

**What Stability-Instability
Paradox? Subnational Conflicts
and the Nuclear Risk in
South Asia**

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What Stability-Instability Paradox? Subnational Conflicts and the Nuclear Risk in South Asia

Rajesh Rajagopalan* | February 2006

Abstract

The stability-instability paradox enjoys great popularity among scholars examining the nuclear situation in South Asia. However, its utility is questionable. The stability-instability paradox was framed to understand the relationship between the conventional and nuclear levels of war. In South Asia, it is routinely used to look at the relationship between sub-conventional (secessionist insurgencies or terrorism) and nuclear, which was not the original intent. In addition, the fundamental assumption in much of the literature on this issue – that it was Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capabilities that led it to an aggressive policy of supporting terrorism in Kashmir – is not valid. Pakistan had always supported secessionist groups within India, including the Nagas, Mizos, and Khalistanis. Thus, Pakistan's policy in Kashmir was no different from the pre-nuclear period. Finally, I suggest a more appropriate way in which we can look at the role that nuclear weapons played in Pakistan's Kashmir strategy in the 1990s.

1 | Introduction

The stability/instability paradox enjoys a kind of non-partisan support among scholars and analysts examining the South Asian nuclear issue. In a recent essay, Paul Kapur points out that all shades of academic writing on the subject seem to support the hypothesis: he lists proliferation optimists as well as proliferation pessimists, those who think nuclear weapons in South Asia will be dangerous, as well as those who are more sanguine about its negative

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The concept of the stability/instability paradox has been used somewhat carelessly in much of the literature on the South Asian nuclear situation

effects, among the proponents of the stability-instability hypothesis.¹ Unfortunately, the concept has been used somewhat carelessly in much of the literature on the South Asian nuclear situation, with even the basic concepts and arguments misrepresented.

In this essay, I examine the stability-instability paradox and suggest at least two reasons why the hypothesis does not apply to South Asia. First, I argue that the stability/instability paradox has been misrepresented: the stability/instability paradox was a proposition about the relationship between the nuclear and conventional military balances, not between nuclear and sub-conventional conflicts as is mistakenly assumed in much of the literature about the proposition in South Asia. I do this by returning to Glenn Snyder's original propositions about the stability/instability paradox. Second, I argue that a key piece of evidence is missing in the manner that the proposition has been presented: the link between Pakistan's nuclearisation and its support for the Kashmir rebellion. If anything, the history of sub-conventional conflicts in India suggests that such conflicts – and Pakistan's support for such ventures – predate the nuclearisation of the region. In other words, there is nothing unique about Pakistan's involvement in such conflicts over the last decade; the long history of such policies calls into question arguments about the effect of nuclearisation in encouraging such instabilities. Finally, I briefly examine how nuclearisation might have affected sub-conventional warfare and the prospects for such conflicts to escalate. I argue that much of the worrying on this score misses the point: that nuclearisation and the threat of escalation has constrained *both* Indian and Pakistani decision-makers – rather than just Indian decision makers – and that this is primarily because decision makers worry about even minimal risks when such risks have great consequences.

2 | What is the Stability/Instability Paradox?

As Varun Sahni has recently pointed out, the stability/instability paradox was well-known much before Glenn Snyder's 1965 essay to which it is generally credited.² Sir Basil Liddell Hart had pointed out at least a decade earlier that strategic stability made wars below that threshold more likely. But much of what passes for the stability/instability paradox is based on Snyder's formulation, which therefore needs to be considered at some length.

Snyder's essay was an attempt to look at the problem of nuclear stability and its relationship to traditional balance of power concepts. He begins by disputing the notion that the balance of terror negates traditional balance of

¹ S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30:2 (Fall 2005), pp. 127-52.

² Varun Sahni, "India-Pakistan Crises and the Stability-Instability Paradox: A Less Than Perfect Explanation," in Easwaran Sridharan (Ed), *Deterrence Theory, International Relations Theory and the India-Pakistan Conflict* (New Delhi: Routledge, forthcoming).

power concepts based on conventional military force. That is the central point of the essay – that conventional and nuclear balances interact in a variety of ways, and sometimes to contradictory effects. His exploration of that relationship does not suggest that either the conventional or the nuclear balance predominates but points out the possible ways in which both interact. Thus the relationship is a complex one, not a simple one as has been suggested in much of the subsequent literature that refers to the debate, especially in the context of the debate about South Asian nuclear and conventional military stability.

