



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**A MOST DANGEROUS PLACE: INVESTIGATING  
PAKISTAN'S IRREGULAR WARFARE CAMPAIGN  
IN KASHMIR UNDER THE NUCLEAR SHADOW**

by

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December 2020

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC, 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY</b> (Leave blank)		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> December 2020		<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> A MOST DANGEROUS PLACE: INVESTIGATING PAKISTAN'S IRREGULAR WARFARE CAMPAIGN IN KASHMIR UNDER THE NUCLEAR SHADOW			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Matthew D. Hanes				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b> A	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  For more than thirty years, Pakistan has conducted an irregular warfare campaign in Kashmir to wrest control of the disputed region from India while also leveraging its nuclear weapons capability. This approach has frustrated a decisive Indian response, precipitated multiple crises, and risked nuclear exchange. This thesis analyzes Pakistan's irregular warfare-nuclear deterrence strategy by evaluating Kashmir crises nested within three distinct periods of Pakistan's nuclear capability: de facto, overt, and advanced technology. The results suggest Pakistan has successfully employed irregular warfare under the nuclear umbrella within Kashmir, but has also incurred great cost by risking nuclear exchange, alienating the international community, and destabilizing itself through empowerment of violent jihadist groups. As one looks forward to the implications of Great Power Competition upon the Indian subcontinent, the dynamics have dramatically shifted as the U.S. and China compete for influence. While the U.S. moves closer to India, and China to Pakistan, potential polarization of the Kashmir problem presents additional nuclear escalation risks. However, emerging opportunities to leverage the global powers' common interest in preventing terrorism could prove a catalyst for South Asian stabilization. Pakistan's Kashmir strategy can also provide insights regarding how current or future nuclear-armed regional powers may choose to employ irregular warfare to optimize their influence.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Great Power Competition, India, irregular warfare, Kashmir, nuclear escalation, nuclear proliferation, Pakistan, terrorism			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 103	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UU	

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**A MOST DANGEROUS PLACE: INVESTIGATING PAKISTAN'S  
IRREGULAR WARFARE CAMPAIGN IN KASHMIR UNDER THE  
NUCLEAR SHADOW**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS  
(IRREGULAR WARFARE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
December 2020**

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## **ABSTRACT**

For more than thirty years, Pakistan has conducted an irregular warfare campaign in Kashmir to wrest control of the disputed region from India while also leveraging its nuclear weapons capability. This approach has frustrated a decisive Indian response, precipitated multiple crises, and risked nuclear exchange. This thesis analyzes Pakistan's irregular warfare-nuclear deterrence strategy by evaluating Kashmir crises nested within three distinct periods of Pakistan's nuclear capability: de facto, overt, and advanced technology. The results suggest Pakistan has successfully employed irregular warfare under the nuclear umbrella within Kashmir, but has also incurred great cost by risking nuclear exchange, alienating the international community, and destabilizing itself through empowerment of violent jihadist groups. As one looks forward to the implications of Great Power Competition upon the Indian subcontinent, the dynamics have dramatically shifted as the U.S. and China compete for influence. While the U.S. moves closer to India, and China to Pakistan, potential polarization of the Kashmir problem presents additional nuclear escalation risks. However, emerging opportunities to leverage the global powers' common interest in preventing terrorism could prove a catalyst for South Asian stabilization. Pakistan's Kashmir strategy can also provide insights regarding how current or future nuclear-armed regional powers may choose to employ irregular warfare to optimize their influence.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Association
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
J&K	Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir region
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
LoC	Line of Control
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Treat of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
PAEC	Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TRF	The Resistance Front
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife, Kelsey, for her tremendous support during this academic journey. I would also like to thank my advisors, Dr. Tristan Volpe and Dr. Kalev Sepp, for their critical analysis and candid feedback of my work.

Finally, I want to remember the past and present members of the Special Forces Regiment, especially those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in our nation's irregular wars. *De Oppresso Liber.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*“The most dangerous place in the world today, I think you could argue, is the Indian subcontinent and the line of control in Kashmir.”*<sup>1</sup>

— U.S. President Bill Clinton, 10 March 2000

### A. INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

Conflict precipitating from within Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K)—ranging from low intensity through conventional war to nuclear escalation—has raged in its current form for more than thirty years. Central to this ongoing crisis is Pakistan’s ongoing revisionist efforts to wrest control of J&K through an irregular warfare campaign while leveraging nuclear deterrence to avoid a decisive Indian response. Pakistan, the conventionally weaker power vis-à-vis India, has supported a protracted Kashmiri resistance since becoming a latent nuclear power in the 1980s that continues today.<sup>2</sup> Frustrated by the potential nuclear escalation, India has struggled to tailor a decisive response against the irregular warfare campaign within J&K.

This project addresses the relationship between Pakistan’s nuclear program and that of its irregular war campaign within J&K. This thesis analyzes Pakistan’s ability to employ irregular warfare within J&K while also maintaining nuclear deterrence against India over the last thirty years of conflict. It also identifies the consequences of this approach, its provocative nature, and the disturbing reality of potential nuclear exchange in South Asia. Analyzing Pakistan’s irregular warfare campaign within J&K, coupled with its nuclear capability, can provide insights into how regional powers with nuclear capability (or aspirations) may choose to engage in hybrid warfare. Therefore, this thesis examines: How

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<sup>1</sup>“The White House: Office of the Press Secretary — Remarks by the President on One America Initiative Religious Community Call to Action: [1],” *M2 Presswire*, Mar 13, 2000, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/446202330?accountid=12702>.

<sup>2</sup> Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 9.

has Pakistan leveraged nuclear weapons to support irregular warfare in Kashmir and how can Pakistan's approach be applied to regional nuclear powers?

## **B. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Analysis of the interaction between irregular warfare and nuclear deterrence spanned the spectrum of warfare and encompasses an equally broad expanse of literature. The sources described below provided an understanding of nuclear warfare, irregular warfare, and South Asia-specific issues relevant to this study. First, the author focused on theoretical frameworks associated with both nuclear deterrence and irregular warfare. Thomas Schelling's *Arms and Influence* and *The Strategy of Conflict* along with Glen Snyder's *Deterrence and Defense* demonstrated the basis for understanding the deterrence relationship between two nuclear-armed competitors. Among these considerations were analyses of the cost of fighting, the value of the objective at hand, probability of adversary responses, and the ability to successfully hold the opponent's values at stake.<sup>3</sup>

Additional theoretical analysis with respect to irregular warfare was also conducted. This included Mao Tse Tung's definitive work *On Guerrilla Warfare* which provided an illustration of the basic principles for raising and employing a resistance. Although Mao's writing was in the context of a revolutionary uprising against Japanese occupiers in a pre-nuclear world, his observations linking irregular warfare activities with that of the political objectives of a country proved instructive. Mao consistently cited the importance of tying a well-organized resistance movement to that of its national goals.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in *Deception and Deterrence*, John Norton Moore described the fundamental support of nuclear powers to assist foreign groups to achieve limited objectives as opposed to direct confrontation leading to nuclear escalation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Glenn Herald Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, and Samuel B. Griffith, *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare* (Auckland: Pickle Partners Publishing, 2014), 29.

<sup>5</sup> John Norton Moore, *Deception and Deterrence in "Wars of National Liberation," State-Sponsored Terrorism and Other Forms of Secret Warfare* (Durham: Academic Press, 1997), 82.

The author also reviewed literature specifically related to nuclear dynamics within South Asia. Vipin Narang's *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era* provided analysis of nuclear deterrent postures that can be specifically applied to regional nuclear-armed powers, such as Pakistan. Narang acknowledged that regional powers typically do not enjoy the flexibility and capability of superpowers, and must optimize their nuclear deterrent capabilities in different ways.<sup>6</sup> Narang also described how regional powers choose their nuclear strategy through his Posture Optimization Theory. This framework illustrated the nuclear posture pursued by a nuclear-armed nation, "optimizes their force structure for their external security environment and their internal threat and constraints. That is, states carefully calculate what strategy they require to deter their likely foes and what they are organizationally and financially capable of doing, and optimize their choice of posture in response."<sup>7</sup> This approach emphasized the interaction between a state's threat perceptions, its menu of defense capabilities, and its stature within the international community.

The author also investigated the stability/instability paradox as it pertains to the nuclear deterrence-irregular warfare connection within J&K. Michael Krepon's definition of the stability/instability paradox stated that nuclear powers were likely to not fight direct wars against each other for fear of nuclear retaliation, but would resort to limited war on a broader scale. Thus, the likelihood of nuclear war decreased as the probability of limited, indirect conflict increased.<sup>8</sup> This concept provided context for Pakistan's employment of irregular warfare under the nuclear shadow within J&K. Other South Asia scholars offered additional perspectives regarding the stabilization effect, or lack thereof, within the region. In *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur opinions differed regarding Pakistan's nuclear posture. Ganguly asserted that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal provided a balancing effect within the region, specifically with India. This capability

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<sup>6</sup> Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Krepon, "The stability-instability paradox, misperception, and escalation control in South Asia," *Prospects for peace in South Asia* (2003), 261.

ensured that large-scale conventional warfare between the nations is unlikely and the adversaries will seek diplomatic solutions to escalatory issues. He contrasted this with the costly 1947 and 1965 wars between the countries over J&K that occurred prior to operational nuclear capability in South Asia.<sup>9</sup> Kapur disagreed, stating that Pakistan's nuclear capabilities provided space to challenge the status quo within South Asia because India would not risk decisive conventional campaign in response. He further cited the ongoing Pakistan-sponsored insurgency against Indian occupation has resulted in dangerous confrontation and escalation on multiple occasions since the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

Kapur presented additional research in *Jihad as Grand Strategy* that described Pakistan's history of irregular warfare to achieve strategic objectives against its superior adversaries. He also discussed the jihadi paradox which brought to light the negative internal consequences to Pakistan's empowerment of insurgent groups.<sup>11</sup> This observation provided important incites when evaluating the cost-benefits of employing an irregular warfare strategy and assisted the author with understanding the limitations of such an approach.

### **C. METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT BREAKDOWN**

This thesis is comprised of a pre-nuclear historic analysis of Pakistan and three case studies that examine various phases of Pakistan's nuclear capability and its corresponding irregular warfare campaign in Kashmir. Each case study focuses on a specific Kashmir crisis event precipitated by Pakistan-based irregular warfare; with each instance occurring in a distinct phase of Pakistan's nuclear program. In addition, each scenario describes interventions of the international community with regards to diplomatic and de-escalatory actions. The final chapter applies the aforementioned studies to the arising challenges associated with Great Power Competition and future revision-seeking nuclear armed regional powers. Thus, the thesis will proceed in the following sections:

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<sup>9</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 126.

1. Pakistan's Pre-Nuclear History and Early Security Dilemmas
2. Pakistan's Latent Nuclear Capability and 1990 Kashmir Crisis
3. 1998 Nuclear Testing and the Kargil War
4. Pakistan's Nuclear Modernization and the Pulwama Crisis
5. Findings and Application to Nuclear-Armed Regional Powers

## **1. Pakistan's Pre-nuclear History and Early Security Dilemmas**

This research investigates the evolution of Pakistan as a fledgling nation in 1947, its defeats against India, and its subsequent pursuit of nuclear weapons. This chapter analyzes Pakistan's clandestine nuclear program coupled with its support of jihadis to achieve strategic security. The author identifies key conditions, events, and decisions that resulted in Pakistan's irregular warfare-nuclear deterrence grand strategy.

This chapter provides the historical context from which the next three chapters demonstrate Pakistan's irregular warfare-nuclear deterrent relationship. In addition, it examines Pakistan's decision-making methodology prior to its possession of nuclear weapons. The author also identifies the changing demeanor, attitudes, and foreign policy decisions upon Pakistan's realization of nuclear capability. By illustrating the historical perspective, the author provides context for Pakistan's evolving deterrence and security strategy.

## **2. Pakistan's Latent Nuclear Capability and the 1990 Kashmir Crisis**

This case study analyzes Pakistan's early nuclear capability and its support of the Kashmir insurgency following the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan. The 1990 Kashmir crisis is specifically analyzed for two reasons. First, Pakistan achieved a position of de facto nuclear weapons capability thus propelling it into a unique class of nations.<sup>12</sup> Second, the internal conditions within J&K fomented a Kashmiri population weary of Indian misrule and open to Pakistan-supported insurgency.<sup>13</sup> With these new conditions

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<sup>12</sup> Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>13</sup> Paul S. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 98.

applied to Pakistan's ongoing security issues, the author analyzes the impacts on its security decision making process and posture within Kashmir.

### **3. 1998 Nuclear Test and the Kargil War**

This case study investigates Pakistan's 1998 nuclear testing and its corresponding status as an overt nuclear power; followed by its escalatory crisis and limited war against India within J&K. These conditions ultimately make the Kargil War a unique situation: nuclear powers conducting kinetic combat operations directly against each other in support of limited objectives.<sup>14</sup> This situation allows the author to analyze not only Pakistan's employment of irregular warfare in conjunction with overt nuclear weapon capability, but also evaluate India's reaction, risk analysis, and response when faced with this approach.

### **4. Pakistan's Nuclear Modernization and the Pulwama Crisis**

Following the Kargil War and normalizing of relations with India to a tense peace over the Kashmir region, Pakistan continued to modernize its nuclear weapons capability to maintain positive nuclear deterrence against the more advanced Indian force.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the 2019 Pulwama crisis represents an escalatory flashpoint in which India responded decisively with increased troop presence, revocation of J&K's autonomous status, and internet blackouts within the region. This situation escalated to active combat and eventually deescalated, but ultimately remains unresolved.<sup>16</sup> The ongoing crisis represents the most significant escalation of hostilities over J&K in two decades. With Pakistan's increased nuclear capability and a heavy-handed Indian response to insurgent actions within Kashmir, the author argues that an emerging—and uniquely dangerous—situation exists within the conflict's nuclear deterrence/irregular warfare relationship.

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<sup>14</sup> Mark S. Bell and Julia MacDonald, "How Dangerous Was Kargil? Nuclear Crises in Comparative Perspective," *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 136.

<sup>15</sup> "Pakistan's Nuclear Capabilities," Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, August 29, 2019, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/pakistans-nuclear-capabilities/>.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Kugelman, "India and Pakistan Are Edging Closer to War in 2020." *Foreign Policy*, December 31, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/31/afghanistan-taliban-nuclear-india-pakistan-edging-closer-war-2020/>.

## **5. Findings and Application to Nuclear-Armed Regional Powers**

The final section summarizes the findings and trends within Pakistan's journey as a regional actor throughout the spectrum of nuclear capability and its corresponding support of irregular forces in Kashmir. In addition, the author applies the ongoing Kashmir crisis to future polarization of the region within the emerging tensions between U.S. and China for influence in South Asia. This section identifies common interests in the region, but also cautions the potential for greater escalatory risk. Finally, the author applies Pakistan's approach to other regional powers that may seek nuclear weapons and choose to employ irregular warfare capabilities.

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## **II. PAKISTAN'S PRE-NUCLEAR HISTORY AND EARLY SECURITY DILEMMAS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the historical perspective necessary to understand the follow-on case studies which analyze the relationship between Pakistan's irregular warfare campaign in Kashmir and its various stages of nuclear capability. The first section will explain the early history of Pakistan, beginning with the decolonization of British India. It will describe the three significant wars that Pakistan fought against India from 1947 to 1971. This section will identify the successes, failures, and corresponding strategic decisions made by Pakistan in the wake of its emergence as a nation. The second section will focus on Pakistan's nuclear program, describing its origins, struggles, and pathways to the bomb. It will also describe Pakistan's leverage of the Soviet-Afghan War to facilitate its final measures to achieve nuclear latency. This section also identifies Pakistan's reorientation toward irregular warfare in Kashmir through successful employment of mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

### **B. PAKISTAN'S EMERGENCE AS A NATION**

In August 1947, Great Britain officially relinquished control of colonial India creating the countries of India and Pakistan. Under the recently developed two-nation theory, which divided the colony along ethnic boundaries, emerged the Muslim-aligned state of Pakistan. However The Partition, as it was known, of colonial India was marked by haste and disorganization. Great Britain sought to quickly divest from its eastern territory and focus entirely on repairing the catastrophic damage from World War Two. This presented the fledgling nation with serious challenges that defined its early history.<sup>17</sup>

Geographically, Pakistan's sovereign territory was comprised of West (present day Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). These territories were separated by roughly 1,000 miles. This caused numerous command and control issues between the entities as

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<sup>17</sup> Crispin Bates, The Hidden Story of Partition and its Legacies, *British Broadcasting Company*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/partition1947\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/partition1947_01.shtml).

well as divided Pakistan's military assets to protect the entirety of its territory. In addition, West Pakistan was physically narrow with limited strategic depth to defend its national assets. Specifically, its major cities of Islamabad and Lahore sat within 100 miles of India's borders presenting a potential security dilemma. The India-Pakistan division also favored India economically as the prime agricultural and industrial areas remained within Indian borders.<sup>18</sup>

Militarily, Pakistan did not fare any better during The Partition. The Partition agreement stated that Pakistan would receive 17.5 percent of British India's financial assets and 30 percent of its military resources. However, this separation never occurred in full as India recognized that it was within its best interest to limit Pakistan's strength. Once The Partition was complete, Pakistan had only received approximately 15 percent of its promised ordnance.<sup>19</sup>

Politically, Pakistan also suffered. The Indian state had inherited a well-organized and effective administration system from Britain allowing India a comparatively simple transition within its bureaucracy. In contrast, Pakistan's political institutions were never developed because Britain had primarily utilized the region as a frontier expanse meant to provide a defensive western buffer. The resultant political and ideological turmoil between Pakistan's government, military, and intelligence communities plagued the nation's stability and continues to threaten its security today.<sup>20</sup>

Pakistan's disaffection following The Partition precipitated distrust and conflict with India. Three wars will be discussed to demonstrate the evolution of Pakistan's employment of proxy forces to deter aggressions: the First Kashmir War, the Second Kashmir War, and the Bangladesh War. The lessons learned comparing Pakistan's success and failures with respect to its irregular warfare campaigns set the stage for its modern employment that will be analyzed in follow-on chapters.

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<sup>18</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Jerry Meyrle, *Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: A Brief History*, DRP-2012-U-003250-Final (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analyses, 2012), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 35.

