



## **Centre for Air Power Studies**

**Rapporteur's Report on.**

**CAPS-IISS Joint International Seminar**

**on**

**Nuclear Strategy: Global and Regional Developments**

(Organized by Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) on 7 June 2023 at Conference Hall, AirForce Auditorium, Subroto Park, New Delhi, with participation of International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), London)

**CAPS-IISS Joint International Seminar on “Nuclear Strategy: Global and Regional Developments”** was held with distinguished participants including serving and retired members of the armed forces, strategic community and academics. A copy of the programme is attached.

The seminar was inaugurated by **Vice Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal AP Singh PVSM AVSM**, who explained the unique circumstances in which India conducted its nuclear tests and the high level of responsibility that the country has shown over the last 25 years, including maintaining political control over nuclear weapons. In his opening remarks, **Air Marshal Anil Chopra PVSM AVSM VM VSM (Retd), Director General, CAPS**, pointed out how the nuclear weapons had been put to political use in the Russia-Ukraine crisis since the start of the conflict in February 2022. He also highlighted that international nuclear trend lines remain generally negative as relations between major nuclear powers are and stressed and vertical nuclear proliferation is on the rise, further straining the global nuclear order.

### **Session 1: Global Nuclear Developments: Implications for Southern Asia**

The first speaker of this session, **Air Marshal Rajesh Kumar PVSM AVSM VM (Retd) Former C-in-C, Strategic Forces Command**, discussed ‘**US-China Nuclear Dynamics**’. He identified three factors that are heightening US-China competition – unclear rules and norms, perceptions of declining deterrence and increased geopolitical tensions. China feels threatened by US conventional counterforce capabilities, which is why it is comingling their conventional and nuclear tipped missiles. In order to counter U.S BMD, China feels the need to develop strategic early warning systems, and ASAT capabilities. He concluded that the future US-China relationship would be marked by deepening competition and arms race.

Speaking on the same subject, **Prof. Wyn Bowen, Director, Freeman Air and Space Institute, Kings College London**, argued that the main objective of China's modernization is to strengthen its assured retaliation capability in face of US' conventional long-range strike capabilities. Another key point he raised was the possibility of US recalling into service nuclear warheads that had been retired under New START Treaty, if the agreement faded out without replacement. Given its new two-front threat perception, USA was feeling the need for strategic forces



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to counter both Russia and China (whose no limits friendship was an additional matter of concern), besides also reassuring its allies in East Asia. He opined that India's nuclear capability would also be affected by nuclear developments in China.

The second theme of the session was '**Global Nuclear Order in the Shadow of Russia-Ukraine Conflict**'. **Dr Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow, CAPS**, argued that global nuclear order was on shaky ground from even before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict because its cornerstone, the NPT, was stressed by differences between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states and amongst the NWS. The conflict, however, had drawn attention to the political salience of nuclear weapons, raised the chances of horizontal nuclear proliferation and led to the demise of arms control. Any future nuclear arms control would have to be conceived in a new form with new actors, and the need to include new technologies. The military utility of nuclear weapons had not yet shown up in the ongoing war since despite several setbacks, Moscow had not 'used' nuclear weapons. She also highlighted the difficulty in finding the right target and the value of the nuclear taboo in inhibiting nuclear use.

In his assessment of the impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on global nuclear order, **Mr. Timothy John Wright, Research Associate for Defence and Military Analysis, IISS**, expressed concern about Russia's actions with regard to its seizure of civil nuclear power facilities. He argued that the crisis had implications beyond the Euro-Atlantic framework for East and South Asia as well. Russia's actions, including deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus in violation of the NPT and suspension of New START would undermine global norms, trigger arms races and impact global strategic stability. China's expanding nuclear capability and lack of its inclusion into nuclear arms control could impact South Asia, forcing India and Pakistan to modify their nuclear forces as per the changing environment.

### **Session 2: Regional Nuclear Developments: Capability & Strategy**

India-China and India-Pakistan nuclear dynamics was the focus of this session. The first speaker on '**India - China Dynamics**', **Mr. Antoine Gordon Levesques, Research Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy, IISS**, claimed that India's "minimum" nuclear deterrence posture will come under stress from the projected growth and modernization of China's nuclear arsenal even though China's nuclear revamp is aimed at the United States. Given China's view of India as an *illegitimate* nuclear power, there's no scope for bilateral arms control in the immediate future even though China is a stakeholder in South Asian nuclear dynamics. He opined that China could support Pakistan in a crisis with India and play a role in its escalation or de-escalation.