Snyder starts with contemporary ideas of that relationship. Indeed, Snyder's formulation was originally only a reconsideration of what he clearly felt was the contemporary strategic wisdom on this issue, though he does add a new twist to the logic of the interaction between stability operating at the strategic and sub-strategic levels. His words make that abundantly clear: "*The point is often made in the strategic literature that the greater the stability of the 'strategic' balance of terror, the lower the stability of the overall balance at its lower levels of violence.*"³ It is important to make this point, not simply for the sake of accuracy or to give credit where it is due – which are important issues too – but also so as to give credit to Snyder's actual argument. Indeed, Snyder appears actually to suggest that the logic of the stability-instability hypothesis may work in reverse too. Again, it is useful to go back to his own words: "But one *could* argue precisely the opposite – that the greater the likelihood of gradual escalation due to a stable strategic equilibrium tends to deter both conventional provocation and tactical nuclear strikes – thus stabilizing the overall balance."⁴ He accepts that the stability/instability hypothesis may be dominant, "but it must be heavily qualified by the second, since nations probably fear the possibility of escalation 'all the way' nearly as much as they fear the possibility of an 'all-out' first strike."⁵

What can we take from these rather contradictory positions? In essence, what this suggests is that Snyder was proposing a logic that was far more complex and uncertain than the stability/instability hypothesis suggests. He was suggesting that though stability at the strategic level could reduce stability at lower levels, the threat of escalation can also deter lower levels of violence. Thus stability at the strategic level can have both effects: it may increase the risk of lower level instability, but – given the possibility of escalation – can also create stability at lower levels.

He suggests subsequently that conventional balances can also affect nuclear stability. It can, again, do so in both positive and negative ways.⁶ To the extent that there is a conventional balance, it can prevent recourse to nuclear weapons either through deterrence of conventional war or by defeating the aggressor conventionally, should deterrence fail and war break out. But such conventional balances also reduce the credibility of nuclear threats precisely because there is a conventional alternative to resorting to nuclear weapons.

³ Glenn H. Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in Paul Seabury (Ed.) *The Balance of Power* (Scranton: Chandler, 1965), pp. 185-201. Emphasis added.

⁴ Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," p. 199. Original italics.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Another way of interpreting Snyder's argument is to suggest that conventional weakness, by increasing the likelihood that the weaker side could resort to nuclear weapons, can actually increase the credibility of nuclear deterrence.

Though Snyder does refer to internal wars in Southeast Asia, he does so in the context of the probability of Chinese conventional military intervention in such conflicts, which he discounts because of the imbalance of the nuclear balance in Washington's favour: "The obvious disequilibrium in the strategic nuclear balance between the United States and Communist China serves to deter the Chinese from openly committing their own conventional forces in internal wars (e.g. South Vietnam) and thus tends to create a conventional balance of power in Southeast Asia which might not otherwise exist."⁷ The concern, as in the European balance, is about the relationship between the conventional and nuclear balances, not between nuclear and sub-conventional conflicts.

But Snyder also recognises that arguments about deterrence are about perceptions of intention and capabilities, and are thus subjective. Uncertainty on these counts thus aid deterrence because "it is what the opponent thinks or fears that counts" rather than the facts of the actual balance.⁸ Thus even a low probability of a failure of deterrence and the risk of escalation may be sufficient to deter, arguments that are critical but often ignored in considerations of the operation of nuclear deterrence. I will return to this issue later because this is relevant in the South Asia context too.

This review of Snyder's essay suggests an important conclusion that is overlooked in the attempt to employ the stability/instability paradox in South Asia. Snyder's concern, as I have suggested above, is the relationship between the conventional military balance and the nuclear one. His specific concern is about the relationship between conventional and nuclear balances in Europe and Asia and the working of US extended deterrence. He is clearly not referring to the equation between the nuclear balance and alleged foreign assistance for sub-conventional conflicts, insurgencies, proxy wars and the like. Indeed, the fact that he considers Chinese support for the insurgency in South Vietnam but does not see that as an example of the operation of the stability/instability proposition is a useful corrective to the way stability/instability paradox has been deployed in the context of South Asia.