### C. FIRST KASHMIR WAR

The First Kashmir War commenced immediately upon British India's division into the modern nations of Pakistan and India in 1947. During The Partition, the question regarding which nation the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) would ultimately become a member remained. This province contained a super-majority Muslim population (approximately 75%), aligning it culturally with Pakistan under the two-nation theory.<sup>21</sup> However, the ruler of Kashmir Maharaja Hari Singh was Hindu and closely tied to India. J&K remained unaligned even following the August 1947 Partition. This situation presented Pakistan with a dilemma. In its estimation, the two-nation theory justified acquisition of J&K on account of the region's preponderance of Muslim citizens. Afterall, Pakistan was created as a nation within this context quite literally during the same time period.<sup>22</sup>

The acquisition of J&K could potentially reinforce Pakistan's Islamic identity and provide a uniting factor for the fledgling nation.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Kashmir resides on a resource economically essential for a growing population: fresh water. Several rivers flowing from the Siachen Glacier weave through J&K, making it susceptible to diversion by India to the detriment of Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan had a domestic incentive to acquire this region as well.<sup>24</sup>

Although the logic for acquisition of J&K by Pakistan appeared legitimate, the questions of ways and means remained. Pakistan's military and command structure presented no match for India's professional forces and a conventional attempt to wrest control of J&K would assuredly result in war with India. However, Pakistan did have a shared cultural identity and had developed relationships with Islamic leaders within J&K. This presented Pakistan with an opportunity to support an internal J&K uprising. Within these conditions, Pakistan chose to pursue conflict that would foment a grass-roots Muslim

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<sup>21</sup> Mushtaqur Rahman, *Divided Kashmir* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 18.

<sup>23</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Shawn Snow, "Analysis: Why Kashmir Matters," *The Diplomat*, September 19, 2016.

uprising against the Hindu-controlled J&K. Furthermore, Pakistan could facilitate a larger offensive from Pakistan tribesmen willing to conduct jihad to liberate Muslim Kashmiris from the Hindu government of India. The combined effort of these factions would facilitate a rapid advance upon J&K's capital of Srinagar, completing a *fait accompli*. This situation would force the Maharaja to accede to Pakistan and prevent India's timely response to counter Pakistan's offensive.<sup>25</sup>

Pakistan's approach would rely heavily on deep-rooted Muslim animosity towards the Hindu government within the Poonch region of J&K to foment rebellion while the Pakistan military provided non-attributable weapons and materiel support. This initial phase would destabilize the Maharaja's regime and set conditions for tribesmen from Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province to invade J&K from the west, with their objective being to occupy the Kashmir Valley and its capital of Srinagar. Pakistan would facilitate this unconventional warfare campaign through initial planning and resourcing, but would not contribute significant support during the combat phase to prevent attribution.<sup>26</sup>

Pakistan began the war on October 22, 1947, following months of planning and resourcing. The 4<sup>th</sup> J&K Infantry in Poonch successfully mutinied against its Indian leadership, established control, and facilitated the invasion of the Pakistani tribesmen. The combined force began its advance toward Srinagar, but lost momentum as tribesmen halted their movement in favor of pillaging the countryside. This operational pause created space for India's timely reaction.<sup>27</sup>

In response to the rapid and surprising advance, Hari Singh pleaded to India for military support to protect his regime. India agreed to respond on October 26, but only after Singh committed to accede J&K to India once hostilities had concluded. India quickly mobilized, deployed, and stymied the Muslim advance on Srinagar. Akhbar Kahn, the Pakistani orchestrator and field commander, attempted to leverage support from the combined group under further auspices of jihad, but his efforts proved futile when the

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<sup>25</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 22.

hodgepodge and undisciplined irregular force balked at these orders. The Indian Army expelled the invasion force from the Kashmir Valley and successfully protected Srinagar by the end of November 1947.<sup>28</sup>

Pakistan and India fought to a stalemate through the winter months of early 1948. India attempted a Spring offensive to totally reestablish the pre-war J&K boundary, but was ultimately unsuccessful. Pakistan chose to escalate the conflict by committing conventional forces upon a new front into the Ladakh region of J&K, but was quickly repulsed. Indian threats of a large-scale invasion of Pakistan along with diplomatic engagement with the United Nations (UN) to mandate total control of the pre-war J&K proved unsuccessful. An UN-brokered ceasefire on January 1, 1949, concluded the war, with Pakistan occupying a third of the J&K region and India retaining the eastern two-thirds of the territory.<sup>29</sup>

Although the First Kashmir War ended largely as a stalemate, with India gaining control of the most important areas of J&K—the Kashmir Valley and Srinagar—Pakistan did gain insights regarding irregular warfare within the region that would affect its future approach. First, Pakistan experienced the positive and negative ramifications of a limited-support unconventional warfare campaign. In addition, the call to unification in support of Muslim ethnic groups proved a somewhat effective catalyst for a revisionist campaign.<sup>30</sup>

Pakistan chose to equip and employ the Kashmir uprisers and Pakistani tribesman while limiting their connection to the state. However, they did not provide additional military training in tactics or effectively organize and discipline these units. Pakistan prioritized an approach that would decrease the probability of connection between the Pakistani state and the invaders. This approach assumed symmetry in intentions between the irregular troops and that of the Pakistani state: a swift occupation on Srinagar. Although the troops moved rapidly to within 35 miles of the capital, the irregulars lost momentum.

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<sup>28</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Arif Jamal, *Shadow War* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2009), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 86.

The responsive Indian force drove the irregulars from Baramula by early November, with the tribesmen retiring from the battlefield, convinced of defeat.<sup>31</sup>

Although this operation did initially mask Pakistan's support to the irregular effort, it failed to provide the necessary command and control to ensure that the objective was realized. Had a greater presence of cadre been present to influence, direct, and support the tribesmen, perhaps Srinagar may have fallen. However, the element's lack of focus provided India the ability to respond quickly and decisively by airlifting a response force directly to the Srinagar airport and quickly repel the offensive.<sup>32</sup>

Ideological fervor propelled the initial uprising and motivated Pakistani tribesman to action. However, the Islamic identity did not coalesce the force enough to see through the entire operation. Although unsuccessful in achieving lasting effects, Pakistan would use the call to jihad to motivate its constituency in the future.<sup>33</sup>

#### **D. SECOND KASHMIR WAR**

Although the First Kashmir War ended in stalemate, Pakistan remained committed to the accession of J&K. Aware of the undisciplined and ill-planned irregular warfare approach employed in 1947, Pakistan would employ a more aggressive unconventional warfare campaign. This involved a cadre of Pakistani Special Services Group soldiers to motivate, train, equip, and lead irregulars from Pakistani Kashmir in guerilla warfare operations. Recent bouts of intense anti-governmental unrest would then tip the balance in favor of Pakistan in the region. Then, a follow-on conventional operation would consolidate gains and reinforce positions in the Kashmir Valley, resulting in seizure of the province. The two phases of this operation were referred to as Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*, 13.

Pakistan's plan to conquer J&K hinged upon two assumptions that turned out to be false: the Kashmiri population would rise in violent rebellion when supported with Pakistan assistance and that India was not poised to respond with overwhelming military force. During the infiltration phase of Operation Gibraltar, the Pakistani force successfully inserted 7,500 fighters into J&K in three weeks. Although the forces had infiltrated with success, Kashmiris did not respond as suspected. In fact, Kashmiri citizens were the first to compromise these fighters by alerting Indian authorities. India responded quickly, sealing off the Kashmiri border to J&K thereby isolating the infiltrators and rendering them ineffective.<sup>35</sup>

Pakistan ordered Operation Grand Slam to begin on September 1, 1965, but its mobilization proved disorganized and sluggish. India responded overwhelmingly and repelled the Pakistan Army's advance. The Indians escalated the conflict beyond J&K and propelled a massive offensive toward Lahore and Sialkot within Pakistan's territory. The belligerents eventually fought to a stalemate that was resolved by a UN ceasefire two weeks later that reestablished the antebellum boundaries.<sup>36</sup>

Although unable to achieve Pakistan's objectives, Pakistan achieved operational success during its planning, infiltration, and employment phases of Operation Gibraltar. The irregular force was able to establish surprise and initially attrite Indian forces to gain operational momentum. However, Pakistan failed to understand the operational environment and set conditions within J&K to ensure a massive and rapid overthrow of Indian forces. This was largely due to Pakistani leadership prioritizing secrecy for this operation. Thus, the J&K resistance leaderships' opinions were not solicited on this approach. Because they mistakenly assessed the Muslim disturbances to be stronger than they were, Pakistan incorrectly assessed the J&K population's willingness to violently rebel. Furthermore, Operation Grand Slam's reliance on conventional forces proved to be disorganized and improperly executed. India eventually suppressed both, but not before irregular troops had inflicted significant losses and demonstrated India's vulnerable

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<sup>35</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 56.

political control within J&K. Thus, from an irregular warfare perspective, Pakistan viewed this approach as a viable option for success.<sup>37</sup> After its experience in the 1971 Bangladesh War and its devastating conventional defeat, the irregular warfare approach became even more attractive in the face of a more technically advanced adversary.

The jihadist phase of this operation illuminated positive and negative components of the irregular warfare campaign. First, the religion-fused irregular force from Pakistan proved to be motivated, focused, and capable. This reinforced the use of jihad to leverage the movement. However, Pakistan grossly miscalculated the Kashmiri willingness to overthrow its local government, even with its longstanding grievances. It became evident that Pakistan would need to cooperate more closely with Kashmiri dissenters prior to conducting irregular operations, rather than assume the mere presence of Pakistani forces would sway popular support. Kashmiris valued independence and would not blindly follow Pakistan's wishes.<sup>38</sup> Thus, greater investment toward building underground networks within J&K that could influence the population, recruit fighters, and train them for operations was required. This would allow the force to increase its military prowess and enhance the likelihood of success when encountering a robust Indian response.<sup>39</sup>

## **E. BANGLADESH WAR**

In contrast to the First and Second Kashmir Wars that employed a degree of successful irregular force, Pakistani military operations during the Bangladesh War were almost entirely conventional. The war resulted in a complete loss for Pakistan: significant degradation to its warfighting capacity and greater geographic isolation with its loss of East Pakistan (Bangladesh).<sup>40</sup> The war began with India-supported uprisings in East Pakistan followed by assaults of Indian troops in November of 1971. To divert attention from its beleaguered force in East Pakistan, President Yahya Kahn ordered an attack on various airbases within India from West Pakistan on December 3. This justified India's

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<sup>37</sup> Meyrle, *Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: A Brief History*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 65.



conventional invasion of East Pakistan and a corresponding offensive against West Pakistan which devastated the air and naval headquarters in Peshawar and Karachi. Pakistan's incursions into India were easily defeated, as India successfully leveraged its two-to-one to 1 conventional military advantage.<sup>41</sup>

After 14 days of combat, Pakistan's Army was completely defeated. Over 9,000 Pakistani soldiers were killed along with more than 200 tanks and 75 aircraft destroyed. India suffered approximately a third of these losses. Humiliatingly, upwards of 90,000 Pakistani soldiers had surrendered and 5,000 square kilometers of Pakistan's sovereign territory had been secured by Indian forces at the end of hostilities.<sup>42</sup>

## **F. POST-BANGLADESH WAR INITIATIVES**

Immediately following Pakistan's loss of Bangladesh, disgraced President Yahya Khan stepped down and former Foreign Minister Zulfikar Bhutto assumed control of the nation. His first order was the negotiation of war termination conditions. The Simla Accords officially relinquished control of Bangladesh from Pakistan. However, Bhutto did secure the release of 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war and retained the 5,000 square kilometers of sovereign territory overwhelmed by Indian forces during the war.<sup>43</sup> Of note, the Simla Accord established the Line of Control (LoC) between Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and Indian-controlled J&K as recognized by the international community in present day.<sup>44</sup>

Bhutto then reassessed Pakistan's revisionist goals within Kashmir. He decided to de-value Pakistani-supported irregular warfare in the near term. The risk of escalation with India during a time of utmost asymmetry in military capability presented an unacceptable risk. However, the issue remained present as Bhutto stated in 1972 regarding the Kashmir conflict: "I cannot go to war. Not in the next 5, 10, or 15 years ... if tomorrow the people

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<sup>41</sup> Rahman, *Divided Kashmir*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Boewe, "Indian-Pakistan Wars," in *Encyclopedia of the Developing World*, ed. Thomas M. Leonard Rutledge (New York: Rutledge, 2006), 806.

<sup>43</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Happymon Jacob, *Line On Fire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 16.

of Kashmir start a freedom movement ... we will be with them ... we will fight if we want to fight. ... this is an eternal position.”<sup>45</sup> Although Kashmir remained an important issue, Bhutto understood through Pakistan’s experience that such revisionist claims required greater preparation. Conditions needed to be properly set—internal and external to J&K—for the policy to work. Decisive to this revisionist mentality happened to be the very factor that would also deter existential threats: nuclear weapons. In fact, Bhutto’s claims proved accurate as Paul Kapur points out in *Dangerous Deterrent*: “1972 through 1989 was relatively peaceful both in quantitative and qualitative terms. 186 of the 216 months during this period were completely free of militarized disputes, and the disputes that did occur remained at fairly low hostility levels.”<sup>46</sup> The resurgence in violence within Kashmir occurred as Pakistan’s nuclear dream was fully realized following this time period.

Internationally, Bhutto reassessed his relationship with the West. During its early history, Pakistan found itself in the middle of the larger Cold War, dealing with varying interests between the United States, Soviet Union, and China. As a fledgling nation, Pakistan sought protection from these powers at different periods. Pakistan had entered into the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which provided a counter to Soviet-aligned India. As Pakistan drew closer to the U.S., this provoked the Soviet Union to strengthen its relationship with India and Afghanistan to provide it further regional support.<sup>47</sup>

In President Bhutto’s estimation, the partnership with the U.S. had not yielded the international leverage or regional protection Pakistan required to ensure its sovereignty, but had simply enhanced Cold War tensions in the region. This was especially evident when the U.S. took punitive action against Pakistan by withdrawing military aid during the Second Kashmir War of 1965. The Bangladesh War further separated Pakistan from U.S. interests, as the U.S. deferred the diplomatic space for the Simla Accords to be brokered

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<sup>45</sup> Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul. Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>46</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*. 93.

<sup>47</sup> Hassan Feroz Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 24.

by the Soviet Union. In response, Pakistan withdrew from SEATO and cut ties with its former colonial rulers by leaving the British Commonwealth of Nations.<sup>48</sup> Although Pakistan maintained steady relations with China in their “all weather friendship” China did not come to its defense over Bangladesh for fear of escalating a regional war with India.<sup>49</sup> It became apparent that South Asia issues were not of the utmost importance to the larger nations. Pakistan served as a proxy to further their interests, but these powers would not expend extensive capital to protect Pakistan from India.<sup>50</sup>

The Bhutto Administration then sought to increase its relationship with Middle Eastern Muslim countries. In 1972, Bhutto made two visits to the region to shore up diplomatic and financial support. In addition, Pakistan hosted the Islamic Summit Conference in 1974 to address a myriad of ongoing issues within the Middle East. This conference proved to be successful at drawing support from Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iran; relationships that would prove vital to Pakistan’s aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons.<sup>51</sup>

India’s self-described “peaceful nuclear explosion” (PNE) in 1974 furthered Bhutto’s “us vs. them” narrative. Upon demonstration of this capability, Bhutto introduced the concept of an “Islamic Bomb.” He reasoned that Western democratic nations, Communists, and Hindus all had this capability. To stay relevant and gain prestige, a Muslim country must attain nuclear weapons status. Among Islamic nations, Pakistan was best poised to do so. Bhutto’s assessment was met with overwhelming support from Pakistan’s population along with external Islamic actors.<sup>52</sup>

The Pakistan government’s appeal to Islamic nations in the Middle East was wildly successful as multiple countries provided financial and technical assistance in support of the bomb throughout the decade. Because of the immense financial costs of a nuclear weapons program coupled with Pakistan’s deleterious status following the Bangladesh

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<sup>48</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 73.

War, external investment was essential. Libya's financial assistance to Pakistan's nuclear program is estimated to be as much as \$500 million. In addition, Libyan-owned uranium deposits in Chad as well as 450 tons of yellow cake were provided to Pakistan. In return, Pakistan agreed to share nuclear technology with Libyan scientists.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Bhutto secured upwards of \$900 million in loans from Muslim states, primarily Saudi Arabia and Iran, to fund fuel cycle facilities required for nuclear energy production.<sup>54</sup>

## **G. PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM**

Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear energy began with the assistance of the U.S. during President Dwight Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program in 1954. This program attempted to control the proliferation of nuclear material and technical knowledge to countries desiring the benefits of nuclear energy. In turn, the receiving countries would agree to forego nuclear weapons in the future while also providing the United States access for monitoring of their program. With support of this program, Pakistan founded its Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) in 1957.<sup>55</sup>

The PAEC initially sought nuclear technology principally for energy production to support its growing population and ameliorate its lack of internal energy resources.<sup>56</sup> However, this changed with the growing asymmetry in defense between Pakistan and India and the region's constant state of posturing or outright conflict since 1947. A growing influential population within the Pakistani government, led by future President Zulfikar Bhutto, began communicating a desire for nuclear weapons to counter India. In addition, India had signaled an intent to pursue nuclear weapons following China's October 16, 1964, successful nuclear explosion. The Second Kashmir War of 1965 war had also demonstrated a level of conventional military disparity between India and Pakistan. It was in this context that Bhutto's now infamous quote emphatically referenced Pakistan's need

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<sup>53</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>56</sup> Tehmina Mahmood. "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Pakistan and India." *Pakistan Horizon* 48, no. 3 (July 1, 1995): 86.

to achieve a nuclear weapon at all cost, even if it meant “eating grass.” Upon completion of the Bangladesh War post-hostilities, Bhutto set upon rebuilding Pakistan amidst a time of depleted power and low morale. The utmost priority was acquiring nuclear weapons to prevent another catastrophic defeat at the hand of India. India’s 1974 PNE in many ways vindicated Bhutto’s approach and justified Pakistan’s efforts to meet India’s capability on the subcontinent.<sup>57</sup> Pakistan’s ongoing security concerns and its distrust of the international community, along with India’s refusal to sign the landmark Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), informed Pakistan’s decision not to as well. These security concerns, in Pakistan’s estimation, were validated following its bloody and embarrassing defeat in 1971 to India.<sup>58</sup>

Pakistan’s post-Bangladesh War quest for nuclear weapons is characterized by a multi-layered approach, both above board and clandestine, to achieve this status. This initiative was greatly impacted by early international nonproliferation initiatives in the form of the NPT, International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) safeguards, and the London Suppliers Group (later to become the Nuclear Suppliers Group).<sup>59</sup> The U.S. also pursued further actions to thwart Pakistan’s attempt to achieve nuclear weapons status through the Symington and Glenn Amendments that severely limited military and economic assistance to non-NPT signatories that were seeking a nuclear program.<sup>60</sup>

Although non-proliferation efforts hindered Pakistan’s ability to receive uranium enrichment technology and stunted its pace for achieving nuclear capability, Pakistan acquired nuclear latency sometime in the mid-1980s.<sup>61</sup> This was completed through a massive and complex procurement network led by the now infamous A.Q. Khan. This system leveraged sympathetic and opportunistic countries, companies, and individuals willing to circumvent emerging international constraints. Examples include buying critical

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<sup>57</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Mahmood, “Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Pakistan and India,” 86.

