year later in

1999. He stated: "Our commitment to preserving a credible minimum deterrent remains unchanged. We understand completely the risks and responsibilities that come with having nuclear weapons."

Pakistan nuclear policy is based on nuclear restraint, moderation and credible minimum deterrence.<sup>21</sup> Abdul Sattar, the Foreign Minister at that time, stated in November 1999: "The basis of our nuclear strategy will continue to be minimum nuclear deterrence. The minimum can't be quantified in static numbers. We would not get involve any nuclear or arm race competition. The Indian build-up would require reviewed and reevaluated." <sup>22</sup> The former Foreign Minister stated in 2000: "As India maintains the size of its minimum deterrence flexible and adaptable to an altered environment, Pakistan will undoubtedly have to keep its deterrence lively in a similar way."<sup>23</sup>

### ***First Use Policy (FU)***

Pakistan has not released an official nuclear use strategy since testing its nuclear weapons in May 1998. According to Pakistani authorities, being vague benefits Pakistan more since it prevents adversaries from learning about their weak areas in their plans and prevents information about what precise actions can prompt a nuclear reaction from them. It is unclear whether or not this ambiguity actually contributes to stability. On the other hand, the lack of an official, public doctrine does not imply the absence of one at all. Credible clues on the nature of Pakistan's operational doctrine are provided by official declarations, interviews, and developments pertaining to nuclear weapons.<sup>24</sup>

Analysts have to interpret Pakistan's nuclear policy through the prism of political leaders' post-nuclear test remarks

because the nation does not have a defined nuclear doctrine. Pakistan's first use policy and nuclear weapon deployment threshold are also unclear. Analysts from Pakistan contend that by keeping enemies from determining Pakistan's red lines and possibly provoking a nuclear exchange, ambiguity in these areas strengthens deterrence.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD)***

After the nuclear test a year later Sharif stated that: "... in preserving the nuclear deterrence, we remain intensely aware of the risks and responsibilities arising from possession of nuclear weapons." In a November 1999 speech, the Foreign Minister, Abdul Sattar, stated: "More is not needed; we already have enough." However, he also said that: "... in order to maintain a strong deterrent, the current state of affairs requires updating and improving nuclear technology." General Pervaiz Musharraf stated that numbers were irrelevant "beyond a point" in 2003. He continued saying that Pakistan now possesses enough deterrent to ensure her security.<sup>26</sup> In 1999 during the administration of General Pervaiz Musharraf, Foreign Minister, Abdul Sattar epitomised Pakistan's nuclear policy framed within the context of deterrence rather than aggression. Sattar emphasised the defensive nature of Pakistan's nuclear strategy, aimed at ensuring national security and peace, rather than seeking regional dominance or great power status. He proposed a dynamic policy of maintaining a 'minimum nuclear deterrence,' suggesting a dynamic approach to determining what constitutes the minimum necessary arsenal, contingent on regional developments, especially India's military capabilities.



Basic elements of Pakistan's nuclear policy include nuclear restraint, stabilisation and minimum credible deterrence. A Pakistani official adds to this tenet's logic and dynamism: "Minimum can't be counted with fixed numbers. The Indian increase will require a re-evaluation." The credible minimum deterrence position of Pakistan has a flexibility that lets it adjust responses when India changes its strategies related to nuclear armaments and conventional forces. As India's Cold Start doctrine evolves, assuming fast military action against Pakistan while under possible nuclear threat from them (known as 'nuclear overhang'), Islamabad adjusted towards what they call full spectrum deterring approach.<sup>27</sup>

But through random comments or writings from officials, pointing to first-use as a "last option" in regular fights with India. This shows a believable least amount of deterrence capacity, concentrating more on staying alive than tactical or counterforce methods. However, the situation began to change in the early 2010s. In 2011, Pakistan carried out test firings for two short-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads with ranges: Nasr (60 km) and Abdali (180 km). Although the Pakistan military did not label these as TNWs, their restricted distances together with an analogy to the flexible response strategy employed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War made it possible for viewers to interpret those missiles as such. Even though the previous CMD policy is still in place, Pakistan's nuclear strategy and military position have been shifting over the last two decades from minimum credible deterrence to credible minimum deterrence.