This, I would suggest, is the key to the problem. Much of the literature on the operation of the stability/instability paradox in South Asia assumes, mistakenly, that the stability/instability hypothesis refers to the relationship between the strategic (nuclear) level and the sub-conventional levels. The argument is that the stability created by the probability of nuclear escalation of conventional conflicts discourages conventional wars but encourages support for sub-national guerrilla forces. A few examples will illustrate the point. Sumit Ganguly argued that "because conventional conflict is seen to be fraught with the dangers of escalation, both sides are instead trying to exploit internal conflicts; decision makers on both sides of the border see the risks of

⁷ Ibid, p. 194-95.

⁸ Ibid, p. 193.

internal unrest as being both controllable and calculable.”⁹ Similarly, Michael Krepon posits a direct link between the accretion of Pakistani nuclear capabilities and its support for the rebellion in Kashmir in the 1990s: “Pakistan’s support for separatism and militancy in Kashmir has notably coincided with its acquisition of covert nuclear capabilities.”¹⁰ P. R. Chari notes that “The availability of the nuclear deterrent to Pakistan encouraged its undertaking the Kargil intrusions, while increasing its cross-border terrorism and proxy war in Kashmir.”¹¹ Kapur argues that “Pakistani leaders...came to believe that this danger of nuclear escalation, by insulating Pakistan from Indian conventional attack, would allow Pakistan not simply to ensure its own security, but also to pursue a strategy of limited conflict against Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir.”¹² Though Kapur’s central argument slightly modifies the stability/instability paradox by suggesting that it is instability rather than stability at the strategic level – the higher risk of nuclear escalation – that allowed Pakistan to engage in aggressive behaviour in Kashmir, it is also based on the link between the nuclear, conventional and sub-conventional levels of conflict.

This is a link that is clearly absent in Snyder’s logic. In essence then, the stability/instability paradox – at least as Snyder conceived it – is inappropriate for considering the consequences of the interaction between sub-conventional war and nuclear escalation. There may be a link in Pakistan’s behaviour between its acquisition of nuclear capabilities and its support for the insurgency in Kashmir – it would appear to be foolish to assert otherwise. But this is a link that has to be examined separately from the stability/instability paradox. Moreover, to suggest that this link is a causal one, that it was the nuclearisation of the conflict that led to such Pakistani behaviour, requires evidence about this causal chain. I turn now to the evidentiary basis for the stability/instability paradox.

The stability/instability paradox is inappropriate for considering the consequences of the interaction between sub-conventional war and nuclear escalation

⁹ Sumit Ganguly, “India-Pakistan Nuclear Issues and the Stability-Instability Paradox,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 18 (October-December 1995), p. 326.

¹⁰ Michael Krepon, “The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception and Escalation Control in South Asia,” (May 2003). Available at <<http://www.stimson.org/southasia/pdf/kreponmay03.pdf>> (accessed November 22, 2003).

¹¹ P. R. Chari, “Nuclear Restraint, Nuclear Risk Reduction, and the Security-Insecurity Paradox in South Asia,” in Michael Krepon and Chris Gagne (Eds.), *The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia* (Washington: The Stimson Center Report No. 38, June 2001), p. 21.

¹² Kapur, “India and Pakistan’s Unstable Peace,” p. 143.

3 | Stability/Instability Paradox and Proxy War in South Asia

If the stability/instability paradox is not applicable as originally suggested, could it be modified to suggest such a link? This is a task that scholars partial to the hypothesis should have undertaken, but the outlines of such a hypothesis can be gleaned from their arguments, even if it is not explicitly stated in a theoretical form. The main assertion appears to be that nuclearisation of the subcontinent encouraged Pakistan to pursue its strategy of aiding Kashmiri rebels.¹³ The central question, as Kapur succinctly puts it, is whether strategic stability could have facilitated such aggressive Pakistani behaviour as expected by the theory.¹⁴ If such a proposition were to be valid, it will have to rest on two pillars: there must be a clear link between Pakistan's nuclearisation and its support for the Kashmir insurgency and such Pakistani behaviour must be distinct from previous, pre-nuclear behaviour. On both counts, the evidence for the stability-instability paradox fails.

Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons roughly coincided with the beginnings of the Kashmir rebellion in the late 1980s. It is difficult to place either of these developments with any precision. Though A. Q. Khan had claimed during the 1987 Brasstacks crisis that Pakistan had acquired a nuclear weapon, it is most likely that Pakistan acquired it slightly later. The US had concluded by the fall of 1990 that it could no longer certify, as the Pressler Amendment required, that Pakistan did not possess nuclear weapons.¹⁵ Washington's action was based on US intelligence assessments that Pakistan had machined its nuclear bomb cores, assessments that Pakistanis have disagreed with. On the other hand, Pakistani officials have suggested that they had acquired their 'bomb capability' by 1988.¹⁶ That same period, for entirely independent reasons, also witnessed the beginnings of the Kashmir insurgency. The rigged election in Kashmir in 1987 is generally seen as the starting point for the rebellion; by the summer of 1988, violence had begun, with incidents of assassinations and bombings increasing the following year.¹⁷ There had been sporadic and ineffective violence prior to this period too, as Praveen Swami notes, but the scale of violence after 1988 clearly suggest this as the starting of a distinct new rebellion.¹⁸ There is also somewhat uncertain evidence that Pakistani intelligence agencies had contacts with Kashmiri

¹³ This formulation permits me to include those who suggest that there is stability at the strategic level and those, like Kapur, who suggest that there is instability at the strategic level.

¹⁴ The operative question for Kapur is whether it was strategic *stability or instability* that led to Pakistani aggressiveness. Thus the intended focus of his question is different from mine; nevertheless, his formulation accurately frames the key hypothesis of the stability/instability paradox. Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," p. 138.

¹⁵ Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 308.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁷ Balraj Puri, *Kashmir: Towards Insurgency* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), pp. 54-60; Vernon Hewitt, *Reclaiming the Past: The Search for Political and Cultural Unity in Contemporary Jammu and Kashmir* (London: Portland Books, 1995), pp. 157-61.

¹⁸ Praveen Swami, "Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir in Theory and Practice," *India Review* 2:3 (July 2003), pp. 55-87.

rebels as early as 1984.¹⁹ There was, then, a clear coincidence between Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the outbreak of the Kashmir rebellion, but coincidence is not causation. There is little to indicate that Pakistan began the Kashmir rebellion and much to indicate that it took advantage of a development that had clear roots in the maladministration and incompetent interference by the Delhi government in the politics in Srinagar.

There is little doubt that Pakistan has been aggressive in exploiting the rebellion. Indeed, it is this aggressiveness that scholars using the stability/instability paradox in South Asia are trying to explain.²⁰ The Kargil war, in particular, is seen as an indication of this aggressiveness. Pakistan's rationale in launching the Kargil venture is unclear; as Brian Cloughley, one of the best-informed experts on the Pakistan army notes, it is doubtful if this rationale will be ever revealed.²¹ Cloughley's suggestion that "the whole affair seemed a good idea at the time, and got out of hand" seems as reasonable an explanation as any.²² Though the lack of clear indications of Pakistani motivations and thinking about the subject is an issue, both the similarities – and differences – between this venture and previous Pakistani operations in Kashmir should allow us to draw some conclusions about the stability/instability paradox.

Even if Pakistan was not responsible for the outbreak of the Kashmir rebellion, the expectations of the stability/instability paradox can be satisfied if Pakistan's exploitation of the rebellion was the consequence of its confidence in its newly developed nuclear capability. It would be difficult to find much direct evidence for such an argument. But what is clear is that Pakistani behaviour in Kashmir in the 1990s was no different from its exploitation of India's other domestic troubles. If the stability/instability paradox has to be deployed to explain the aggressiveness of Pakistan in the post-nuclearisation phase, then there has to be a clear distinction between Pakistani behaviour in the pre- and post-nuclearisation period. If Pakistan's involvement in internal rebellion in Kashmir in the 1990s is no different from previous Pakistani behaviour, it would be reasonable to ask if nuclearisation made any difference.