**Dr Ashok Kantha, Former Director, Institute of Chinese Studies** emphasised the



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nuclear deterrence stability between China and India. But, he felt that the current status quo would be stressed by China's abandonment of small nuclear forces and moving towards greater sophistication; and, China's development of early warning retaliation posture. While China might be doing so enhance its survivability vis a vis USA, it created concerns for India, exacerbated by Beijing's assistance to Pakistan in developing the latter's sea-based capability.

Moving to '**India-Pakistan Dynamics**', **Mr. John Herbert Gill, Associate Fellow for South and Central Asian Defence, Strategy and Diplomacy, IISS**, started by identifying two positive developments that could facilitate the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan -- continued validity of the Ceasefire agreement of 2021, and the continued existence of DGMO hotlines. However, he lamented the lack of formal dialogue or even back channel talks between the two, even as the rhetoric was high and likely to worsen with the coming election season. He questioned what could be the likely role of outside actors in future crises and whether they would be welcome or even available to do so.

**Dr Shalini Chawla, Distinguished Fellow, CAPS**, explained how Pakistan uses its nuclear weapons for balancing conventional asymmetry and as a currency of power at the domestic, regional and global levels. She highlighted the link between Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence and its sub-conventional warfare against India, whereby it uses the threat of low-nuclear threshold to continue acts of terrorism with impunity. She noted the Pakistani assumption that nuclear weapons make it too dangerous to fail and hence uses its status as nuclear armed state even in the context of the domestic crises.

### **Session 3: Future Stability, Technology & Nuclear Developments**

'**Managing Future Stability – Restraint and Risk Taking in Future Conflicts** was the first theme in this session. **Lt Gen Amit Sharma PVSM AVSM VSM (Retd), former Commander-in-Chief, HQ SFC**, identified two issues that have been instrumental in restraining the use of nuclear weapons -- the enormity of the damage causing potential of the nuclear weapons; and the memory of the devastation that they caused. For continued non-use to be retained, he recommended continuous public sensitization to the destructive nature of nuclear war, including of a limited nuclear war.

**Mr. William Paul Alberque, Director for Science, Technology and Arms Control, IISS**, highlighted the collapse of arms control regimes which had served as guardrails during crisis escalation. He mentioned the need for U.S and Russia to revive these regimes and also recommended newer arms control agreements that accommodate China as well. He opined that risk reduction was another way to manage competition till we can resolve competition that could escalate to crisis.

On the second theme of the session, '**Managing Future Stability – Crisis Communication**', **Ms. Ruhee Neog, Director, IPCS**, drew attention to the fact that means



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of communication between two nuclear armed nation, once established, may not remain active forever. She cited the example of India and Pakistan where communication channel for crisis de-escalation were established, but have not been actively used. She also argued that communication must not be used only for crisis de-escalation, but also be used for crisis prevention.

**Mr. Desmond Bowen**, spoke about the importance of proportionality in a conflict and identified trust as a necessary tool for crisis de-escalation. He also highlighted the importance of a third-party's role in helping belligerent nuclear powers to de-escalate.

### **Important Points from Discussion Sessions**

- The biggest nuclear concern for India was China's expanding and advancing nuclear capabilities. China was singularly responsible for the Pakistani nuclear weapons and the international community had been silent on the nexus, thereby harming regional strategic stability.
- Russian deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus was not any different from American nuclear deployments in countries in Europe.
- Arms control was a function of the geopolitical relationship of the Cold War. It cannot be replicated in the same form in the contemporary nuclear reality.
- There cannot be any 'good' outcomes for the nuclear order from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It could end up upending many 'settled' nuclear issues.
- China would be learning its lessons on how best to 'use' its nuclear weapons in case of a conflict over Taiwan.
- The concept of proportionality with use of nuclear weapons is meaningless.
- China's reticence to establish crisis communication channels with the US is a way of creating risks for enhancing deterrence. It also does not want such channels with India since it refuses to accept India as a nuclear armed state.
- India's wisdom in keeping nuclear and conventional delivery systems separate from each other showed up in the Brahmos missile misfiring. Countries that have entangled delivery and command and control systems must learn from this as a risk reduction measure.

*Report prepared by Dr Manpreet Sethi with inputs from Mr Anubhav Shankar Goswami, Dhrub Tara Singh and Jay Desai*