<sup>59</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 104

<sup>60</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 129.

<sup>61</sup> Bob Woodward, “Pakistan Reported Near Atoms Arms Production,” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1986, A1.

individual components rather than restricted end items; utilizing intermediaries to veil the final destination of equipment and supplies in order to bypass restrictions; exploiting timelines of various agreements to quickly acquire necessary equipment prior to treaty enforcement; reverse engineering components; and providing justification for procurement of equipment under the auspices of non-military purposes.<sup>62</sup> Pakistan also received additional financial support from Saudi Arabia and Libya to produce an indigenous uranium production facility when its Plutonium program floundered due to international restrictions.<sup>63</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan sums up this “all in” approach in his detailed account of Pakistan’s nuclear pursuit *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* by saying:

For A.Q. Khan and others who were involved in procurement activities, however, acquiring the necessary knowledge and components for the nuclear program was a call to the highest level of national service at a time when Pakistan’s security and survivability were at stake. Dedicated people who were determined to overcome all technical and political hurdles placed before the Pakistani nuclear program were prepared not just to “eat grass” but also to take extraordinary risks—at times with their lives—in the underworld of nuclear procurement, all in the name of technology and national capacity.<sup>64</sup>

This highlights the risks that Bhutto and his successor (and deposer) President Zia Al-Haq were willing to accept regarding international coercion in order to achieve defensive parity and support their revisionist agenda.

## **H. OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, would significantly change the dynamics for Pakistan regarding both its nuclear weapons program and its irregular warfare capability. Pakistan would successfully leverage its unique geographical position and access to mujahedeen fighters to support U.S. efforts that negated recent efforts to punish the country for its nuclear endeavors. In addition, Zia would successfully protect his western border while gaining influence in the country upon the Soviet Union’s

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<sup>62</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 173.

<sup>63</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 162.

defeat and the rise of the Taliban. All the while, Pakistan would refocus its priorities on Kashmir by leveraging foreign investments and irregular warfare experience in Afghanistan to set conditions for a revitalized campaign. The 1980s would end with Pakistan emerging as a highly latent nuclear power with a developed, battle-tested irregular warfare capability and re-established influence within J&K.<sup>65</sup>

The Soviet presence in Afghanistan caused Pakistan to be surrounded by adversaries. Pakistan's attempt to acquire strategic depth in Afghanistan had already occurred in the mid-1970s when it provided support to mujahedeen insurgents to destabilize the Soviet-supported government. However, with the outright invasion of the Soviet Union of Afghanistan in 1979, and the subsequent U.S. fixation to contain them, provided Pakistan an opportunity to greatly enhance its interests. President Zia sought to leverage the U.S.'s desire to render a Soviet defeat in Afghanistan to develop its unconventional warfare capacity in Kashmir and complete Pakistan's realization of a functional nuclear weapon.<sup>66</sup>

Zia would level anti-Soviet fervor to achieve nuclear weapons status and reinvigorate the Kashmir insurgency in three ways. First, he would secure U.S. financial support from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. In total, the U.S. provided over \$7 billion dollars of military aid to support the anti-Soviet insurgency. Saudi Arabia reportedly provided a similar amount of financial support.<sup>67</sup> Zia sought to utilize this massive investment beyond simply supporting the mujahedeen. Zia successfully filtered all foreign investment through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), masking its distribution and providing an opportunity to disseminate the funding beyond simply the insurgency in Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> Estimates claim that up to 30% of funding had been repurposed in support of Kashmir insurgents

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<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Wright, "The Double Game: The Unintended Consequences of American Funding in Pakistan," *The New Yorker*, May 8, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/16/the-double-game>.

<sup>66</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> Meyrle, *Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: A Brief History*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 214.

during this era. Zia saw these two initiatives so linked that he referred to the Soviet-Afghan War as the “Kashmir jihad.”<sup>69</sup>

Zia also sought protection from international criticism of its nuclear program. The U.S. would see Pakistan as an anti-Soviet ally and accept nuclear activity if it fully supported U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan. The U.S. then removed military and economic sanctions applied under the Carter Administration. In addition, the 1984 Pressler Amendment required the U.S. to impose sanctions if Pakistan was in possession of a nuclear device. The Reagan Administration certified to Congress that this was not the case, freeing up funding of approximately \$300 Million per year. This was done even as the Reagan Administration reportedly knew Pakistan had the capacity to enrich Uranium-235 above the weapon-capable threshold.<sup>70</sup> Although the agreement tacitly allowed Pakistan to continue its program, the U.S. insisted that it cease nuclear tests. However, Pakistan still succeeded in secretly testing an explosive device in 1986 while also achieving a level of 93.6% Uranium enrichment.<sup>71</sup> At this point, Pakistan had achieved latency where policy could no longer prevent nuclear breakout. Bob Woodward’s 1986 Washington Post article *Pakistan Reported Near Atom Arms Production* highlights this:

Another [United States] official said Pakistan could assemble a bomb within two weeks. Another well-informed source said it could be done in a shorter time and, in practical terms, Pakistan is only “two screwdriver turns” from having a fully assembled bomb. Despite this evidence, sources said, keeping Pakistan from obtaining a bomb is a low priority on the list of administration foreign policy goals. Said one senior official directly involved in monitoring the program, “This administration wouldn’t come down on Pakistan if we found a bomb in Zia’s basement.”<sup>72</sup>

Woodward’s summary emphasizes the U.S.’s willingness to compromise its earlier policy towards Pakistan to levy a strategic defeat against the Soviet Union. As Vipin Narang describes in his article *Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation*, Pakistan utilized the “sheltered

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<sup>69</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 75.

<sup>70</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> Woodward, “Pakistan Reported Near Atoms Arms Production.”

<sup>72</sup> Woodward, “Pakistan Reported Near Atoms Arms Production.”



pursuer” strategy to achieve nuclear capability. Just as international pressure was most harsh, Pakistan successfully leveraged the U.S. single-minded South Asian approach of Soviet containment and utilized its support to forego international scrutiny.<sup>73</sup>

Third, Zia reestablished Pakistan’s insurgent-support network between Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and J&K. This was done largely to avoid the operational mistakes of the Second Kashmir War where operational preparation did not precipitate the predicted uprising. Zia garnered the support of the jihadist group Jamat-i-Islami’s leader Maulana Abdul Bari. Bari had fought in the First and Second Kashmir wars and was aware of each operation’s shortcomings. Although initially skeptical, Bari agreed to accept Pakistani support as funding and weapons were diverted from Afghanistan to J&K in support of these efforts.<sup>74</sup>

President Zia empowered the ISI to provide the training, supplies, and propaganda material while the Kashmiris would employ the militiamen to carry out the uprising. The ISI would also assist the development of a Kashmiri intelligence network to indicate when conditions were optimized for a successful uprising within J&K. In the mid-1980s, ISI agents, at the behest of President Zia, began building a relationship with another J&K resistance group, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The JKLF represented an oppressed faction of Kashmiri Muslims opposed to Indian policies and corrupt governing within the region.<sup>75</sup> The ISI produced propaganda booklets to build its guerrilla population base and strengthen the organization. Splinter groups were pressured to join under the JKLF and receive training in Pakistan and Afghanistan, eventually returning to J&K to act as sleeper cells. By 1988, 300 such cells were in Kashmir Valley alone with several others spreading into Kishtwar, Dodad, Jammu, Poonch, and Ladakh districts.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Vipin Narang, “Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation: How States Pursue the Bomb,” *International Security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 150, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/648309>.

<sup>74</sup> Jamal, *Shadow War*, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 84.

<sup>76</sup> Jamal, *Shadow War*, 127.

The total number of militants numbered around 10,000 and were well organized into 50 different fighting formations.<sup>77</sup>

## **I. CONCLUSION**

By the late-1980s, Pakistan had positioned itself as a nascent nuclear power with an established network of ISI-backed irregular warriors within J&K. In addition, they had waged successful jihad with the support of the U.S. against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. With their new-found nuclear deterrence capability and reprised jihadist insurgency movement, Pakistan was again poised to seriously challenge India with its Kashmir revisionist agenda for the first time in almost three decades.

This chapter surveyed Pakistan's early history, identifying its security struggles as well as limitations and opportunities within the larger international community. It showed how the nation transitioned from The Partition, fought three bloody conflicts, and then arose to a latent nuclear status over the first 40 years of its existence. In addition, the chapter demonstrated how Pakistan's combat experience informed its views of how to best leverage irregular warfare capability as an emergent nuclear-armed nation.

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<sup>77</sup> Jamal, *Shadow War*, 129.

### **III. PAKISTAN'S LATENT NUCLEAR CAPABILITY AND THE 1990 KASHMIR CRISIS**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the conditions leading to the 1990 Kashmir crisis, its culmination and de-escalation, and its aftermath. This crisis is analyzed because it represents the first escalatory event over J&K between Pakistan and India since the Second Kashmir War of 1965.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, it is the first Kashmir crisis in which both countries possessed a de facto nuclear capability. Although not declared nuclear powers, India and Pakistan were considered either capable of employing nuclear weapons or able to produce them in short order.<sup>79</sup> Although scholars argue the level of capability possessed at this point, that may prove to be irrelevant. As will be illustrated, the mere potential of this emerging capability precipitated emergency diplomatic intervention from the U.S. to deescalate the situation. Also of interest, although this third party intervention deescalated the conventional and nuclear aspect of the crisis, irregular warfare continued to wage at intense levels; developing a level of “new normal” regarding acceptable levels of violence within the region that continued for a decade.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, the conflict within Kashmir that formed the proximal cause of the 1990 escalation event will be described. Second, the 1990 Kashmir crisis itself, beginning in January and deescalating in May of that year will be framed in regard to escalatory components and the subsequent U.S. decision to intervene and deescalate. The third section will analyze this crisis in the context of the stability/instability paradox.

#### **B. PRELUDE TO THE CRISIS: TURMOIL IN KASHMIR**

By the late 1980s, Pakistan had reinvigorated the insurgency movement within Kashmir and was waiting for the optimal conditions to employ its revisionist agenda. In

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<sup>78</sup> P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis Of 1990* (Richmond: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 82.

addition, the last decade had seen increased dissatisfaction of Indian misrule within J&K amongst its Muslim population.<sup>80</sup> India had increasingly eroded J&K's historic status as an autonomous state by fostering political influence directly from New Delhi. Furthermore, a young and educated Muslim population within J&K was growing restless with its isolation from the political process.<sup>81</sup> The disputed J&K assembly elections in April 1987 provided the catalyst for a greater degree of violent activity as the new surge of irregular warfare began.<sup>82</sup>

The 1987 Kashmir elections involved substantial New Delhi intervention into the political process. This included the unification of the Hindu National Conference and Congress parties at the behest of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to defeat the Muslim United Front claiming a super-majority of representation within the J&K assembly.<sup>83</sup> Conduct during the election was also fraught with corruption as reports of ballot box stuffing, intimidation at the polls, and outright denial of voting rights permeated throughout the region. This destroyed the credibility of the India-supported J&K government and alienated the Kashmiri Muslim population. Along with Pakistan's support of the latent Islamic insurgency, the election improprieties precipitated the population's decision to resort to violence. Pakistan was prepared to leverage this conflict in support of its revisionist aims for the first time since 1965.<sup>84</sup>

The outrage that had enveloped J&K was quickly leveraged by the ISI who had patiently restricted the JKLF and Jamaat-e-Islami until conditions were set to optimize a violent attempt to wrest control of Kashmir. Following the botched elections, the ISI continued supporting its underground apparatus until the commencement of open hostilities on July 31, 1988, when the jihadist detonated two bombs against Indian infrastructure within Srinagar. The Indian security forces responded with mass arrests of

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<sup>80</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 82.

<sup>81</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 86.

<sup>82</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 98.

<sup>83</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 86.

<sup>84</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 84.

young Muslims, sparking increased popular unrest and insurgent violence that catapulted the region into a near civil war.<sup>85</sup>

Violence targeting Indian intelligence, military, and political personnel along with Kashmiri Hindus continued through 1988 and 1989. Pakistan-supported jihadist groups targeted the Indian intelligence network, killing four operatives. The JKLF also commenced a campaign of assassination and intimidation against members of the National Conference Party. The jihadist movement succeeded in intimidating Kashmiri voters from participating in Indian Parliamentary elections in November 1989. The early stages of the insurgency effectively eroded India's legitimacy and control within J&K.<sup>86</sup>

Events in December 1989 and January 1990 saw even greater brutality, propelling the situation within Kashmir from sub-regional violence to escalation at the national level between Pakistan and India. First, JKLF militants kidnapped the daughter of Kashmiri Congress member and India's appointed Home Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed while demanding that five insurgents be released who were being held on terrorism charges. This kidnapping was symbolic in that Sayeed had been appointed by New Delhi and represented India's perceived overreach into Kashmiri sovereignty. The Kashmiri government under Farooq Abdullah capitulated and accepted the deal, at the demand of New Delhi and against the wishes of Abdullah. As Abdullah predicted, the negotiation fostered increased violence—and legitimacy—for the JKLF.<sup>87</sup>

In response to the increased violence and organized resistance from Islamic insurgents, New Delhi attempted to restore order through a heavy-handed counterinsurgency campaign. This included the deployment of hundreds of thousands of Indian troops and paramilitary forces to Kashmir to quell the violence under the new J&K Governor Jagmohan Malhotra. This was Jagmohan's second tour as governor and he had already garnered a reputation for employing an aggressive approach to countering militancy within Kashmir. Islamic militants responded by transitioning their actions to

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<sup>85</sup> Jamal, *Shadow War*, 129.

<sup>86</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 165.

<sup>87</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 165.

increased offensive operations against Indian military targets including convoys and military patrols. Jagmohan responded with systematic clearances of Kashmiri homes and strict enforcement of curfews to aggressively disrupt insurgents.<sup>88</sup> This martial rule resulted in various mass Kashmiri protests that culminated with the January 21, 1990, Gawkadal Massacre in which at least 32 protestors were killed by Indian forces.<sup>89</sup>

The connection between these events marked an escalation in ISI-supported insurgent violence coupled with India's willingness to employ draconian measures to maintain its authority and prevent any notion that it would allow J&K to separate. These conditions also ushered in the 1990 Kashmir crisis by compelling both Indian and Pakistani national leadership to address the violence, posture their formal military apparatus, and implicitly leverage their de facto nuclear capability.

### **C. THE CRISIS**

The events in January 1990 transformed the Kashmir insurgency from a sub-regional context into a Pakistan-India showdown incorporating the full spectrum of military capabilities that was only dampened through direct diplomatic efforts from the United States. Conventional escalation was initially demonstrated by massive mobilization of conventional forces within both countries, coupled with increasingly bellicose rhetoric from diplomats and political leaders on both sides of the border.

India continued its deployment of several hundred thousands of troops within Kashmir and nearby Punjab, with the stated purpose of border security to prevent jihadists from entering J&K from Pakistan. Their tasks also involved protection of Indian lines of communication from insurgent sabotage along with providing additional combat capability to resist massive uprisings should they occur.<sup>90</sup>

As this massive troop buildup occurred in Kashmir, Pakistan grew weary of the India Army's robust force package so near its border. Pakistan had conducted a massive,

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<sup>88</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 165.

<sup>89</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 88.

<sup>90</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 86.

joint air-land training exercise called *Zarb-i-Momin* within Punjab in December 1989, the largest in the nation's history. Following completion of this exercise, Pakistan did not redeploy its forces to home station, retaining an offensive posture. Furthermore, the focus of this exercise was offensive in nature, rehearsing a combined arms thrust into India with fully integrated air support. The nature, size, scope, and proximity of this exercise, coupled with Pakistan's continued mobilization, raised tensions into April 1990.<sup>91</sup>

India, skeptical of this massive training exercise and its lack of demobilization within proximity to Kashmir aroused suspicion by the spring of 1990. As insurgent violence continued to escalate within J&K, some Indian analysts were convinced that Pakistan was waiting for the right conditions to launch a conventional attack. They reasoned that Pakistan would assume Indian forces in Kashmir would be tied up suppressing militants and would be overwhelmed by a swift campaign.<sup>92</sup> India also estimated that Pakistan would wait until early summer 1990 as the monsoons subsided, providing optimal conditions for maneuver warfare and allowing time for continued degradation of the security situation by insurgents.<sup>93</sup> India responded with a mobilization of two armored divisions numbering 100,000 troops to a shooting range in Rajasthan, fueling tensions of an Indian pre-emptive and preventative attack. By April 1990, 200,000 Indian troops had deployed in total to J&K, while approximately 100,000 Pakistan soldiers stood on the opposite side of the LoC. Each adversary feared preemptive strikes from each other.<sup>94</sup>

Massive conventional mobilization was coupled with escalatory rhetoric from both Pakistani and Indian leaders. Although vitriolic commentary between the new nations had been common through the decades regarding Kashmir, Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto raised tensions in March of 1990. During a visit to the Pakistan portion of Kashmir, she avowed Pakistan's support of Kashmir independence and the work of "freedom

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<sup>91</sup> Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia*, 82.

<sup>92</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 91.

<sup>93</sup> Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia*, 82.

<sup>94</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 41.

fighters” within the insurgency. Most provocatively, she emphasized that Pakistan was prepared to fight an “one thousand year war” against Indian rule. Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh retorted in April that “[Pakistan] should examine whether they will last a thousand hours of war.”<sup>95</sup> This emphasized India’s willingness to decisively defeat Pakistan over the Kashmir problem.