How unique was the Kargil venture? Comparing Kargil with Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir in 1965 (Operation Gibraltar) is instructive. There are, of course, differences in the context. Operation Gibraltar began at least partly because of Pakistan's fears that the balance of power was shifting irrevocably in India's favour. Indian military modernisation programmes in the aftermath of the disastrous war with China in late 1962 was a serious worry for the Pakistani regime. Some leaders within the Pakistani high command, such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, apparently suggested to Ayub Khan that Pakistan utilise the Chinese invasion of India to attack in Kashmir, advice

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¹⁹ A.G. Noorani, "The Betrayal of Kashmir: Pakistan's Duplicity and India's Complicity," in Raju G.C. Thomas (ed.), *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 254-75.

²⁰ Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," p. 137, especially footnote 35.

²¹ Brian Cloughley, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* 2nd edition (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 376.

²² Ibid.

that was rejected.²³ But by the summer of 1965, with US sponsored India-Pakistan negotiations over Kashmir having ended in failure, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar. The initiative was designed to lead to an insurrection by the Muslim population in Kashmir, and was based on the mistaken belief that India would not escalate the conflict.²⁴ But the guerrilla forces that Pakistan created were poorly trained and led, and they were quickly rounded up by Indian security forces with assistance from the local population.²⁵ Pakistan followed up that failure by launching Operation Grand Slam, a full-scale conventional assault on Kashmir, aimed at the southern area of the state, hoping to cut the state off from the rest of India.²⁶ But India reacted with force, launching a retaliatory attack across the international border. Faced with an increasingly unfavourable position on the battlefield, Ayub Khan agreed to a Soviet offer of mediation, leading to the Tashkent agreement. As Altaf Gauhar has written, “While he allowed his Foreign Minister to talk about carrying on the war to the bitter end, he was being told by his Commander-in-Chief that the Indians were continuing to improve their position in Pakistani territory by violating the cease-fire. For Ayub, Tashkent had become the only hope of military disengagement though there was always the possibility that something might turn up in Tashkent to help resolve the Kashmir problem.”²⁷

There are striking similarities between the two events. In both cases, Pakistan attempted to wrest Kashmir from India by fostering (in 1965) or supporting (in the 1990s) a rebellion in Kashmir. Pakistan misjudged the ground reality in 1965; the more favourable circumstances in the 1990s made Pakistan’s sponsorship that much more effective. But there are also significant differences. In 1965, Pakistan attempted to escalate as it recognised that its venture had failed; in Kargil, accepted defeat rather than escalate.

But Operation Gibraltar was not unique either. Pakistan has also supported rebellions in areas other than Kashmir such as in Nagaland and Mizoram in the 1950 and the 1960s and Punjab in the 1980s, though such support did not extend to direct military intervention.²⁸ The Naga leadership approached Pakistan for assistance as early as 1956; subsequently, several Naga insurgent camps were established in then East Pakistan where Naga rebels received training from the Pakistan Army.²⁹ When the Mizo rebellion broke out in 1966, they too received support from Pakistan, with their bases too being set

²³ Kux, *The United States and Pakistan*, p. 131.

²⁴ Bhutto, apparently, had convinced Pakistani dictator Ayub Khan of this. See, Anwar H. Syed, *The Discourse and Politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 46-9.

²⁵ There are now a number of Pakistani accounts of the ill-fated Operation Gibraltar. See, in particular, Lt. Gen. Gul Hassan Khan, *Memoirs of Lt. Gen. Gul Hassan Khan: The Last Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan’s First Military Ruler* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Roedad Khan, *The American Papers* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁶ On Pakistan’s military plans and dispositions, see, Khan, *Memoirs of Lt. Gen. Gul Hassan Khan*, pp. 173-88.

²⁷ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan’s First Military Ruler*, p. 248.

²⁸ Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 43.

²⁹ Prakash Singh, *Nagaland* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1995), pp. 104-13 and Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: North-East India* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1996), pp. 42-45.

up in East Pakistan.³⁰ Similarly, Sikh rebels from the Indian state of Punjab received support and succour from Pakistan during the 1980s as they fought an unsuccessful rebellion to secede from the Indian Union and create a new state that they called Khalistan. Thus, Pakistani involvement in supporting internal rebellions in India has a long history and Pakistan's behaviour in Kashmir in the 1990s was no different from its approach towards other internal rebellions in India for the previous several decades. What this suggests is that Pakistan would have supported the rebellion that broke out in Jammu and Kashmir irrespective of whether it had nuclear weapons or not. It was the long tradition and practice of supporting Indian rebellions that paved the way for Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir in the 1990s, not the safety of its nuclear umbrella.

