

The India-Pakistan Confrontation. The Dangers of Nuclear Conflict in South Asia?

Foreign Policy Diary

By [South Front](#)

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The Pakistani military strategists rely on their nuclear arsenal as a main counter-measure against a possible Indian aggression.

On October 19, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Aizaz Chaudhry officially confirmed that Islamabad has plans to use low-yield nuclear weapons to impede advancing Indian troops in case of a military conflict. The Pkiastan's attitude is a response to a new Indian military doctrine, named "Cold Start". New Delhi denies the existence of Cold Start as a concept, attributing the terminology to off-the-cuff remarks by Indian officers. Nonetheless, India has been implementing a strategy that has greatly alarmed Pakistan, driving Islamabad to invest in tactical nuclear weapons and alter its own nuclear posture.

Indeed, it's nothing new in a new Indian military doctrine. New Delhi started to develop it after the conflict between countries in 2011. After the December 13, 2001 attack on the Indian parliament building in New Delhi by suspected Kashmiri militants, India launched Operation Parakram which failed. It took India's strike corps nearly three weeks to reach the Pakistani border, by which time Pakistan had effectively mobilized its own defenses. The very same time, international pressure on India became acute and India was pushed to abandon the plans of intervention.

Subsequently, the Indian military has adopted a far more proactive strategy relying on immediate offensive operations against Pakistan. The offensive will be spearheaded by eight cohesive operational maneuver groups with significant artillery and immediately air support. They are deployed close to the Pakistani border at a higher level of readiness and able to launch operations within 96 hours. The strategy aims to achieve shallow territorial penetrations in Pakistan — not exceeding 80 kilometers. If this occurs, Islamabad will be in a complicated situation to use nuclear weapons at own territory amid the knowledge that Indian battle groups would not aim to advance deeper into Pakistan.

Islamabad is aware of the widening gap in conventional military capabilities between itself and India and has taken an asymmetric approach to the new threat, building up and relying on an arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons, lower yield nuclear weapons designed for direct use on the battlefield against enemy forces. Pakistan is calculating that tactical nuclear weapons would essentially counter India's conventional military superiority. Although it is a nuclear power, India does not operate or plan to develop tactical nuclear weapons. So, Pakistan will have an advance. In turn, this situation is conducting additional risks of a wider

escalation into a strategic nuclear exchange that might include non-military targets such as cities.

Thus, India has adopted a quick-launch posture which will be hardly de-escalated by international diplomacy's measures. It won't be enough time for this. In turn, the Pakistani defense and deterrence capabilities are grounded on a usage of the tactical nuclear weapons.

This is raising the possibility of a full-scale nuclear war in South Asia in case of a potential conflict between Pakistan and India. Furthermore, India's rapid response doctrine can be triggered by a terrorist attack as, for instance, the Lashkar-e-Taiba's 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Considering the fact that India and Pakistan actively use militant groups against each other, any terror attack could conduct a full-scale conflict. Separately, Saudi Arabia is financing a major part of the Pakistani nuclear program. The Saudi authorities likely consider the Pakistani asymmetric strategy as a useful approach for themselves. Considering a low combat potential of the Saudi military forces, tactical nuclear weapons could become the only security guarantee for the current regime in Riyadh. At a later stage, the nuclear cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan will probably lead to the Riyadh's attempt to become a nuclear state without any additional exploration in the sphere.

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