By April, the United States became increasingly concerned with the spike in Kashmir violence, conventional military buildup, and provocative words by each country’s leadership. Most worrisome, was the state of de facto nuclear weapons capability and posture of India and Pakistan. Most experts agreed that each country had a nuclear weapon, or was capable of employing a deliverable weapon within a few days or weeks. In addition, varying assessments from U.S. diplomatic, military and intelligence relationships demonstrated a dynamic environment with no clear picture. In *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis Of 1990*, the authors demonstrate the nebulous nature of this crisis and the context of U.S intervention:

Apparently, differing assessments of the crisis had reached President Bush by May. The U.S. ambassadors in New Delhi and Islamabad were already deeply involved in the process of crisis management through their independent assessment of military positions and their reassurances to the respective governments. They also believed that hostilities were not imminent, although there was a risk of war later in the year. The Department of State was slightly more concerned, with the CIA holding the most alarmist position, seeing the possibility of a conflict that might acquire nuclear overtones. Still, even the most pessimistic view held that the prospects of a conflict were in the 20 percent range. It was the potential for the use of nuclear weapons that energized the U.S.<sup>96</sup>

The corresponding U.S. intervention, led by Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates sought to deescalate the situation by first ensuring Pakistan and India demobilize their offensive forces to prevent an accidental escalatory event or miscalculation. In May 1990, Gates met with the Islamabad and New Delhi governments, arguing for immediate de-escalation of conventional forces. With respect to Pakistan, he

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<sup>95</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 41.

<sup>96</sup> Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia*, 100.



emphasized India's sheer conventional dominance and Pakistan's highly probable defeat against these odds. With India, he argued that although victory was likely, the costs of the war would be far too great to justify its action. Gates emphasized that Pakistan's capability to go nuclear in order to mitigate its conventional disadvantage specifically changed India's risk calculus.<sup>97</sup>

Following the Gates visit, the 1990 Kashmir crisis quickly deescalated. Within two weeks, India had demobilized its armor forces from the Marajan Range and Pakistan followed suit by returning its forces postured near the LoC to their home stations. By June, the international crisis had subsided, but violence continued to thrive within Kashmir for the next decade.<sup>98</sup>

#### **D. ANALYZING THE 1990 KASHMIR CRISIS**

Applying the stability/instability paradox to the 1990 Kashmir crisis provides a framework to analyze the relationship between Pakistan's latent nuclear capability with its employment of irregular forces, coupled with the overall stability of the entire region. The stability/instability paradox states that nuclear powers are likely to not fight direct wars against each other for fear of nuclear retaliation, but will resort in limited war on a broader scale. Thus, the likelihood of nuclear war decreases as the likelihood of limited, indirect conflict increases.<sup>99</sup> The 1990 Kashmir crisis offers two interesting takeaways. First, the regional crisis compelled third party intervention to immediately quell the threat of nuclear exchange providing a level of stability at the diplomatic level. The threat of nuclear escalation, the likelihood debated by scholars and practitioners from marginal to very likely, seemed irrelevant. The U.S. intervened simply because the capability did exist.<sup>100</sup> Thus, leveraging global powers to de-escalate an immediate crisis provided a vital deescalating lever.

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<sup>97</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 98.

<sup>98</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> Krepon, "The stability-instability paradox, misperception, and escalation control in South Asia," 261.

<sup>100</sup> Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia*, 98.

Second, the de-escalation of the crisis only occurred with respect to the Pakistan-India direct confrontation, while not deescalating the underlying Kashmir crisis itself. In fact, the Pakistan-supported Kashmiri insurgency continued to increase in its intensity during the greater part of the decade. Thus, Pakistan had identified operational space at the irregular warfare level to serve its interests in the region over a protracted timeline.

### **1. Nuclear Component Analyzed**

Pakistan had achieved some level of nuclear capability by the late 1980s. Analysts differed on the level of nuclear latency, but the intelligence community agreed that Pakistan was capable of nuclear breakout within a few weeks at most. In addition, positive rhetoric with respect to its nuclear capability by Muhammed Zia in the late 1980s provided additional reinforcement of Pakistan's realization that this capability was credible and capable of changing the risk calculus in the region.<sup>101</sup>

With respect to a regional nuclear conflict, intervention of a foreign power is a significant aspect that involves consideration in the Kashmir situation. As global powers attempt to influence the international order to their advantage, an uncontrolled regional dispute that could devolve into a conventional or nuclear conflict presents a problem whose results could have significant impacts with worldwide implications. The U.S. chose to intervene within this crisis as it administered the end of the Cold War. Robert Gates himself had travelled from Moscow to the region in order to deescalate the situation. Intelligence regarding the exact capability of nuclear weapons as well as their disposition were unknown at the time. However, the U.S. assessed that the situation could not be ignored, even at the smallest likelihood that a nuclear event would occur.<sup>102</sup> Contrasted to the 1971 Bangladesh War where India and Pakistan possessed only conventional military capability and the superpowers largely remained out of the hostilities, the nuclear aspect of this crisis reigns paramount. Vipin Narang's *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era* emphasis on Pakistan's catalytic nuclear policy during this episode provides a unique perspective:

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<sup>101</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 60.

<sup>102</sup> Chari, Cheema, and Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia*, 100.

Pakistan had necessary capability—an ambiguous but credibly functional capability—and the availability of a third-party patron through at least 1990 that enabled it to successfully implement a catalytic posture. The posture allowed Pakistan to more aggressively execute a long-standing revisionist preference to support insurgent groups—for example, in Punjab and Kashmir—with the probabilistic calculation that the United States would intercede to prevent significant Indian retaliation that might result in escalation to the nuclear level.<sup>103</sup>

He emphasized Pakistan's leverage of the U.S.'s relationship in this instance as its Cold War client against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan to bring stability to the crisis as a key component of its approach to Kashmir. Pakistan's fledgling nuclear capability had not been tested, and therefore could not be validated. In addition, it possessed a primitive launch capability likely having to rely on aerial delivery systems. However, evidence suggested that Pakistan signaled to the U.S. its heightened nuclear status instead of India in order to garner intervention from its Cold War ally. The U.S. had an additional incentive to avoid a nuclear confrontation with India, as that would remove focus from its efforts to leverage Pakistan in shaping the post-Soviet environment in Afghanistan.<sup>104</sup>

Seymour Hersch's *Washington Post* article laid claim that National Security Agency signals intercepts prompted the rapid intervention by Robert Gates in April 1990, thus beginning the de-escalation.<sup>105</sup> Although it is important to note that the details of Hersch's article have been largely debated, it cannot be denied that the U.S. intervened quickly and purposely.<sup>106</sup> In this manner, the threat however imminent and credible, was deemed worthy of immediate U.S. intervention. Therefore, it seems that a level of the nuclear stability within the context of the 1990 Kashmir crisis resided in the international community's willingness to become involved with regional disputes if there was a chance that the nuclear taboo is broken. Consequently, within this unique nuclear regional conflict, it appeared that foreign intervention to deescalate the situation provided a level of stability

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<sup>103</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 61.

<sup>104</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 60.

<sup>105</sup> Seymour M. Hersch, "On the Nuclear Edge," *The New Yorker*, March 22, 1993.

<sup>106</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 67.

not otherwise present between prospective belligerents, such as the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War.

## **2. Irregular Warfare Analyzed**

The 1990 Kashmir crisis revealed that irregular warfare was capable of escalating to the highest levels of conflict and risk nuclear confrontation. The rising tension and eventual violent breakout of Kashmiri separatists did give rise to enhanced tensions at the conventional military, diplomatic, and potentially nuclear level. This refutes the concept that limited conflict would be the “escape valve” for nuclear powers to avoid escalation as prescribed in the context of the stability/instability paradox. This demonstrates a direct connection between the irregular warriors within the region, Pakistan’s revisionist ideals, and India’s unwillingness to rescind control of the region.

Pakistan’s direct support of the increasingly violent Kashmir insurgency allowed this regional dispute to accelerate into a larger crisis. Because of the two wars fought to this point over the region, India was aware of Pakistan’s desire to wrest control of J&K, and to do so without risking a conventional war they were incapable of winning. Therefore, Indian could escalate its conventional advantage as a mitigating factor by signaling its willingness to punish Pakistan in a larger scale, beyond the border of J&K into its sovereign territory. India signaled this through its Marajan armor exercises as a supplementation to the hundreds of thousands of troops already emplaced in Kashmir to quell the insurgency.<sup>107</sup> As in the Bangladesh War, India executed this approach on West Pakistan, with horrible results for Pakistan. Therefore, during the specific 1990 Kashmir crisis, nuclear capability did not ensure stability at the level of limited warfare.

Where the instability/stability paradox can be successfully applied was immediately following the crisis’s de-escalation. Following the 1990 Kashmir crisis, the violence in Kashmir continued to increase throughout the decade. The evidence indicates that the specific ‘conventional’ crisis had cooled in May 1990, irregular warfare continued

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<sup>107</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 41.

at increasing rates within Kashmir.<sup>108</sup> As discussed, the conventional escalation by both belligerents did result in a degree of nuclear posturing that sparked international interest and eventual de-escalation. However, for the next decade, violence within Kashmir continued to *increase*.<sup>109</sup> Figure 1 displays this dynamic. One can see that violent deaths due to the insurgency increased sharply in the years directly following the 1990 Kashmir crisis before leveling off at over 2500 fatalities per year.<sup>110</sup> This demonstrates a much more violent reality than the decades prior, when Pakistan was merely in pursuit of nuclear capability.

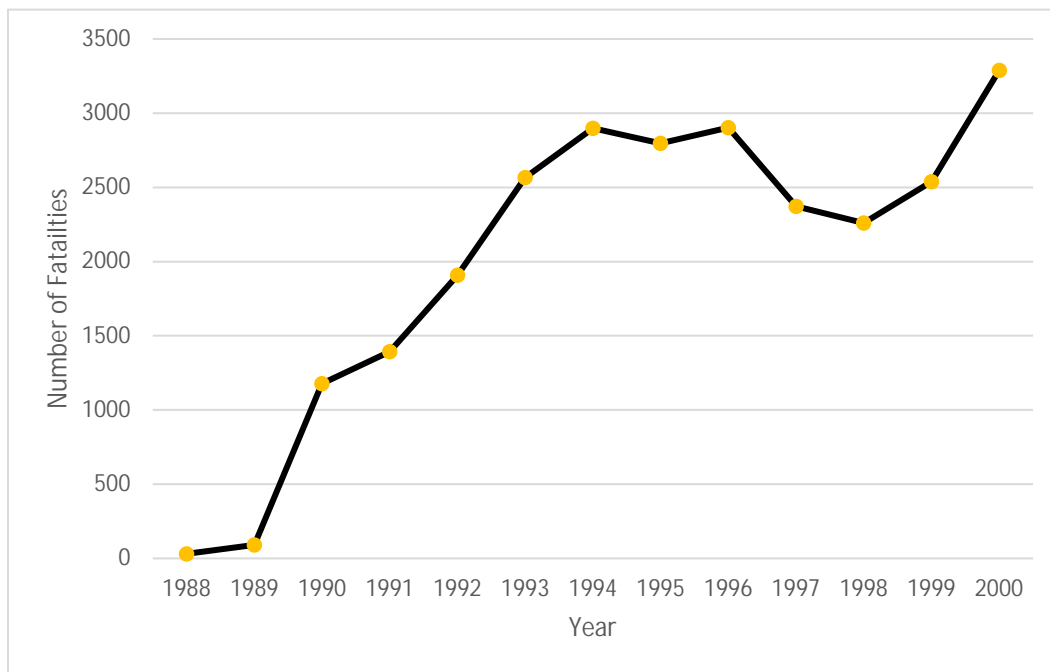


Figure 1. Total Fatalities Due To Insurgency in Indian-Administered Jammu and Kashmir by Year<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Anuj Chopri, “India Weighs Troop Reduction in Quieter Kashmir,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 88.

<sup>110</sup> “Jammu and Kashmir Terrorist Fatalities Data Sheet,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-jammukashmir>, accessed: May 25, 2020.

<sup>111</sup> Adapted from “Jammu and Kashmir Terrorist Fatalities Data Sheet,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-jammukashmir>, accessed: May 25, 2020.

Therefore, although the nuclear aspect of the 1990 Kashmir crisis was deescalated at the nuclear level, the regional conflict developed into a state of “new normal” violence. Here, it seems that Pakistan had identified operational space to continue its protracted revisionist campaign. Although India was still willing to invest a great deal of military capability to maintain its authority and unwilling to submit to separatist demands of independence, it did not seek to leverage its conventional advantage to intimidate or coerce Pakistan again until the Kargil War of 1999.<sup>112</sup>

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Pakistan was partially successful in leveraging its emerging nuclear deterrence capability with its revisionist irregular warfare approach in Kashmir in 1990. Although it was not able to overthrow the India-backed government through unconventional means, it did create an environment of prolonged instability that absorbed Indian counterinsurgency resources while avoiding another escalatory event for almost a decade. Pakistan was also able to leverage intervention by its Cold War ally, the U.S., by signaling the threat of nuclear escalation to entice support in the crisis. In the end, Pakistan’s revisionist efforts remained intact and it had avoided a larger conflict with India.

As the Cold War gave way to U.S. supremacy, Pakistan lost a close ally in the United States. The U.S.’s divestment from Afghanistan coupled with its desire to again counter Pakistan’s nuclear proliferation with the enforcement of the Pressler Amendment in 1991 largely ended the U.S.-Pakistan partnership.<sup>113</sup> Pakistan then sought to increase its nuclear delivery capability in parity with India, while also remaining a de facto nuclear power. This status changed in 1998 when India overtly signaled its nuclear weapons capability with a successful nuclear weapons test and Pakistan subsequently following suit. The next chapter identifies Pakistan’s employment of irregular forces with its newly acquired overt nuclear status during the 1999 Kargil War.

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<sup>112</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 76.

<sup>113</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 73.

## **IV. 1998 NUCLEAR TEST AND THE KARGIL WAR**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In May 1999, Indian soldiers confirmed suspicions that Pakistan troops had seized multiple mountain positions in the Kargil region of J&K. The resultant three-month war was the first conflict between the two adversaries since 1971 and occurred only a year since both nations demonstrated their nuclear capability to the world. Pakistan's use of irregular troops to aggressively seize terrain within J&K devolved into a dangerous crisis that risked nuclear escalation and garnered international admonishment.<sup>114</sup>

This case study describes the events leading to the Kargil War, the Kargil War itself, and war termination. It then analyzes how the employment of irregular forces by Pakistan to wrest control of a portion of J&K was connected to its newly acquired overt nuclear parity with India. From this analysis, the report demonstrates the capabilities and limitations of irregular forces with respect to the stability/instability paradox and Pakistan's failure to connect its tactical gains with ultimate strategic success.

### **B. PRELUDE TO THE KARGIL WAR**

Recent changes to Pakistan's nuclear weapons posture and the overall nuclear dynamic vis-à-vis India set the stage for the Kargil War. Between May 11 and 13, 1998, India conducted five live tests of nuclear weapons. India's stated reasoning for its overt nuclear signaling was that it served as a deterrence measure against the revisionist ideals of China and Pakistan on the subcontinent. The results of the tests positioned Pakistan to reestablish deterrence by mirroring India's overt nuclear posture.<sup>115</sup> Pakistan quickly followed suit when it reportedly exploded six nuclear devices three weeks later. These tests

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<sup>114</sup> Bell and MacDonald, "How Dangerous Was Kargil? Nuclear Crises in Comparative Perspective," 136.

<sup>115</sup> Mahmood Tehmina, "India and Pakistan's Nuclear Explosions: An Analysis." *Pakistan Horizon* 52, no. 1 (1999): 40.

propelled the regional rivals from a de facto, unofficial nuclear status into the fraternity of established nuclear powers.<sup>116</sup>

Concerning to the international community was Pakistan's additional efforts to establish nuclear deterrence against the proven superiority of its conventionally dominant foe. In order to mitigate this disadvantage, Pakistan adopted what Vipin Narang coined as an "asymmetric escalation" posture that established the threat of first-use of nuclear weapons against Indian conventional build up and aggression against Pakistan. Narang also notes that this posture directly confronts the adversary instead of compelling the intervention of a third party:

Asymmetric escalation postures are aimed at deterring both conventional and nuclear conflict against the state. Unlike the catalytic posture in which the use of nuclear weapons is only contemplated in the face of a significant conventional threat to a state and whose signal is directed toward a third-party patron, an asymmetric escalation posture attempts to directly deter conventional conflict by another nuclear or non-nuclear state *in toto* by threatening the first use of nuclear weapons in either a tactical or strategic strike. The deterrent threat is clearly communicated to the adversary in question, not a third-party patron. While the third party may still have incentives to cap escalation, the primary goal of the posture is no longer to compel that patron's intervention but rather to *directly* deter an opponent.<sup>117</sup>

Pakistan accomplished this enhanced posture through complete integration of its nuclear capability within its military forces. By ensuring that military doctrine encompassed the employment of nuclear weapons should India threaten Pakistan's territorial integrity with either nuclear or conventional weapons, it enhanced the credibility of its deterrence threat beyond the mere overt possession of nuclear weapons.<sup>118</sup> This threat was deemed even more credible through Pakistan's known ability to deliver aerial munitions from fighter aircraft by this time.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 267.

<sup>117</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 77.

<sup>119</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 186.



International condemnation of these nuclear tests was swift and severe. United States President Bill Clinton quickly condemned them and the UN Security Council (UNSC) also responded hastily by passing Resolution 1172. This resolution officially admonished both nations' nuclear tests and outlined conditions that must be met to limit nuclear proliferation and escalation. Resolution 1172 also acknowledged the Kashmir problem as a potential nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan, and urged efforts between the nations to encourage peace. For Pakistan, this was significant as it was the first UN acknowledgement of the Kashmir problem as a strategic impasse since the Second Kashmir War of 1965.<sup>120</sup> This potentially provided Pakistan an angle to leverage its overt nuclear capability and achieve revision in the region with support of the international community.

In response to international pressure and an effort to normalize relationships, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee met Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore, Pakistan in February 1999. The meeting held symbolic significance as it represented a concerted effort to initiate reforms in the midst of the changing nuclear dynamics between the historic adversaries. The resulting Lahore Declaration illustrated confidence building measures to reduce the nuclear postures between the nations and resolve the Kashmir dispute peacefully.<sup>121</sup> However, Pakistan's attempt to militarily seize the Kargil heights and the corresponding war in May 1999 erased these measures, led to war, and compromised future diplomatic endeavors.

As nuclear postures on the Indian subcontinent changed in the late 1990s, so did the dynamics of the Pakistan-supported Kashmir insurgency. To Pakistan's dismay, India had begun restoring greater law and order to the region while reestablishing political influence. India had successfully reformed its counterinsurgency practices which included less lethal and draconian methods when interacting with Kashmiri resistance forces and

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<sup>120</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 288–89.