4 | Kashmir, Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship

If the stability/instability paradox does not explain the link between nuclear weapons and Pakistan's support for the rebellion in Kashmir, how else can that link be characterised? I would suggest that Thomas Schelling's notion of 'brinkmanship' is a better explanation of the link.³¹ Schelling saw brinkmanship as a deliberate strategy that presented a risk of loss of control, thus increasing the prospects of a nuclear escalation that neither side could completely control. Brinkmanship, as Schelling saw it, was not the deliberate threat of escalation (which would suggest that the parties controlled that risk), but rather "the deliberate creation of a recognizable risk of war."³² Because that threat of loss of control affected both sides, both were at risk, and war-avoidance meant not so much deciding against going to war as deciding to reduce the threat presented by the inherent possibility of escalation.

Pakistan, in supporting the rebellion in Kashmir, was presenting just such a risk – the risk of uncontrollable escalation, rather than the risk of deliberate war. The threat presented was not that Pakistan may go to war in support of the rebels but that war may result because neither New Delhi nor Islamabad may be able to maintain full control. The Kargil venture provides a good example of this logic. Pakistan attempted to hide the involvement of its forces in Kargil by claiming that the fighters who had taken territory were Kashmiri rebel fighters, not Pakistani soldiers, and unlike in 1965 when Pakistan launched Operation Grand Slam, a conventional large-scale military offensive, to rescue its failed 'covert' operation, Pakistan accepted the slow defeat of its forces in Kargil rather than intervene. Just as New Delhi

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³⁰ Raju G. C. Thomas, *Indian Security Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 62-63 and Animesh Ray, *Mizoram* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1993), pp. 166-69.

³¹ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 199-201.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

demonstrated deliberate restraint in not attacking across the Line of Control (LoC) or the international border in response to the Pakistani aggression in Kargil, Pakistan also showed restraint in accepting the defeat of its Kargil venture rather than – as in 1965 – attempting to rescue a failed policy through further military escalation. This mutual co-operation in restraining the risk of escalation can be explained neither by the stability/instability paradox nor Kapur's recent arguments about the instability/instability logic. If the stability/instability paradox was valid, then there would have to be a clear indication that the 'instability' at the lower levels – Pakistan's aggressive support for Kashmiri rebels – is the consequence of nuclearisation and distinct from the long history of similar Pakistani ventures since the 1950s. If it is instability at the strategic levels that is breeding Pakistani aggressiveness as in Kargil, Pakistan's restraint, especially when compared to the 1965 war, is difficult to explain. A full-scale war should have emphasised the possibility of escalation because of Pakistan's weakness and thus brought Pakistan greater dividends.

5 | Conclusion

Nuclearisation has constrained both India and Pakistan. It has induced great caution in both Indian and Pakistani policies

Pakistan's support for the rebellion in Kashmir was neither unprecedented nor unique. Once Indian political and administrative short-sightedness and incompetence led to the Kashmir rebellion, Pakistan's support for the rebellion was a foregone conclusion. Nuclear weapons may have increased Pakistan's comfort level in risking Indian wrath, but – if the history of previous Pakistani ventures is any indication at all – Pakistan would have risked it nevertheless. To the extent that nuclearisation had an effect, it was to prevent Pakistan from stepping over the brink from supporting the rebellion to invading Kashmir as in 1965. This is the key development that is missing in the stability/instability (and instability/instability) literature: nuclearisation has constrained both India and Pakistan. It has induced great caution in both Indian and Pakistani policies. There could still be miscalculations, of course, but both sides have demonstrated awareness of the risks posed by escalation and have taken painful compromises to avoid such risk.³³ This suggests greater optimism for nuclear relations and stability in South Asia than that proposed by the stability/instability paradox.

³³ Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Second Strike: Arguments about Nuclear War in South Asia* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005).