## **Key Factors Influencing Nuclear Policy Dynamics**

### ***I. Technological Advancement***

### ***II. Security Dynamics***

Advancements in technology, concerns about security within a region, and the dynamics of internal politics all have an important effect on how nuclear policy develops. One example is that the Chinese nuclear test in 1964 was a significant factor in why India started conducting tests. Past happenings and developments like formulation India's nuclear doctrine in 1998 and its implementations in 2003 show us that India's approach to using its atomic power has evolved over time. If we compare with earlier ideas (NFU) policy which was shown by their draft doctrine from year 1999 where there are only two options: first use or punitive retaliation; now this change means there has been movement away from No First Use towards more ambiguous strategies is evident in the later draft doctrine from year 2003. The evolving nuclear posture of India, particularly its possible move from a (NFU) to a first use posture, adds unpredictability and triggers corresponding advancements in Pakistan's nuclear capabilities to ensure credible deterrence. While Pakistan keeps its nuclear posture ambiguous and tested its nuclear weapons in May 1998 without having a formal nuclear doctrine, its nuclear strategy has evolved over the years. Pakistan strategies has shifted from minimum credible deterrence to credible minimum deterrence, aligning with the concept of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD), focusing on stopping all types of aggression and keeping regional stability. Pakistan has chosen to gradually reveal its nuclear policy in a manner that neither confirms nor denies a first-use policy. The nuclear program of Pakistan has a core defensive strategy that allows for flexibility in reacting to

India, and it maintains deterrence against preemptive conventional attacks. The expansion of missile range, triad system, as well as comprehensive deterrent strategy present country's commitment to strategic uncertainty for deterring distinct kinds of threats coming from India. The ambiguity in nuclear doctrine has a two aspect it may be effective for flexibility and deterrence but also increase the possibility of misunderstanding and unintentional escalations. These components need to be balanced to maintain stability and reduce the risk of nuclear war. Strategic ambiguity is viewed from different perspective by different scholars believes it brings stability because it creates uncertainty about enemy intentions, reducing chances for an initial strike or rising antagonism.

### **Analysis**

Historical events and disparities in power dynamics have shaped India Pakistan nuclear policies. The aggressive neighborhood had an enormous impact on Pakistan strategic thinking, which mostly focuses on perceived threats, particularly from India. Pakistan upholds a defensive, minimum credible deterrence that is based on preserving national security rather than regional dominance. On the other hand, India's nuclear journey has evolved from the pre- nuclear era to developing nuclear strategies with major accomplishments and adaptations. The possible change in Pakistan's stated commitment to No First Use (NFU) could be seen as a significant alteration for Indian-Pakistani relations creating new uncertainties about both nations' strategic intentions and raising concerns regarding stability within the volatile region of South Asia. This shift might lead to pre-emptive strikes and counterforce strategies, triggering an

inadvertent escalation and serious consequences including full-scale conflict. The continuous development in India's nuclear posture, particularly the recent public debates about its policy, may point to a shift towards more clarity or possible reconsideration in future strategies.

In contrast, retired Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai's assessment of Pakistan nuclear doctrine shows the strategic expansion and adaptability within its deterrence structure which incorporates vertical and horizontal aspects to neutralise diverse threats posed from across India's borders. The current evolution in India's nuclear posture, especially recent deliberations about whether the country should maintain its (NFU) policy or not, might reflect a movement toward more transparency now or possible reevaluation later on. The expression of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine by retired Lt. Gen Khalid Kidwai focuses on the comprehensive growth and adjustability within their deterrence structure which combines both vertical and horizontal features for countering various threats from different directions across the Indo-Pakistan frontiers. However, it still leaves some room for interpretation as they aim to balance between being too specific and staying vague on purpose. Keeping up with this strategy of ambiguity can potentially help stabilise situations since unpredictability keeps adversaries unsure about responses. However, there are also risks, such as misunderstandings leading to unintentional conflicts, such as scholars like Vipin Narang pointed out, stating that "*strategic ambiguity can work until it doesn't.*"

## **Conclusion**

Nuclear policies traditionally have always included some level of strategic ambiguity, even if the transparency varied. India officially declared its No First Use policy in 2003, while the ongoing debates regarding India's no first use policy and strategic shift towards pre-emptive strikes and counterforce strategies could trigger inadvertent escalation and a series of consequences, including full-scale conflict. Pakistan's strategic ambiguity accentuates the dynamic nature of nuclear deterrence strategies in response to changing geopolitical realities. This intentional uncertainty has helped maintain stability by keeping rivals unsure about each other's intentions. However, it also carries the risk of misinterpretation and unintentional escalations. To prevent misunderstandings and unexpected escalations, ensure transparency and confidence-building measures between the two countries. While ambiguity can increase deterrence, openness and mutual understanding are crucial for building trust and reinforcing strategic stability. India and Pakistan require to carefully navigate a balance between flexibility and openness in their nuclear doctrines, considering evolving security dynamics. Dialogue, transparency, and risk reduction initiatives are crucial for preserving peace and security in South Asia.

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