<sup>121</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 151.

civilians. In addition, the counter-insurgents employed a more robust intelligence network that helped destabilize the insurgent networks and disrupt them from within.<sup>122</sup>

Pakistan also increasingly relied on foreign jihadists to conduct irregular warfare in Kashmir which proved to alienate the traditionally supportive Kashmiri population. The ISI became exceedingly frustrated with the JKLF's willingness to negotiate with the Indian government over issues within Kashmir that were not directly aligned with Pakistani revisionism. The ISI therefore relied on non-native mujahedeen that strictly aligned with Pakistan's interest in accession of J&K and were more willing to conduct extreme acts of violence. Most notably, Pakistan employed the terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) to maintain violence in J&K. These groups would eventually expand their efforts beyond Kashmir into mainland India.<sup>123</sup> However, this reliance on "foreign jihadists" alienated the Kashmiri population as indigenous support of Pakistani's proxy war began to wane. As Ganguly and Hagerty describes in *Fearful Symmetry*, "unlike the home-grown JKLF, many of these latter-day entrants into the Kashmiri fray had few, if any, blood-soil ties to Kashmir. Consequently, they exhibited scant scruples with their harsh dealings with the local population."<sup>124</sup> Within this context, the Indian security forces were able to gain an advantage by exploiting the growing schism between insurgents and the population.

India exploited the growing animosity within the insurgent networks and with the population by conducting Kashmiri Parliamentary elections in September 1996 that were widely considered free and fair. This was a significant step forward in the peaceful transition of power as contrasted to elections earlier that year. These elections resulted in the National Assembly Party winning a majority of seats in the state assembly, and instilled cautious hope for sustained peace amongst Kashmiris.<sup>125</sup> With the trend toward peace by 1998 in Kashmir, members in the Pakistan military feared that the 'noble cause' had

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<sup>122</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 88.

<sup>123</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 90.

<sup>124</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 147.

<sup>125</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 148.

dampened along with international visibility on the conflict. In addition, many believed that Pakistan's ability to wage proxy war in Kashmir was a strategic fight that compelled India to commit hundreds of thousands of troops that could otherwise be used to threaten Pakistan's sovereignty.<sup>126</sup>

### C. KARGIL WAR

The war originated from Pakistan's attempt to wrest control of Indian redoubts and fighting positions in the mountains surrounding the town of Kargil in J&K, approximately seven kilometers from the LoC. These positions were occupied seasonally by Indian forces and vacated during the winter due to the harsh Himalayan climate. The heights provided strategic control of India's National Highway 1 that connected Srinagar to Indian forces based on the Siachen Glacier. Control of this highway would therefore isolate Indian forces and provide Pakistan control of highly defensible positions within J&K.<sup>127</sup>

Planning for this operation was based upon two critical assumptions. First, Pakistan could capitalize upon its overt nuclear deterrence status with India to make revisionist gains within Kashmir. By conducting a bold maneuver to occupy the peaks surround Srinagar, India would not choose to escalate the conflict and accept Pakistan's gains. India would do this to avoid escalating the event into a major war and corresponding nuclear standoff.<sup>128</sup> Second, the international community, specifically the U.S., would react swiftly and urge a brokered deal to prevent escalation. The international community had proven hypersensitive to the overt nuclearization of the Indian subcontinent, and understood the Kashmir problem as a flash point for uncontrolled escalation. Therefore, a *fait accompli* could result in a U.S.-backed peace deal that would work in Pakistan's favor. Both assumptions proved faulty.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> John H. Gil, "Provocation, War and Restraint Under the Nuclear Shadow: The Kargil Conflict 1999," *Journal of Strategic Studies: War & Peace in Contemporary India*, Edited by Rudra Chaudhuri 42, no. 5 (July 29, 2019): 704.

<sup>127</sup> Gil, "Provocation, War and Restraint Under the Nuclear Shadow: The Kargil Conflict 1999," 702.

<sup>128</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 51.

<sup>129</sup> Meyrle, *Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: A Brief History*, 13.

The operation, directly planned and approved by Army Chief of Staff General Pervez Musharraf and potentially unknown to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, involved the infiltration of four battalions of Pakistan's Northern Light Infantry sent to occupy the mountain positions surrounding Kargil between December 1998 and April 1999. These forces wore civilian clothes, posing as Kashmiri militants to affect deniability and protect Pakistan's direct involvement.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Pakistan also employed the LeT militants alongside its infantry during this operation.<sup>131</sup> This was a significant escalation within Pakistan's irregular warfare campaign as it is the first time that Pakistan directly used its military to breach the LoC on an offensive operation within Kashmir. The Indian Army did not become aware of Pakistan's operation until May 6, when one of its patrols was ambushed while conducting a reconnaissance of the area following reports of militant operations in the region. By late May, India had assessed that as many as 800 Pakistani militants had breached the LoC and occupied around 70 defensive positions in the mountains around Kargil.<sup>132</sup>

India initially responded with infantry forces that were unable to wrest the well defended Pakistani forces from their advantageous positions. However, India quickly escalated its military response through joint employment of its army, air force, and naval assets. It diverted the Indian 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Corps from counterinsurgency assignments within J&K to dislodge the Pakistani forces; along with re-tasking the 6<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division from duty on the Chinese border to the region. India further escalated its conventional military response with tenacious air to ground attacks meant to degrade the defensive positions and facilitate Indian forces as they assaulted up steep terrain to retake positions upward of 14,000 feet.<sup>133</sup>

By late June, India's relentless air campaign and corresponding ground assaults eroded Pakistan's advantage. Indian forces had also done so without crossing the LoC,

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<sup>130</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 311.

<sup>131</sup> Meyrle, *Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: A Brief History*, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 154.

<sup>133</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 312.

even as it would have enjoyed a marked tactical advantage during its operations in Kargil.<sup>134</sup> This disciplined choice may have negatively affected Indian forces on the battlefield, but provided political leverage as it demonstrated India's calculated and nuanced approach to the conflict with a desire to avoid an escalatory event.

For Pakistan, the operation was turning into an operational and strategic disaster. The Pakistan government maintained deniability throughout the crisis, asserting the infiltration was the work of Islamic militants and not the Pakistani Army. In addition, the Prime Minister argued that the Kargil War was a function of the larger Kashmir problem and required international intervention. The U.S. categorially rejected both assertions, refused to broker a negotiated deal between belligerents, and called for the immediate withdrawal of Pakistan's forces from J&K.<sup>135</sup> Prime Minister's Shariff's visit to the White House in July solidified Pakistan's defeat as President Clinton affirmed an unwillingness to intervene without Pakistan's complete withdrawal from Kargil and acknowledgement of the LoC. By late July, Pakistan had retrograded from all positions within J&K and the hostilities ended, with almost 500 Indians and over 700 Pakistanis killed in the conflict.<sup>136</sup>

The nuclear component of the Kargil War remains nebulous. Pakistani officials did make insinuations regarding nuclear weapons during the crisis, such as the Foreign Secretary Shamsahad Ahmad stating that Pakistan "will not hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity."<sup>137</sup> In addition, U.S. and Indian intelligence agencies had determined that the Pakistan military assumed an increasingly aggressive posture with its nuclear missiles. India responded directly with similar preparations.<sup>138</sup> However, during his summit with President Clinton, Prime Minister Sharif appeared surprised and denied the accusation when the intelligence was presented to him of

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<sup>134</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 269.

<sup>135</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 121

<sup>136</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 122.

<sup>137</sup> Scott D. Sagan, "The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine," In *Nuclear South Asia*, ed. Scott D. Sagan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 232.

<sup>138</sup> Sagan, "The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine," 232.

aggressive nuclear posturing.<sup>139</sup> However, questions remain concerning the purpose of this signaling or if Prime Minister Sharif even possessed knowledge of the Pakistan military's control over its nuclear arsenal whatsoever. Nuclear proliferation expert Scott Sagan in *Nuclear South Asia* sums up the importance of Pakistan's nuclear ambiguity and disconnect between its civil and military leadership by stating:

The mysterious operations in Pakistan were exceedingly important for they led to Kargil being South Asia's first confirmed nuclear crisis, and not just a conventional war, as the Indian military responded to ambiguous Pakistan nuclear activities with missile-alert and deployment operations of their own.<sup>140</sup>

Sagan's comments emphasized the ambiguous nature of the nuclear component of this crisis just one year after each country demonstrated nuclear capability. In addition, it demonstrated the connection between Pakistan's perceived freedom of maneuver under the nuclear umbrella with irregular troops, its corresponding miscalculation during the Kargil War, and the effects of its ill-defined nuclear posture in the midst of an ongoing conflict.

#### **D. ANALYSIS**

This episode demonstrated the complexities of overt nuclear capability beyond simple deterrence through the possession of nuclear weapons as well as the limitations of irregular warfare within the framework of the stability/instability paradox. Pakistan wanted to capitalize upon its newly formed overt nuclear deterrence with India—and the corresponding international attention—by seizing terrain within J&K without consequence. It is reasonable to assert that the international community would not want to risk any sort of escalation, especially involving developing and fledgling regional powers new to the “nuclear club” and thus potentially more willing to assert their might. However, Pakistan overestimated its ability to exploit its nuclear posture through employment of irregular forces in Kashmir and underestimated international admonishment for its actions.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 314.

<sup>140</sup> Sagan, “The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine,” 233.

<sup>141</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 123.

## 1. Irregular Warfare Approach

Throughout the events of 1999, Pakistan lacked appreciation for the nuances associated with irregular warfare below the nuclear umbrella with respect to fostering international support and crisis resolution. Insurgency warfare within Kashmir was identified as potentially escalatory as it had resulted in several escalating events in the past: First and Second Kashmir Wars and the 1990 Kashmir crisis. However, outright attempting a *fait accompli* with Pakistan forces dressed in civilian clothes while attempting to maintain deniability across an internationally-recognized border did not maintain the idea of an “ongoing territorial dispute.” This was viewed by India and the international community as diverting from the status quo and inherently escalatory. Furthermore, the infiltration of irregular forces by Pakistan occurred during ongoing diplomatic negotiations that precipitated the Lahore Agreements. This sense of ensuing peace reduced tensions and likely lowered India’s security posture and facilitated the infiltration.<sup>142</sup> However, this tactical gain came at a strategic cost as it demonstrated Pakistan’s reckless approach to both its adversarial relationship with India and its responsibility as a nuclear power.

Pakistan also did not envision India’s measured response, both operationally and strategically. Although the liberal use of Indian airpower to degrade Pakistan’s defensive positions could have been perceived as escalatory, because it was strictly focused on military targets against enemy positions within the Indian-administered area of Kashmir, it appeared to be a reasonable and justifiable defensive response. Similarly, India’s decision not to cross the LoC into Pakistan territory proved to support its stated objective of reestablishing the border, not merely a guise to acquire additional Pakistani territory.<sup>143</sup> Not only was this latter decision integral in maintaining a moral high ground within this specific conflict, it keenly identified a potential threshold for nuclear escalation. Although Pakistan maintained ambiguity concerning any nuclear red lines, conventional military advance into sovereign territory would have logically been perceived as escalatory.

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<sup>142</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 152.

<sup>143</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 49.

Pakistan's decision to use irregular Army troops instead of Islamic militants during the Kargil War had deleterious effects. First, by maintaining deniability, Pakistan could not support its ground force with air or artillery support without simultaneously destroying its position and escalating conventionally.<sup>144</sup> Second, it placed Pakistan in position of overtly striking Indian forces within Indian-administered territory thereby forfeiting any international support as an escalating act of war. This would likely be viewed as extraordinarily irresponsible by the international community as unnecessarily increasing the likelihood of a larger conventional and potentially nuclear confrontation.

The Kargil War also demonstrated the spectrum of warfare available beneath the nuclear umbrella as applied to the stability/instability paradox. India enjoyed the ability to conduct conventional, combined arms attacks within its sovereign territory where Pakistan did not share this advantage. Pakistan's employment of irregular warfare during the Kargil War assumed that a certain level of violence was accepted as normal and appropriate within the context of ongoing struggle within Kashmir. However, as it became apparent that the Pakistan Army had seized numerous established Indian positions within its recognized territory, the dynamic shifted beyond insurgent violence and transcended into a state-sponsored act of war. India, identifying this dynamic, responded to the issue while avoiding a troop build-up that could be perceived as threatening to Pakistan at large.<sup>145</sup> This avoided potential Pakistani reprisal and maintained international support of India throughout the crisis.

## **2. Nuclear Component**

Pakistan's nuclear posture during Kargil proves difficult to ascertain as specific knowledge remains disputed and incomplete. However, U.S. and Indian intelligence services reportedly learned of Pakistan's decentralization and deployment of nuclear weapons in some capacity during the crisis, a fact denied by Pakistani officials.<sup>146</sup> Two possibilities are worth considering. First, Pakistan changed its posture in the event that the

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<sup>144</sup> Gil, "Provocation, War and Restraint Under the Nuclear Shadow: The Kargil Conflict 1999," 712.

<sup>145</sup> Gil, "Provocation, War and Restraint Under the Nuclear Shadow: The Kargil Conflict 1999," 712.

<sup>146</sup> Sagan, "The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine," 232.



Kargil War became a protracted, stalemated affair. This would allow Pakistan to deter India's conventional escalation should it grow impatient and seek to escalate hostilities beyond the relatively small battlefield of Kargil. This would not be without its roots in history, as the actions of India during the Bangladesh War provided a stinging precedent for Pakistan's leadership that informed their security decisions since 1971.<sup>147</sup> Second, Pakistan could have signaled its nuclear posture in order to compel the international community to intervene as well as deter India's decisive response.

The first possibility accounts for Pakistan's lack of options in support of its troops around Kargil. It could not reasonably utilize air support without risking a highly volatile conventional war. Outgunned and outmatched conventionally, highlighting its nuclear parity with India could provide it with enough leverage to drive negotiations or at least prevent wider hostilities. Especially considering that the *fait accompli* maneuver did not result in India's compliance, Pakistan required an additional measure to salvage its position in the absence of operational contingencies.

The second possibility could have been an effort to force quick and decisive negotiations by the U.S. to demand peace prior to the nuclear crisis spiraling out of control. In this view, perhaps the international community would support appeasement in order to avoid a crisis scenario altogether. However, India outright denied entertaining any action less than the re-establishment of the LoC. The U.S. did meet with the Pakistani Prime Minister and confronted him with the nuclear posturing reports, but did not seek bilateral peace talks. Instead, President Clinton demanded Pakistan's return across the LoC and reestablish pre-Kargil War status quo conditions. Thus, nuclear weapons did not achieve Pakistan's desired effect.<sup>148</sup>

Nuclear optimists argue that nuclear weapons on the Indian subcontinent prevented the Kargil War from escalating into a larger conventional war. India understood its red lines and chose to mitigate the risk of escalation by maintaining its focus on the limited

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<sup>147</sup> Gil, "Provocation, War and Restraint Under the Nuclear Shadow: The Kargil Conflict 1999," 705.

<sup>148</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 269.

objective of reestablishing the territorial integrity of the LoC.<sup>149</sup> Pessimists argue that the Kargil War only happened *because* Pakistan possessed overt nuclear weapons and therefore had the perceived capacity to aggressively revise the situation in Kashmir, compared to its proxy warfare insurgent approach of decades past.<sup>150</sup> While both arguments demonstrate the capabilities of potentially empowering irregular warfare and limiting the protraction of the corresponding military response, one must also understand the interaction between irregular warfare and nuclear capability within the context of deterrence and the instability/stability paradox. The Kargil War demonstrates that although there is substantial freedom of maneuver for conventional forces when reacting to an irregular threat under the nuclear umbrella, there are also substantial drawbacks as well. In addition, specifically for regional powers, there is a powerful component of international opinion and intervention that can drive success or failure in this context. As witnessed with Pakistan, it was unable to tie initial tactical success with strategic victory and alienated the international community in the process.

## E. CONCLUSION

The Kargil War was an outright loss for Pakistan. Although it achieved tactical success while infiltrating its forces, the *fait accompli* devolved into strategic failure. Pakistan's efforts were perceived as irresponsible and an unnecessarily violent effort that could have instigated nuclear escalation. Conversely, India's measured and controlled response was lauded by the international community for its focus and concern for unnecessary nuclear escalation. Pakistan's failure demonstrated the complexities of irregular warfare employment under an overt nuclear umbrella.

This episode represents the direct interaction between Pakistan's nuclear capability and its irregular warfare approach. Pakistan escalated the Kashmir conflict by employing Pakistani soldiers directly into hostilities vice supporting proxy Islamic militants in Kashmir. This attempt to maintain deniability limited flexible options, damaged Pakistan's reputation, and crippled any chances for a positive outcome to the conflict.

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<sup>149</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb*, 48.

<sup>150</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 270.

## **V. PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION AND THE 2019 PULWAMA CRISIS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

On February 14, 2019, 40 Indian soldiers were killed by an Islamic suicide bomber loyal to the Pakistan-based militant group JeM within the Pulwama district of J&K. The ensuing crisis involved an exchange of airstrikes for the first time since the 1971 Bangladesh War and first significant kinetic altercation between these adversaries since the Kargil War of 1999.<sup>151</sup> This crisis also occurred over two decades from each adversary's demonstration of nuclear capability. Subsequently, Pakistan developed an advanced and multi-dimensional nuclear program capable of land, sea, and air based nuclear response that is supplemented with a tactical nuclear capability.<sup>152</sup>

This case study analyzes and describes the events leading to the Pulwama crisis, the Pulwama crisis itself, and its aftermath while highlighting Pakistan's nuclear capability and irregular warfare employment. The dynamics of irregular warfare within J&K are then investigated within the environment of Pakistan's advanced nuclear capability, specifically Pakistan's diverse nuclear military apparatus and its tactical nuclear weapons. This case study also considers India's apparent willingness to escalate to conventional warfare in response to terrorist violence inside J&K and the repercussions of a changing status quo within the region. Finally, the U.S.'s role within the crisis is considered as it pertains to its competition with China.

### **B. BACKGROUND**

The two decades of J&K insurgency leading up to the Pulwama crisis contrasted remarkably with the Kashmir resistance movement originating in the 1980s. Pakistan-based jihadist organizations supplanted the grassroots Kashmiri insurgency that had defined the struggle for J&K independence from India. With support of the ISI, LeT and

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<sup>151</sup> Pegahi, "From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years," 149.

<sup>152</sup> Sadia Tasleem and Toby Dalton, "Nuclear Emulation: Pakistan's Nuclear Trajectory," *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 135.

