

**An In-House Talk on
'The Dynamic Nature of Deterrence in South Asia'
SASSI, Islamabad.
February 11, 2009**



The South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI) is an independent think tank dedicated to promoting peace and stability in South Asia. It takes a multi-disciplinary approach focused on strategic stability aimed at bringing together various streams of thought from the social and natural sciences, the policymakers and academia.

An in-house talk was held at SASSI, Islamabad, on February 11, 2009. Brig (Retd) Samson Simon Sharaf, political and security analyst, was the guest speaker.

In the opening remarks Director of South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI) Maria Sultan highlighted the concept of deterrence and introduced the guest speaker to the audience.

Masood Ur Rehman, a research fellow at SASSI, made a brief presentation on deterrence in South Asia. He elaborated on the credibility of nuclear deterrence in South Asia, BMD technology by India, arms race between India and Pakistan, terrorists and extremists and also highlighted the other issues including Kashmir dispute, water-sharing disputes between India and Pakistan.

Brig (Retd) Samson Simon Sharaf presented the changing dynamics of nuclear deterrence in South Asia. He highlighted that having acquired much of the knowledge on nuclear strategy from western and American writers, both Pakistan and India have tended to dwell too deep into the semantics of the term and simplifications. In the process, we lost our logic and thinking by the wayside. He emphasized the deterrence typologies, technicalities, groupings, etc. He quoted the Bernhard Brodie as saying that a nuclear bomb is a weapon of peace and not a super bomb. Nuclear deterrence is all about war avoidance and not war-fighting strategy.

Brig (Retd) Sharaf gave his own interpretation of deterrence as a cost-benefit analysis of the gains and losses in credible, capable and hostile environments, with a common and well understood strategic concept and language between the adversaries warranting a constant appraisal of capabilities and vulnerabilities.

He highlighted the concept of 'balance of terror', 'strategy of compellance', 'evolution of nuclear deterrence' and 'the challenges faced by deterrence during Cold War'. Regarding the changing dynamics of deterrence in South Asia, Pakistan's fear of becoming vulnerable to a first strike (and/or a desire to attain first-strike capability) gives technology a central role in deterrence, and tends to fuel a high-intensity qualitative arms race. Pakistan has to develop and adopt effective controls on the Graduated Escalation Ladder both in conventional and nuclear forces to retain the initiative of nuclear retaliation. He further talked about the growing Indo-US strategic relationship and its impact on Pakistan strategic stability and stated that India cannot compete against China on a nuclear platform.

In the end, he stated that Pakistan's nuclear forces in terms of technical capability appear more than equal and in some aspects ahead of India. India appears stronger in defence and residual capability. Perhaps too strong if the ambivalence of Indo-US nuclear treaty, surveillance, missile defence and TU44s are also to be factorized. Pakistan's major problems lie in the overarching role of the army in policymaking, political instability, institutionalized corruption, civil war, poor economic policies and fragmentation of society. All these factors, mostly indigenous create a doubt about the efficacy of cognitive controls. Pakistan's gradual surrender to compellance imposed by Indo-US pressures reflects a fragile and self-centered national leadership. This casts an aspersion on the will and determination needed to handle a deterrence regime.

In question-answer session, Dr. Riffat Hussain, chairman of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, QAU, said that the BJP had stated in its manifesto that they would conduct nuclear test and it was not a surprise for the world. He said that compellance never works but deterrence and further asked are you suggesting that Indo-US strategic partnership would draw Pakistan into a status of compellance. In his reply, Brig (Retd) Sharaf said that Pakistan has never been intermediated by nuclear weapons. It is basically US strategic interests that matter as there is no concept of permanent friendship in the real politics. Now, due to shift of interests of the US, a front-line state in the so-called war against terrorism has become a backline state.

In the end, SASSI Director Maria Sultan thanked the audience and appreciated their presence.

SASSI Profile

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