JeM became the new face of the insurgency and demonstrated a willingness to expand operations beyond J&K into the Indian homeland. Although these Pakistan-based groups shifted the narrative of a Kashmiri grassroots insurgency for freedom into an ideological conflict, Pakistan was willing to accept this tradeoff. LeT and JeM were aligned with the state's overall strategic objective of secession of J&K into Pakistan whereas J&K-based groups generally only desired independence. In addition, LeT and JeM demonstrated a greater threshold of violence and did not share the same fear of domestic reprisals as the local insurgents. This resulted in continued violence against Indian security forces operating inside of J&K that protracted into India. The high profile attacks against India's Parliament in New Delhi in 2001 and the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008 illustrated the changing dynamic of Pakistan-based irregular warfare.<sup>153</sup>

As Pakistan's irregular warfare approach in J&K evolved, India struggled to achieve a proportional response or deterrence strategy. India attempted diplomatic pressure against Pakistan to reign in the LeT and JeM following the New Delhi and Mumbai attacks, but achieved little success. Pakistan's President Musharraf publicly decried the events, stating that Pakistan would not allow terrorists to carry out attacks from its soil and prohibited the LeT and JeM from operating within its borders. In reality, the ISI shielded LeT and JeM members from prosecution and likely enabled further operations. Pakistan's ambivalence was most obviously displayed following the Mumbai attacks. Pakistan initially denied LeT involvement, eventually acknowledged the LeT's responsibility and ties to its government, but refused to take decisive action against the group.<sup>154</sup>

India's inability to leverage its conventional military dominance to deter terrorism from Pakistani-based groups became an existential concern for India. The military standoffs following the New Delhi and Mumbai attacks resulted in posturing and little else, leaving feelings of political failure within India; while Pakistan enjoyed success with its long-term irregular warfare approach under the nuclear umbrella. With increasing political pressure to secure the homeland and deter Pakistani-based terrorism, India's military

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<sup>153</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 94.

<sup>154</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 96.

establishment developed a potentially proportional solution to the irregular warfare threat that could also be employed below the threshold of nuclear use.<sup>155</sup>

This approach, known as Cold Start, re-oriented India away from its historic focus on overwhelming attacks deep within Pakistan for rapid and overwhelming maneuver against Pakistan forces proximal to the shared border, but not threatening to any of Pakistan's strategic assets. The plan required India to quickly mobilize, deploy, and decimate Pakistan forces prior to dissuasion from the international community and in a manner that would not empower Pakistan to employ its nuclear arsenal.<sup>156</sup>

The Cold Start doctrine, although never officially adopted by India, presented a shift in India's operational approach toward Pakistan. In the face of India's evolving Cold Start doctrine and Pakistan's historic conventional military disadvantage, Pakistan invested substantially in the development of a robust nuclear weapons program capable of deterring, withstanding, and halting a limited conventional Indian offensive during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>157</sup> Pakistan reasoned a nuclear triad modeled after that of the United States Cold War doctrine would be most suitable to reestablish credible deterrence. This resulted in the development of advanced aerial delivery systems for F-16 and Mirage aircraft; various short, medium, and long range ground-based missile systems; and an emerging sea-based delivery system recently tested in 2017.<sup>158</sup>

Pakistan's most credible deterrence threat against a limited Indian offensive was its employment of the short-range Nasr missile in 2011. The Nasr missile, with its modest effective range of 60 km, provided a tactical nuclear capability that was fully integrated into the conventional military order of battle and a direct response to India's Cold Start.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities" *International Security* 43, no. 3 (2018): 14, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00340](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00340).

<sup>156</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 281.

<sup>157</sup> Lowell Dittmer, *South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma: India, Pakistan, and China* (London: Routledge, 2016), 117.

<sup>158</sup> "Pakistan's Nuclear Capabilities," Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, August 29, 2019, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/pakistans-nuclear-capabilities/>.

<sup>159</sup> Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 124.

In *India's Counterforce Strategic Dilemma*, Christopher Clary and Vipin Narang stated the importance of this system to deter any limited Indian cross-border transgressions:

Pakistan's manipulation of the threat of low-level nuclear use, something that it had hinted at since 1998, now included a dedicated battlefield capability. Satellite imagery strongly suggests that Nasr batteries are kept near the border, implying that the short-range missile is in fact a fielded system.<sup>160</sup>

The fielding of the Nasr system represents Pakistan's continued acknowledgment of its conventional military weakness with India and the importance of its nuclear capability to deter Indian attacks. In addition, the limited impact of tactical nuclear weapons against specific military targets in defense of Pakistan territory provided a more focused, realistic, and credible deterrence weapon. Posturing its nuclear force as minimum credible deterrence during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Pakistan has recently described its nuclear program as a "full spectrum deterrence capability" since the Nasr missile's inception.<sup>161</sup> This change signaled Pakistan's desire to fully leverage its menu of nuclear weapons options—tactical to strategic—to best prevent India's encroachment within its borders and leverage proxies against them.

Pakistan has coupled its diverse nuclear capability with ambiguous nuclear employment doctrine to further deter India. As there is no official Pakistani doctrine made public that outlines nuclear terms of use, debate remains amongst practitioners and academics regarding Pakistan's employment criteria, specifically with reference to its tactical nuclear weapons. In *Nuclear South Asia*, Scott Sagan highlights this ambiguity by identifying contradictory claims within Pakistan's military establishment as to whether Pakistan would engage in limited nuclear engagement or only as a weapon of last resort to defend the state's existence.<sup>162</sup> However, nuclear experts Scott Sagan, Sadia Tasleem, and Toby Dalton point to Pakistan's emulation of the U.S.'s flexible response doctrine of the

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<sup>160</sup> Clary and Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," 14.

<sup>161</sup> Tasleem and Dalton, "Nuclear Emulation: Pakistan's Nuclear Trajectory," 135.

<sup>162</sup> Sagan, "The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine," 235.

Cold War and Pakistan's likely employment of tactical nuclear weapons should deterrence of India's conventional force fail.<sup>163</sup>

Pakistan's full spectrum nuclear capability and doctrinal ambiguity have frustrated India's response to terrorism over the last 20 years, leaving a perception of a weak counterterrorism strategy and impotence against a nuclear-armed Pakistan proxy force campaign. However, the 2019 crisis represents a remarkably more assertive Indian response and escalatory behavior contrasted against the episodic crises between these nations over the last two decades.

### C. THE CRISIS

The 2019 Crisis began when a 22 year old Kashmiri man named Adil Ahmad Dar drove a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device into a bus filled with Indian paramilitary soldiers, detonated the device, and killing himself along with 44 others on February 14 in the Pulwama district of J&K.<sup>164</sup> According to family reports, Adil Ahmad Dar had been radicalized following two episodes of public humiliation at the hands of Indian security forces in 2016. Adil would later pledge allegiance to JeM in March 2018, shortly before disappearing to join the group. During his absence, Adil likely received further indoctrination and training to prepare him for his February 14<sup>th</sup> operation.<sup>165</sup>

This terrorist attack was reportedly the single deadliest event within J&K in the 30 year history of its modern insurgency. Jaish-e-Mohammed quickly took credit for the attack and India hastily blamed Pakistan for supporting this operation. Indian Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh specifically implicated Pakistan's ISI in the attack, accusing the agency of coordinating JeM activities to wrest control of J&K away from Indian security

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<sup>163</sup> Sagan, "The Evolution of Pakistani and Indian Nuclear Doctrine," 235; Tasleem and Dalton, "Nuclear Emulation: Pakistan's Nuclear Trajectory," 136.

<sup>164</sup> "Pulwama Attack: What is Militant Group Jaish-e-Mohammad," *British Broadcasting Company*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47249982>.

<sup>165</sup> Harinder Baweja, "Apathy Forced Him to Opt for Violence, Says Pulwama Bomber's Family," *Hindustan Times*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/apathy-forced-him-to-opt-for-violence-says-pulwama-bomber-s-family/story-ZTZ6mfqODWp54dyi5WL5vI.html>.

forces.<sup>166</sup> Within 24 hours, Indian Prime Minister Nedehra Modi unequivocally blamed Pakistan, stating the attacks would be met with a “crushing response” and that “our neighboring country thinks such terror attacks can weaken us, but their plans will not materialize.”<sup>167</sup>

Pakistan quickly denied responsibility for the attacks, accusing Prime Minister Modi of attempting to leverage the attacks for political support in the midst of his re-election campaign. Pakistan’s Prime Minister Ihram Khan acknowledged the terrorist attack, likening it to a larger regional problem that required multinational cooperation. Khan qualified these remarks by warning against an Indian military response to the terrorist attack by saying, “If you think you would launch any attack on Pakistan and we would not think of retaliating, Pakistan will retaliate. Pakistan would not have any other choice but to give an answer.”<sup>168</sup>

The situation further escalated on February 26, when Indian warplanes bombed a reported JeM training camp near Balakot, within sovereign Pakistan. In a statement following the attacks, the Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Keshav Gokhale characterized the operation as a pre-emptive measure against “non-military” terrorist targets based on actionable intelligence of an upcoming JeM operation. The statement further implicated Pakistan’s persistent inability and unwillingness to eradicate JeM as justification for the strikes.<sup>169</sup> This event was of great significance as it represented the first instance in which India had bombed sovereign Pakistani territory since the 1971 Bangladesh War, when neither country possessed nuclear weapons. Damage assessments of the airstrikes were

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<sup>166</sup> “Jammu & Kashmir: Timeline (Terrorist Activities) -2019,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.satp.org/terrorist-activity/india-jammukashmir-Feb-2019>.

<sup>167</sup> “India Warns of ‘Crushing Response’ to Pulwama Suicide Bombing That Killed 41 People,” *USA Today*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/02/15/pulwama-attack-narendra-modi-blames-kashmir-bombing-pakistan/2879945002/>.

<sup>168</sup> “Pakistan PM Imran Khan’s Pulwama Terror Attack Statement is an Echo of its Army’s Line on Terror,” *The Indian Express*, February 20, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/decoding-pakistan-pm-imran-khans-first-statement-on-pulwama-terror-attack-5591278/>.

<sup>169</sup> Vijay Keshav Gokhale, *Statement by Foreign Secretary on 26 February 2019 on the Strike on JeM training camp at Balakot* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 2019), [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/31091/Statement\\_by\\_Foreign\\_Secretary\\_on\\_26\\_February\\_2019\\_on\\_the\\_Strike\\_on\\_JeM\\_training\\_camp\\_at\\_Balakot](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/31091/Statement_by_Foreign_Secretary_on_26_February_2019_on_the_Strike_on_JeM_training_camp_at_Balakot).



unclear, with India claiming successful destruction of the camp and Pakistan stating the bombs were ineffectual.<sup>170</sup>

Pakistan quickly responded with its own airstrikes within J&K on February 27, escalating tensions, and further defying the near-50 year old precedent. Pakistan justified these actions by emphasizing its defensive need to respond to India's response by stating, "The Pakistan army and air force had no option to respond after India's incursion." Further statements emphasized Pakistan's desire for peace, but need to demonstrate military capability to retaliate in the face of Indian aggression. They emphasized the ability to engage Indian military positions, but instead chose to destroy dirt instead.<sup>171</sup> Presumably this show of force was meant to signal Pakistan's strength, but desire to deescalate. Prime Minister Khan also sought intervention from the international community to diffuse further activities that could result in escalation:

The international community also has a responsibility. In the current situation, Pakistan does not want to move towards war. From us, there is a message of peace. They [international community] must also come forward and see how the environment between Pakistan and India is a threat to peace and development, not just between the two countries but in the region and beyond.<sup>172</sup>

This quote, although not specifically annotating the nuclear rivalry between Pakistan and India, underscored the potential ramifications of further conventional military interactions between the adversaries. It also acknowledged the role international bargaining had played in the past to de-escalate tensions over Kashmir.

During the ensuing aerial engagement on February 27, Indian aircraft pursued Pakistan fighters into Pakistani airspace. The resulting air battle downed one Indian aircraft and the pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, was taken into custody by Pakistani forces. On March 1, as a "peace gesture," Prime Minister Khan ordered the

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<sup>170</sup> Pegahi, "From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years," 153.

<sup>171</sup> Pegahi, "From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years," 153.

<sup>172</sup> "Did Not Want to Retaliate at the Cost of Regional Peace: DG ISPR," *The Express Tribune*, February 27, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1919333/1-dg-ispr-address-media-paf-strikes-iaf-jets>.

release of the pilot back to India.<sup>173</sup> A day earlier, Prime Minister Khan had urged diplomatic de-escalation in the only public reference to the nuclear dynamic by saying: “History tells us that wars are full of miscalculation. My question is that given the weapons we have can we afford miscalculation. We should sit down and talk.”<sup>174</sup> This appeal, coupled with the return of the downed pilot, deescalated hostilities between the adversaries. Although later reports indicated that hostile verbal altercations occurred between respective intelligence agencies included threats of launching missiles from India, and Pakistani officials retorting they were prepared to respond threefold. However, no open source information exists citing provocative nuclear signaling beyond words.<sup>175</sup>

The U.S.’s role in crisis management following the February 14 attacks was less direct than past situations. Immediately after the incident, National Security Advisor John Bolton acknowledged India’s right to self-defense in a call to New Delhi. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo waited until after India delivered its airstrikes to urge de-escalation, ostensibly providing diplomatic space for India to respond militarily. Although U.S. officials maintained contact throughout the event, there were no physical visits with Pakistani or Indian leadership as in past crises such as the decisive U.S. diplomatic interventions in the near-war of 1990 and the Kargil War in 1999.<sup>176</sup>

Following the immediate crisis that rapidly deescalated in March, additional fallout occurred from the event. First, in an effort to address consistent JeM terrorist activity in the region, three permanent members (U.S., United Kingdom, and France) of the UNSC attempted to designate JeM’s leader Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. This was the fourth attempt by the UNSC to take such action since 2009. Just as in the past three attempts,

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<sup>173</sup> “From Pulwama Terror Attack to Wg Cmdr Abhinandan’s Release: A Timeline,” *The Hindu*, March 3, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/from-pulwama-terror-attack-to-wg-cmdr-abhinandans-release-a-timeline/article26423658.ece>.

<sup>174</sup> “Pakistan PM Imran Khan Urges Talks With India to End Crisis, Avoid Miscalculation,” *Reuters*, February 27, 2019, <https://in.reuters.com/article/india-kashmir-pakistan-primeminister/pakistan-pm-imran-khan-urges-talks-with-india-to-end-crisis-avoid-miscalculation-idINKCN1QG1BH>.

<sup>175</sup> “India Threatened to Fire 6 missiles at Pakistan, Islamabad Said It Would Respond With Strikes ‘Three Times Over’: Report,” *Business Today*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.besnesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/india-threatened-to-fire-6-missiles-at-pakistan-said-it-would-respond-strikes-three-times-over/story/328453.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Pegahi, “From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years,” 155.

China utilized its position on the UNSC to block the resolution, signaling its partnership in support of Pakistan in the midst of its \$60 billion Belt and Road Initiative investment within the country. Interestingly, China reversed its decision against Masood Azhar on May 1, but few tangible results have ensured punishment of Azhar.<sup>177</sup> This issue has further strained Indian and Chinese relations, representing a growing polarity as the U.S. draws closer to India and China to Pakistan.<sup>178</sup>

Second, riding a renewed nationalist fervor following his assertive actions during the crisis, Modi was easily reelected as Prime Minister. Compared to India's less decisive responses and perceived weakness following terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2008, Modi's harsh rhetoric and military response leveraged strong support from within the country. Modi would then go on to win in a landslide victory in May, with timing and response of the attacks considered a proximal factor to his success at the polls.<sup>179</sup>

Third, in August 2019 in the wake of his election, Modi capitalized on the nationalist movement to make sweeping reforms within J&K to draw the region closer to the Indian government. He revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that stipulates special autonomy to J&K and integrates the historically independent state into India. Modi contested that Article 370 had impeded J&K's development, aided the spread of terrorism, and alienated the population.<sup>180</sup> In the months following the crisis, India also employed harsh media blackouts and curfews on the majority Muslim population to reportedly destabilize the J&K insurgency, further raising tensions with Pakistan over India's treatment of Kashmiris.<sup>181</sup>

The crisis ended with very little closure for either nation. Islamic terrorism continued to be a concern for India and Indian misrule over Muslims a leading frustration

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<sup>177</sup> Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "The Terrorist Who Got Away," *New York Times Magazine*, March 22, 2020, 46. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2383127405/>.

<sup>178</sup> Bibhudatta Pradhan, "China Blocked a U.N. Attempt to Label a Pakistani Militant a Global Terrorist," *Time*, March 14, 2019, <https://time.com/5551266/china-block-un-blacklist-masood-azhar/>.

<sup>179</sup> Ahaan Bagwe, "Modi's Grand Strategy in Kashmir?," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/09/modis-grand-strategy-in-kashmir/>.

<sup>180</sup> Ahaan Bagwe, "Modi's Grand Strategy in Kashmir?."

<sup>181</sup> Michael Kugelman, "India and Pakistan Are Edging Closer to War in 2020."

for Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan and India may have entered a new era of instability regarding the J&K problem beneath the nuclear shadow with the Balakot airstrikes directly challenging the status quo.

## **D. ANALYSIS**

### **1. Assessing the Regional Dynamic**

The Pulwama crisis represents a dangerous divergence from the status quo regarding the relationship between irregular warfare and nuclear escalation within J&K. The bomber, a young Kashmiri man who was radicalized by JeM after multiple negative interactions with Indian security forces epitomizes the persistent narrative within the ongoing Kashmir issue. Jaish-e-Mohammed continues to enjoy its relative safety within Pakistan-administered Kashmir along with access to a pool of disenfranchised youth within J&K; a source of fighters to perpetuate JeM's revisionist goals. Pakistan's unwillingness to fully address these terrorist threats within its own borders also remains a constant.<sup>182</sup>

What has changed is the nature of Indian response to irregular warfare from Pakistan-based terrorist groups within J&K. The cross border airstrikes on reported JeM training camps cannot be overstated in their diversion from past crises. The Kargil War of 1999 contained a massive Indian air campaign, but only against offensive Pakistani positions within J&K. India avoided strikes within Pakistan even though it would have likely provided a tactical advantage. The 2001 and 2008 terrorist attacks resulted in posturing and tough talk, development of Cold Start, but lacked a decisive response. Additionally, the aforementioned attacks were significantly more impactful than the Pulwama incident, taking place in India's political and cultural capitals of New Delhi and Mumbai. Furthermore, the Balakot airstrikes occurred after Pakistan had developed a nuclear triad, to include a tactical nuclear capability. These facts point to a shifting dynamic of acceptable military response to irregular warfare in J&K.

Prime Minister Modi's choice to respond quickly and assertively was met with success at the polls months later. This near-immediate gratification for his decision has the

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<sup>182</sup> Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "The Terrorist Who Got Away."

potential to inform an increasingly assertive approach in response to Pakistan-based terrorism within India's borders. In contrast, Prime Minister Khan's measured and diplomatic de-escalation of the crisis proved much more palatable for the international community. The return of the Indian pilot gave an outlet of diplomacy and created space for bi-lateral de-escalation which proved decisive in ending the military aspect of the crisis, at least in the near term.<sup>183</sup>

The peaceful end to the Pulwama crisis belies the potential for catastrophic escalation for three reasons. First, Indian rhetoric coupled with airstrikes created a condition of battlefield uncertainty that risked rapid escalation with disastrous consequences. In this instance, India clearly delineated its attack against a target it deemed as a terrorist, non-military target within Pakistan-administered Kashmir that was not near the civilian population. The Indian's foreign ministry's response was concise in its justification for such attacks. However, Indian's violation of Pakistan's airspace with a substantial force package risks a plethora of negative, unintended outcomes inherent with direct, conventional combat. For example, a mis-strike resulting in substantial civilian casualties was possible and could have quickly increased the stakes of the crisis. Pakistan, responding quickly to the Balakot strike with its own airstrike, was proportional in that it occurred, but did not damage any Indian infrastructure or personnel. It is thus reasonable to imagine a proportional response to a strike harming civilian or military targets, accidental or otherwise.

The captured Indian pilot in Pakistan presented additional risks for dangerous escalation and unpredictable outcomes. Had the pilot been captured and then mistreated or killed by Islamic militants that operate within the region, the event could have provided justification for more provocative behavior from India. Thankfully this did not occur, but the potential for such happenings exists any time belligerents engage in air combat over enemy territory.

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<sup>183</sup> Abhaya Srivastava and Joris Fioriti, "Modi and Imran Bask After 'Good' Kashmir Crisis," *India Abroad*, March 4, 2019, [https://www.indiaabroad.com/diplomacy/modi-and-imran-bask-after-good-kashmir-crisis/article\\_fe53f9f8-3e8c-11e9-9c93-17d1763ddb9b.html](https://www.indiaabroad.com/diplomacy/modi-and-imran-bask-after-good-kashmir-crisis/article_fe53f9f8-3e8c-11e9-9c93-17d1763ddb9b.html).

Although hypothetical “what ifs” are not scientific, the “fog of war” is an oft-cited and very real component of any military campaign.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, Pakistan had responded that it had no choice but retaliate against Indian airstrikes, but in a proportional way. Pakistan’s historic paranoia of its lack of strategic depth and military inferiority compels such actions. This also incentivizes Pakistan to showcase its nuclear capability against India’s overwhelming conventional advantage when it perceives an existential threat.

## **2. Assessing the International Dynamic**

The United States’ less direct intervention from its executive branch compared to past crises in South Asia may be telling of its strategic shift toward India and away from Pakistan. This choice may have less to do with the Kashmir problem and be more in line with U.S. strategic interest to check China’s increasing global influence. The U.S. approach during the Pulwama crisis contrasted significantly with two other high profile J&K crises: Robert Gates’ personal visit to Islamabad and New Delhi in the midst of the 1990 stand-off and President Clinton’s Whitehouse meeting with Pakistan’s Prime Minister during the Kargil War. Both events are viewed as critical actions in the subsequent de-escalation.<sup>185</sup> In Pulwama crisis however, India was given maneuver space to employ a military response in Pakistan, thus altering the status quo of the larger, ongoing nuclear relationship between the two nations.

In contrast, Pakistan’s relationship with China has steadily grown as China has aggressively invested in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key component to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. However, China’s post Pulwama crisis blocking of UNSC blacklisting of the JeM leader and then subsequent support of the amendment may represent a changing policy for China regarding Pakistan’s jihadist problem. China’s massive investments in CPEC prioritizes a strong relationship with the Pakistani state, but

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<sup>184</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret. *On War*, Rev. ed (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985), 101.

<sup>185</sup> Rathnam Indurthy, “The Turns and Shifts in the U.S. Role in the Kashmir Conflict Since 1947: Today’s Propitious Times for a Facilitator to Resolve It.” *Asian Affairs* 32, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 41.; Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 98.

also requires security for its workers and to ensure the projects are completed effectively. In addition, China has incentives to quell outsourcing Islamic terrorism groups from Pakistan that have supported the Uighur cause within China's restive Xinjiang province.<sup>186</sup> However, China has been quick to support Pakistan against their common adversary, India, with respect to Modi's revocation of Article 370. Therefore, this crisis presents China with an interesting conflict between securing its ungoverned spaces, supporting a close ally against a common adversary, and protecting its economic interests.<sup>187</sup>

One must also acknowledge Prime Minister Imran Khan's measured and diplomatic response throughout February 2019 as a positive aspect in the resolution of the Pulwama crisis. He admonished the attacks, requested evidence linking the attack to Pakistan, expressed support for counterterrorism, and ultimately took measures that ended the crisis. This may signal a shift in bilateral diplomatic problem-solving over Kashmir, whereas U.S. third-party intervention had been the traditional norm in crisis management. Perhaps Khan reasoned that Pakistan's own economic woes, failed responses to terrorism, and international isolation during the event required a more conciliatory tone in order to avoid further international isolation. The international community had increasingly sought to blame Pakistan for its proliferation of proxy force terrorism and thus hold them accountable.<sup>188</sup> Thus, Pakistan did not have its third party safety valve and was compelled to deescalate or face greater consequences.

Khan's steady diplomatic approach and acknowledgment of potential nuclear escalation, followed by the punctual release of the Indian pilot, does provide a level of optimism regarding stability within the context of the Pulwama crisis. However, this does not demonstrate a revolution in Pakistani crisis management with regards to J&K. Although the politically powerful Pakistan military supported Prime Minister Khan's

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<sup>186</sup> Barbara Kelemen, "China's Changing Response to Militancy in Pakistan," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, September 2, 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/09/csdp-militancy-in-pakistan>.

<sup>187</sup> Vinay Kaura. "India's Pakistan Policy: From 2016 'Surgical Strike' to 2019 Balakot 'Airstrike,'" *Round Table (London)* 109, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 282, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1760499>.

<sup>188</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, "A Smoldering Volcano: Pakistan and Terrorism after Balakot," *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, March 14, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/14/smoldering-volcano-pakistan-and-terrorism-after-balakot-pub-78593>.

approach in this most recent crisis, that is no guarantee in future instances that it will be as willing to cooperate with less bellicose action.<sup>189</sup>

The dominating nature of Pakistan's military becomes increasingly problematic when one analyzes its monopoly of the nuclear weapons program and its integration into conventional forces. This strategy lowers the threshold of nuclear use and raises the legitimacy of deterrence against India's conventional threat. However, in the case of a crisis with high degrees of volatility and unknown behavior, such arrangements enhance the likelihood of an accidental launch or rapid employment without civilian authorization. As described by Vipin Narang in *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, Pakistan's nuclear arrangements "favor offensive strategies and procedures that allow the retention of the initiative and independence, and take steps to minimize interference."<sup>190</sup> For Prime Minister Khan and the international community at large, such arrangements become increasingly disturbing if conventional military force altercations between adversaries occur more frequently, thereby increasing the probability of mishaps, misestimations, and provocations. In the past, open diplomatic communication channels provided a level of stability that sought to minimize uncertainty.<sup>191</sup> However, the rapidity of escalation in a kinetic environment and Pakistan's decentralized and conventionally integrated command and control structure of nuclear weapons could outpace such procedures.

Modi's "successful" Balakot airstrikes could cause him to be more apt to push the boundary of escalation in a future event similar to the Pulwama crisis. Modi has already demonstrated his own revisionist aims within J&K by stripping its autonomy through revocation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution just five months after the Pulwama crisis. In this instance, there will likely be greater emphasis by the Pakistan military to respond decisively and lower the nuclear threshold to deter the rising aggression of Modi's nationalistic approach.

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<sup>189</sup> Pegahi, "From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years," 157.

<sup>190</sup> Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era*, 85.

<sup>191</sup> Bell and MacDonald, "How Dangerous Was Kargil? Nuclear Crises in Comparative Perspective," 142.



## **E. CONCLUSION**

The Pulwama crisis shattered the historic norms of deterrence within the context of the ongoing J&K dispute. India demonstrated that it would respond with conventional military airpower in the wake of terrorist violence against jihadists groups based in Pakistan's sovereign territory. This precedent-breaking response resulted in an unpredictable crisis that left space for rapid escalation, but was de-escalated through diplomatic intervention on behalf of Pakistan. The episode also lacked the leverage of U.S. crisis management efforts as seen in past crises. Although the crisis concluded peacefully, largely due to Prime Minister Khan's de-escalatory rhetoric and actions, questions remain regarding future regional stability in the event of another J&K crisis.

The catalysts for this crisis still exist, making a future event probable: Pakistan-based militias continue to operate with near impunity and disenfranchised Kashmiri Muslims still reject Indian rule and counterinsurgency methods. The developing polarity between the U.S. and China coupled with Pakistan's and India's willingness to engage in escalating military action beyond the near-50 year status quo will likely define future crises in the region.

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## **VI. FINDINGS AND APPLICATION TO NUCLEAR-ARMED REGIONAL POWERS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter relates common themes observed and analyzed within the case studies that will further shape the Kashmir conflict space. The first portion of this chapter contends three points. First, Pakistan has successfully leveraged nuclear deterrence in its irregular warfare campaign in J&K. Second, the international community accepts irregular warfare violence in J&K while focusing on crisis management efforts. Third, Pakistan has manipulated the interests of global powers to strengthen its security posture and continue its irregular warfare campaign in J&K. The second part will acknowledge the changing dynamics surrounding the Kashmir dispute as a consequence of the growing U.S.–China competition within the region. This section will demonstrate the near-term escalation risks associated with the evolving relationships between a Chinese-backed Pakistan and U.S.-aligned India. It will also identify potential long-term stabilization opportunities regarding counterterrorism in which the U.S. and China have shared interests. The final section applies the Kashmir case to regional powers who may choose to pair their irregular warfare approach with nuclear capability in future.

### **B. PART I: FINDINGS**

#### **1. Leveraging Irregular Warfare as a Nuclear Power**

Pakistan's irregular warfare and nuclear deterrent dynamic has created freedom of maneuver for its revisionist goals within Kashmir. The three crises analyzed in this study focused exclusively on Kashmir, coupled with other escalatory events based on terrorist attacks in India, represent instances where irregular warfare had broken India's threshold of acceptable violence while also imposing significant costs upon them. However, Indian failed to respond decisively due in large part to Pakistan's nuclear deterrence capability.

Nuclear optimists and pessimists debate whether nuclear weapons have ultimately stabilized or destabilized South Asia, but research is quite conclusive that they have created operational space for Pakistan-supported irregular warriors to conduct an insurgency at

varying degrees of intensity in the over 30 years of Pakistan's nuclear status.<sup>192</sup> Nuclear weapons—ranging the entire spectrum of de facto to advanced capability—have successfully empowered Pakistan's protracted irregular warfare strategy while fostering its existential vulnerability to India. Thus, nuclear optimists are correct in that India and Pakistan have yet to engage in large scale military action since the nuclearization of South Asia; while nuclear pessimists accurately highlight how increasing levels of violence have been vitalized within the nuclear shadow.

Judging by the aforementioned factors, Pakistan will continue to support irregular warfare activities indefinitely. However, these efforts will not decisively wrest control of J&K from India as initially desired at the outset of this irregular warfare campaign. India has constantly reaffirmed its willingness to defend this territory over the last 30 years as detailed in this project's case studies. In addition, Prime Minister Modi's August 2019 abrogation of Article 370 of India's Constitution, which protected Kashmir's semi-autonomous status, further demonstrates India's willingness to take significant steps to assert control over the region.<sup>193</sup>

Although recent Indian counterinsurgency efforts are threatening to its irregular warfare campaign, they also present Pakistan the ability to leverage Kashmiri domestic discontent to maintain the insurgency while also bringing to the forefront human rights issues within J&K and other xenophobic policies against Muslims employed by India. In addition, continued security concerns in Kashmir compels India to commit a large portion of its military to maintain security in the region. There are currently over 400,000 Indian security forces located in the region as of 2019 conducting stability and counterinsurgency operations.<sup>194</sup> In Pakistan's strategic estimate, these troops are thus unavailable to threaten Islamabad directly.

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<sup>192</sup> Ganguly and Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>193</sup> Kugelman, "India and Pakistan Are Edging Closer to War in 2020."

<sup>194</sup> Happymon Jacob, "Toward a Kashmir Endgame? How India and Pakistan could Negotiate a Lasting Solution," U.S. Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 474 (August 2020): 9.

Data suggests that the increased focus of Indian security forces in Kashmir since August 2019 has decreased overall terrorist attacks, but there is also evidence of increased infiltration by Pakistan insurgents into J&K.<sup>195</sup> Restrictive measures enforced by Indian security forces in response to COVID-19 have raised discontent among Kashmiris, thus setting conditions for an escalatory event at any time. An oppressive regime, restless population, and Pakistan-based infiltrators indicate the situation is ripe for another escalatory event in Kashmir.<sup>196</sup>

Pakistan can also use this opportunity to shape the information environment in its favor which it has largely been lost over the last two decades. The Kargil War, 2001, 2008, and 2019 crises all resulted in international outrage as Pakistan was held responsible for supporting terrorist activities with extremely dangerous implications outside of the Kashmir region and risking nuclear escalation. This contrasted drastically from the 1990 crisis and corresponding empathy for Kashmiris by the international community due to draconian Indian counterinsurgency measures.<sup>197</sup> Pakistan will likely continue to highlight India's rededication to strenuous counterinsurgency activities since 2019 to embarrass India and call into question the legitimacy of the world's most populace democracy.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, a rejuvenated and post-modern insurgency movement has taken root that enhances the risk of a near-future crisis resembling that of 2019. Recent reports indicate a new Pakistan-based group called The Resistance Front (TRF) has been infiltrating into J&K and fomenting grassroots resistance of Kashmiris against India's recent counterinsurgency methods. Most notably, the TRF possesses technical capability to employ VPNs and bypass India's digital restrictions within Kashmir to disperse propaganda to the population. The Resistance Front has leveraged banned social media outlets and circumvented these restrictions to maintain relevance in the midst of renewed

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<sup>195</sup> Jacob, "Toward a Kashmir Endgame?," 6.

<sup>196</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "Kashmir's Year of Hopelessness," *Foreign Policy*, August 5, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/05/kashmirs-year-of-hopelessness/>.

<sup>197</sup> "Summary of Human Rights Concerns in Jammu and Kashmir," *Amnesty International*, February 2, 1995, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/176000/asa200021995en.pdf>.

<sup>198</sup> Jacob, "Toward a Kashmir Endgame?," 10.

lockdowns under the auspices of COVID-19 prevention.<sup>199</sup> Happymon Jacob demonstrates the changing and potentially escalating dynamic of this group:

A newly minted terrorist group in Kashmir, The Resistance Front (TRF), which Indian officials believe is controlled by the Pakistan-based jihadi group Lashkar-e-Taiba, has been organizing major terror attacks. Indian officials suspect that the TRF has been created to give terror in Kashmir an indigenous face, thereby reducing international pressure, especially from the antiterror financing watchdog Financial Action Task Force, on Pakistan. No one doubts that an indigenous militancy exists in Kashmir, but no one also doubts that it is actively aided and abetted by the Pakistani side.<sup>200</sup>

This suggests that an escalatory incident similar to the 2019 crisis exists as well as uncertainty about the intensity of response Prime Minister Modi is willing to bring to bear in the event of the crisis. The tenuous security situation, willingness to leverage uncertain escalation and brinksmanship, and emerging bipolarity of China-U.S. relations within South Asia increases the risks of nuclear escalation beyond that of past crises detailed in this thesis.

## **2. Third Party Intervention Limited to Crisis Management**

Third party intervention focused on escalation management is also a common trend within past Kashmir crises. Although there are varying levels of international intervention and partiality based on perceived transgressions of either Pakistan or India during each crisis, the international community has remained neutral regarding the underlining Kashmir sovereignty dispute. The UN has stood by the 1972 Simla Accords as the guiding document for determination of the LoC separating Pakistan and India's jurisdiction of the region while also urging restraint and commitment to resolving the dispute peacefully.<sup>201</sup>

With regard to past Kashmir crises, the international community places its greatest emphasis during escalatory events. The United States assumed a pivotal role in the 1990

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<sup>199</sup> "The Resistance Front: New Terrorist Group In Jammu And Kashmir Amplifies Attacks On Social Media," *Medium*, July 15, 2020, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/the-resistance-front-new-terrorist-group-in-jammu-and-kashmir-amplifies-attacks-on-social-media-d71fd7362275>.

<sup>200</sup> Jacob, "Toward a Kashmir Endgame?," 13.

<sup>201</sup> *UN News*, "UN Security Council Discusses Kashmir, China Urges India And Pakistan To Ease Tensions," August 16, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1044401>.

crisis and the Kargil War of 1999 regarding de-escalation, while maintaining a less aggressive intervention status during the 2019 crisis. However, it still urged de-escalation of the latter conflict, albeit later in the event.<sup>202</sup> As crisis management is prioritized with regard to Kashmir, this signals a normalized and accepted level of insurgency violence tolerated by the international community. This was best illustrated during the 1990 case study when following the demobilization of Pakistan and Indian troops that ultimately reduced tensions, levels of violence within Kashmir continued to rise and then level off at a heightened state for the next decade.<sup>203</sup> This represented focus on resolving the immediate crisis instead of the Kashmir conflict itself. In addition, efforts by the UN following the Kargil War and the 2019 crisis to hold Pakistan accountable for irregular warfare within Kashmir or India's accused human rights violations have not resulted in tangible changes in the conflict's dynamics.<sup>204</sup> In short, the Kashmir problem is viewed as a regional dispute until the conflict implications fall outside of the bounds of irregular warfare and encompass a more widespread regional threat.

This suggests that the international community will continue to monitor the ongoing conflict from afar with an understanding that insurgency warfare will remain a constant, but will engage more deliberately when significant changes occur outside this status quo. This may include a large scale terrorist attack, vitriolic rhetoric between Indian and Pakistan regarding nuclear weapon use, or other forms of nuclear signaling either above board or intercepted through intelligence collection. However, this approach is not without risks as it leaves space for rapid escalation that could outpace third party de-escalation efforts.

### **3. Exploiting Global Power Priorities**

Pakistan's leveraging of superpowers and regional Islamic allies are proven constants that it will continue to employ to mitigate fears of international isolation and

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<sup>202</sup> Pegahi, "From Kargil to Pulwama: How Nuclear Crises Have Changed Over 20 Years," 155.

<sup>203</sup> "Jammu and Kashmir Terrorist Fatalities Data Sheet," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india-jammukashmir>, accessed: May 25, 2020.

<sup>204</sup> Jacob, "Toward a Kashmir Endgame?," 11.; Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "The Terrorist Who Got Away," 42.

strategic dominance by India. Pakistan has demonstrated its ability to manipulate the shifts in the global security environment, be it the Cold War, Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), or Great Power Competition to ensure its national survival and that of its nuclear weapons arsenal; while also maintaining its ability to violently confront India in Kashmir. Prior to its working relationship with the U.S. against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and then after 9/11 against Al Qaeda, Pakistan leveraged diplomatic support from China against Soviet-supported India in the 1960s.<sup>205</sup> Pakistan was also able to fund its nuclear program with Saudi Arabian support following the 1971 Bangladesh War with India.<sup>206</sup> Less than a decade later, the U.S. provided funding for the mujahedeen in the Soviet-Afghan War while the ISI secretly directed portions of this investment to support the latent Kashmir insurgency. More decisively was the U.S. willingness to look the other way while Pakistan crossed the nuclear finish line in exchange for covert support against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.<sup>207</sup> Once the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and ultimately collapsed, the U.S. reaffirmed its counter-proliferation policy against Pakistan and imposed sanctions. This drove Pakistan again closer to China until the U.S. renewed its counterterrorism partnership with Pakistan following 9/11.<sup>208</sup>

As a frustrated U.S. divests from its tenuous GWOT ally in Pakistan for a closer relationship to India as a regional balance to China, Pakistan has pivoted to China for protection and economic growth.<sup>209</sup> Most notably, Pakistan is leveraging China's aggressive policy of economic expansion by facilitating CPEC investments within its

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<sup>205</sup> Muhammad Shoaib and Sumaira Shafiq, "China's Policy Towards Kashmir Dispute," *Pakistan Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (Jan, 2015): 88.

<sup>206</sup> Khan, *Eating Grass*, 112.

<sup>207</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 78.

<sup>208</sup> Nasreen Akhtar, "Pakistan And Us Partnership: Cost Or Benefit?" *International Journal on World Peace* 28, no. 4 (12, 2011): 10.

<sup>209</sup> Pamela Constable, "Pakistan Pivots to China Amid Fresh Concerns Over U.S. Ties With India," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/pakistan-pivots-to-china-amid-fresh-concerns-over-us-ties-with-india/2017/06/29/63e377d2-5cc9-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistan-pivots-to-china-amid-fresh-concerns-over-us-ties-with-india/2017/06/29/63e377d2-5cc9-11e7-aa69-3964a7d55207_story.html).



borders. In turn, China's willingness to publicly criticize India's recent counterinsurgency efforts in support of Pakistan demonstrates aligning interests.<sup>210</sup>

## **C. PART II: EMERGING GREAT POWER COMPETITION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **1. Escalation Risk and the U.S.-China Rivalry**

Shifting Great Power dynamics within South Asia have increased uncertainty and risks associated with nuclear escalation in Kashmir in the near term. In response to Pakistan's ambivalence toward U.S. and NATO counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan since 9/11, the Trump Administration ceased defense funding for Pakistan in 2018. Furthermore, the U.S. has strengthened its defense relationship with India by selling them advanced military technology, presenting Pakistan with additional security concerns.<sup>211</sup> With souring U.S. relations, Pakistan has turned to China for economic and military support. China's \$46 billion investment in CPEC has drawn the two countries closer throughout the last decade.<sup>212</sup> In addition, heightened tensions over the China-India border near J&K also increase complexity within the region that has not existed during the era of Pakistan-India nuclear rivalry.<sup>213</sup>

As described in the 2019 Case Study, Prime Minister Modi was not only willing to alter the traditional status quo by conducting airstrikes inside sovereign Pakistan, but amend the Indian Constitution to grasp greater control of the traditionally semi-autonomous J&K region only months after the crisis. Worth noting, the latter event was seen quite favorably by the Hindu majority and increasingly nationalistic population within India. Perhaps its growing relationship with the U.S coupled with increasing Hindu nationalism has granted Modi greater confidence to push historic boundaries. However,

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<sup>210</sup> Jacob, *Toward a Kashmir Endgame?*, 11.

<sup>211</sup> "Online Press Briefing with Ambassador Alice G. Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs," U.S. *Department of State*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/online-press-briefing-with-ambassador-alice-g-wells-acting-assistant-secretary-bureau-of-south-and-central-asian-affairs/>.

<sup>212</sup> Murad Ali, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Tapping Potential to Achieve the 2030 Agenda in Pakistan," *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4, no. 2 (January 2018): 301.

<sup>213</sup> Jacob, *Toward a Kashmir Endgame?*, 13.

China's recent aggressive approach in its own border dispute against India may also signal tacit support for Pakistan's same issue, potentially providing a tenuous balance to Indian military response in the region.<sup>214</sup>

Because the 2019 crisis has fundamentally altered the status quo agreement and Modi has leveraged nationalistic support to change domestic policy regarding Kashmir, Pakistan could reason that it has lost credibility of its nuclear threat from which it had enjoyed in decades prior. With this called into question, the unknowns of future crisis predictability in the region may cause Pakistan to rethink its nuclear posture to reestablish deterrence. Pakistan could reestablish deterrence in the face of Modi's aggressive response posture, but such actions would substantially increase the risk of accidental or uncontrolled escalation. In the event of another crisis, Pakistan could choose to mate its nuclear warheads with its delivery systems, deploy its tactical nuclear systems, and delegate launch authority of these systems in an attempt to reestablish its threat credibility in the face of emerging threats. This would fundamentally increase the risk of accidental escalation while also compelling India to match or supersede Pakistan's nuclear posture as a preventative measure. As India may leverage its growing relationship with the U.S. in the midst of another crisis, Pakistan may attempt to exploit Chinese support as a counter to U.S. influence in Asia. Invoking the growing U.S.–China rivalry into the historic Kashmir dispute adds an additional layer of uncertainty since the unknowns of credible deterrence have been called into question, Modi has demonstrated a greater willingness to aggressively respond to a crisis, and Pakistan maintains its obsession with Indian security dominance as its greatest threat to national security.

## **2. Great Power Stabilization Opportunity**

As discussed, Kashmir's instability lends itself to another escalatory event near-term. However, do the Chinese and American shared interest in preventing Pakistan-based terrorism provide an opportunity to stabilize South Asia in the long-term? As the unknowns of Great Power Competition sour relations between the U.S. and China, opportunities for

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<sup>214</sup> Jacob, *Toward a Kashmir Endgame?*, 13.

cooperation regarding Pakistan-based Islamic terrorism could provide an opportunity to deescalate the Kashmir problem and provide bipartisan mitigation of escalation risk.

For China, the concerns over jihadism are twofold. First, China sees jihadism internal to Pakistan as compromising to its economic investments under CPEC as it threatens to compromise various infrastructure projects: roads, dams, and the Gwadar Port. This was clearly demonstrated when jihadists killed at least 46 Chinese workers in a two-year period alone, as reported in 2016. Pakistan subsequently committed 10,000 troops to protect the CPEC project sites and workers. With Pakistan estimating that CPEC will create 700,000 jobs and result in 2.5 percent growth by 2030, CPEC could potentially provide the economic stimulus Pakistan desperately needs. Economic improvement would likely curtail the radicalization of Pakistan youth as jobs and future opportunities would be more available.<sup>215</sup> As Corinne Graff succinctly summarizes in her work *Poverty, Development and Violent Extremism in Weak States*, “uneducated and often impoverished young men with few employment prospects often are being recruited to join violent extremist groups in exchange for financial rewards.”<sup>216</sup> CPEC could provide the economic stimulus that frustrates recruitment into extremist groups of Pakistan’s most vulnerable population.

Second, jihadism emanating from Pakistan has been a source of support for the Uighurs as they struggle to oppose draconian Chinese policies themselves, not dissimilar (and likely worse) than those experienced by Muslim Kashmiris in J&K.<sup>217</sup> As China seeks to quell its internal populations, it has incentive to prevent Pakistan’s outsourcing of jihadis. With the carrot of CPEC, China has already employed the stick against Pakistan to protect its investment and secure its borders with Pakistan. China has signaled a willingness to hold Pakistan accountable for its harboring of terrorists, most notably supporting the UNSC sanctions against JeM leader Muhammed Azhar, reversing previous objections. In

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<sup>215</sup> Saeed Shah, “Chinese-Pakistani Project Tries to Overcome Jihadists, Droughts and Doubts; Developing the Fishing Town of Gwadar into an Economic Hub is Part of Beijing’s Plan to Forge New Trade Routes,” *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, Apr 10, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-chinese-pakistani-project-tries-to-overcome-jihadists-droughts-and-doubts-1460274228>.

<sup>216</sup> Corinne Graff, “Poverty, Development and Violent Extremism in Weak States,” *Policy File*, The Brookings Institution, January 1, 2010, 46.

<sup>217</sup> Kelemen, “China’s Changing Response to Militancy in Pakistan.”

addition, China supported placing Pakistan on the Financial Action Task Force Grey List for monetary support of terrorism in 2019.<sup>218</sup> Perhaps Chinese influence in Pakistan may compel Pakistan to reduce its leveraging of jihadists and conduct more robust domestic counterterrorism operations to maintain its working relationship with the rising power.

With respect to the U.S., growing partnership with India also presents a potential opportunity to shape Indian policy within Kashmir and reduce tensions. The draconian measures—mass arrests, media blackouts, police brutality, incarcerations—following the 2019 crisis and then renewed during the COVID-19 lockdown has set conditions for a new generation of violent insurgency. Perhaps leveraging a stronger position regarding human rights issues within J&K by persuading Modi’s administration to loosen laws that alienate Muslims could address the grievances that fuel the ongoing insurgency. With China’s focus on economic investment within Pakistan, the U.S.’s relationship could potentially seek to shore up international opinion against India’s human rights-violating counterinsurgency efforts. However, the United States has been hesitant to confront these issues as they are substantial friction points that could compromise its growing relationship with India as a counter against China.<sup>219</sup>

Although U.S.–China shared counterterrorism interests in South Asia present an opportunity regarding the Kashmir problem, there are significant risks associated with this approach. Specifically, if CPEC does not result in economic vitality for Pakistan and it is unable to answer its debts, Pakistan could spiral into greater economic turmoil. These conditions would further lend themselves to radicalization and potentially threaten the Pakistan state itself. With India’s radical policy changes toward J&K, as well as feeling of international isolation, Pakistan may become more willing to aggressively seek revision in Kashmir by justifying its claim of protecting India’s Muslim minority. In addition, Chinese and India’s suspect human rights record—specifically against Muslims—could eventually mobilize international jihadist organizations to take action against these countries and

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<sup>218</sup> Kelemen, “China’s Changing Response to Militancy in Pakistan.”

<sup>219</sup> Maya Mirchandani, “Kashmir, India, and The United States: Does Economics Trump Human Rights?” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, June 26, 2020, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2020/06/26/kashmir-india-and-the-united-states-does-economics-trump-human-rights/>.

further risk escalation in Kashmir.<sup>220</sup> Although Pakistan and the rest of the Muslim world has yet to publicly admonish China over the Uighur human rights issues for fear of economic reprisals, shifting rhetoric could in itself precipitate crisis.<sup>221</sup>

Risks abound with the Kashmir crisis. Pakistan's continued focus on irregular warfare, uncertainty following the 2019 Pulwama crisis, and the evolving Great Power Competition dynamic within South Asia present escalation risks between India and Pakistan. Shared U.S. and Chinese interests regarding a stable Pakistan and its outsourcing of international terrorism demonstrate rare congruency of policy within the region that could help normalize tensions in South Asia. However, India's anti-Muslim policy needs to be addressed to target one source of contention within Kashmir to quell the insurgency. The economic effects of CPEC, Pakistan's continued support of irregular warfare, and suppressive Indian policies in Kashmir are variables that will drive the likelihood of escalation in a future Kashmir crisis. In addition, if CPEC does not stimulate Pakistan's economy and India gains greater influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan may find itself precariously isolated, both geographically and economically. This may lead Pakistan to regress to a more aggressive and survivalist mentality, similar to its pursuit of nuclear weapons at all costs following its disastrous defeat in 1971.

#### **D. PART III: APPLYING THE KASHMIR DYNAMIC TO REGIONAL POWERS**

In many ways, the Kashmir problem is unique in its ongoing struggle under the nuclear shadow between two neighboring adversaries. However, the conflict may provide a lens for viewing future regional irregular warfare strategies enabled by nuclear weapons. As multiple regional powers—such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey—have

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<sup>220</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "How China's Repressive Policies Could Fuel the Jihad." Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, April 29, 2020, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/04/29/how-chinas-repressive-policies-could-fuel-the-jihad/>; Nithin Coca, "China Is Exporting Its Anti-Muslim Strategy to India," *The Nation*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/uighur-china-india/>.

<sup>221</sup> Ilan Berman, "China Outmaneuvers the Muslim World," *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-outmaneuvers-the-muslim-world/>.

signaled interest in nuclear capability, the Pakistan-India situation provides a context to view these future security dilemmas.<sup>222</sup>

The first takeaway is the level of maneuverability demonstrated by irregular warfare when supported by a nuclear-armed client state. The mere possession of nuclear weapons provides a threat credibility that will enable irregular warfare. The counterinsurgent state will—at least initially—struggle to properly tailor a response that manages the threat in a manner that does not uncontrollably escalate the situation. The aggressor can further leverage uncertainty through issuing ambiguous redlines for nuclear use and communicating vague rhetoric from leaders to signal a willingness to employ its arsenal. When leveraging proxy forces, one's opponent is forced to weigh its response which allows the aggressor to exploit this period of indecisiveness.

The second takeaway is the importance of global powers to maintain open communication and ameliorate tensions during a nuclear-charged regional crisis. During multiple crises, Pakistan and India looked to the international community to broker peace between the two countries as a face saving initiative and to deescalate tensions.<sup>223</sup> As regional powers and leaders are focused on developing their international status while also addressing domestic issues, the third party broker allows adversaries to deescalate without backing down. This “safety valve” permits both powers to maintain credibility, and even declare victory, while avoiding uncontrollable escalation.

Weaker powers may also conduct nuclear signaling to compel a global power into the crisis. This approach is especially effective if the weaker power feels that it has lost the upper-hand within the crisis or fears a deleterious outcome, but does not want to yield in the face of its adversary. Pakistan likely employed this approach during the 1990 crisis, which resulted in U.S. direct diplomatic intervention that swiftly reduced tensions.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Henry Sokolski, “In the Middle East, Soon Everyone Will Want the Bomb,” *Foreign Policy*, May 21, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/21/in-the-middle-east-soon-everyone-will-want-the-bomb/>.

<sup>223</sup> Bell and MacDonald, “How Dangerous Was Kargil? Nuclear Crises in Comparative Perspective,” 142.; Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 98.

<sup>224</sup> Ganguly and Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry*, 98.

The third takeaway is the inherent risk of uncontrolled escalation due to irregular warfare. Regional powers, especially a weak state compared to its competitor (as Pakistan is to India), are likely to be exceptionally concerned with territorial integrity and regime survival. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, opting for proxy warfare below the threshold of total war often does escalate into conventional military exchange or nuclear posturing. These conditions, although controlled and deescalated in the case studies analyzed, does raise concern over a potentially rapid and overwhelming response. This may precipitate swift escalation of nuclear systems, including deployment and decentralized command and control of these weapons as a result. This enhances uncertainty and risk that may proceed too rapidly to be de-escalated through diplomatic channels between adversaries or a third party.

Finally, an irregular warfare strategy under the nuclear shadow is not necessarily decisive and presents substantial risks beyond nuclear escalation to the patron state. As demonstrated with Pakistan's campaign, it has not achieved its long term goal of wresting sovereignty of Jammu and Kashmir; although it has accomplished a limited objective of tying down hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces in the region.<sup>225</sup> However, defeat during the Kargil War and incessant terrorism resonating from its borders has brought admonishment from the international community. In addition, Pakistan's support of proxy groups has backfired as domestic terrorism threatens its sovereignty and has substantially decreased its worldwide credibility.<sup>226</sup>

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Pakistan's thirty-year irregular warfare campaign in Kashmir, nested below South Asia's nuclear shadow, has defined the fledgling nation's grand strategy against India. It has succeeded in leveraging its nuclear status for freedom of maneuver at the sub-conventional level, but has risked nuclear escalation in the three major crises described in this thesis. Within the context of the U.S.–China Great Power Competition relationship within South Asia, the Kashmir problem proves a potential flashpoint for nuclear escalation

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<sup>225</sup> Swami, *India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad*, 165.

<sup>226</sup> Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy*, 117.

than experienced in previous crises. Pakistan continues to support the Kashmiri insurgency as India doubles down on harsher counterinsurgency policies within the restive region. However, Chinese economic investment and incentives for counterterrorism policies within Pakistan could provide congruency with U.S. initiatives in the region, even as the U.S. draws closer to India. As the long-term payoffs to Pakistan over CPEC remain unknown and India continues to alienate its Muslim population, the Kashmir problem remains tenuous. In order to quell unnecessary or unintentional escalation and misunderstanding, the U.S. and China should demonstrate stability through direct crisis management during a highly probable escalatory event resonating from Kashmir in the near future. In addition, the U.S. should leverage its position as a leading democracy and human rights advocate to confront India's anti-Muslim policies to promote deradicalization in the region.

Pakistan's approach to the Kashmir crisis represents a unique lens for analyzing challenges of future nuclear-armed regional powers. The freedom of maneuver available under the nuclear shadow will likely be exploited by weaker regional powers while also presenting a significant escalatory risk. In addition, global powers will remain relevant to provide open communication and third-party intervention to reduce the risk of rapid or accidental nuclear escalation. However, reliance on irregular warfare comes with severe liabilities such as the empowerment of uncontrollable militant groups causing domestic and international instability. These burdens may outweigh the benefits and compromise the overall prosperity of the client state.



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