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The Impact of Indian-Induced Arms Race on Regional Stability

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines about the arm race in South Asia, which is a result of India's quest for advanced military capabilities in order to gain regional dominance and strengthen deterrence. Three primary objectives of the study focus on: India's strategic goals in the weapons race, regional reactions to it, and its effects on regional stability. The study used textual analysis to collect information from internet sources, including expert commentary, institutional records, and online publications. According to the study's conclusions, South Asia's regional stability has been significantly affected by India's persistent pursuit of conventional and nuclear military weapons. The constant development and expansion of advanced weaponry have not only escalated tension between Pakistan and India but have also created security dilemma for neighboring South Asian states. India's growing military superiority and strategic influence has contributed to regional insecurity and instability. The increasing sophistication of weaponry including high performance aircrafts, hypersonic missiles and nuclear submarines has altered the regional imbalance of power. To promote lasting peace in the region, the study recommends effective arm control initiatives, strengthened international and regional dialogue mechanisms, and equitable military strategies.

Keywords: Indian Arms Race, Regional Stability, South Asia, Military Expansion, Security Dilemma, Conventional Deterrence, Strategic Balance

INTRODUCTION

When two or more nations purposefully increase the quantity and quality of their armed forces in order to obtain a military and political edge over one another, this is referred to as an arms race. In addition to contemporary technology developments like hypersonic weapons, cyber warfare, and space militarization, this struggle consists of both conventional and nuclear capabilities (Na'inna & Anti-Dwanso, 2022). The development of nuclear weapons is the result of nations competing for superior weaponry from ancient times. Technological advancements that constantly change the nature of warfare have had a significant impact on the development of the arms race. The Cold War era saw the emergence of the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), which rendered nuclear war unwinnable and brought conventional military dominance in smaller but more controllable battles back into the spotlight. Precision-guided weapons and other conventional capabilities became the dominant approach, especially during the Gulf War (Boyle, 2020; Gukeisen, 2005).

In the 21st century, nations including the United States, China, Russia, and India are engaged in an arms race motivated by the desire for security, global supremacy, and international relevance (Department of Defense, 2018a). In order to preserve or gain a strategic advantage in the evolving arms race, countries like the US, China, and Russia are now advancing technology innovations including space weapons, artificial intelligence, and hypersonic weapons. Global military spending has also increased, especially in the creation of advanced weaponry (SIPRI, 2019). To improve strategic security, countries are also developing new nuclear capabilities and missile defense systems (Lamrani, 2018; World Nuclear Association, 2018). In the modern world, the idea of an arms race extends beyond nuclear weapons to include modern technology that improve military prowess. A number of key players compete strategically in this global arms race with the goal of establishing military supremacy (Na'inna & Anti-Dwanso, 2022). With the rapid development of hypersonic missiles and AI-based weapons that have the potential to significantly change global military dynamics, a new phase of the arms race is emerging as nations continue to raise their defense spending (World Nuclear Association, 2018).

As the nature of the confrontation between India and Pakistan has evolved, the South Asian regional arms race has shifted its attention more toward high-tech conventional weaponry. This pattern is seen in the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, in which India began drone and missile attacks across the Line of Control on May 7th, 2025, sparking a four-day military conflict that concluded with a truce on May 10th, 2025 (NBR, 2025; Stimson Center, 2025). Precision-guided weaponry, unmanned aerial vehicles, and layered air-defense networks, rather than extensive ground troops deployments, are the main features of the crisis, which analysts characterize as the

most significant military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbors in recent decades (NBR, 2025). In response, Pakistan deployed sophisticated Chinese-origin weaponry, mostly for defensive and countermeasure purposes, such as J-10C fighter aircraft, PL-15 beyond-visual-range missiles, and HQ-9 long-range surface-to-air missiles (USCC, 2025). Both sides' extensive employment of drones, precision missiles, and integrated defense systems demonstrates how contemporary conventional technologies now drive conflict escalation, escalating the existing arms race sparked by India and adding to South Asia's strategic security quandary (NBR, 2025; USCC, 2025).

A regional arms race in South Asia has been sparked by India's growing investments in advanced military technologies, such as nuclear capability, hypersonic missiles, and missile defense systems. A security conundrum is sustained by these developments, which force neighboring states, especially Pakistan, to implement countermeasures. In addition to threatening regional stability, this dynamic raises the possibility of conflict and error. In this individual research piece, the Indian-induced arms race and its impact on South Asian stability will be examined in order to assess its strategic implications for the region's imbalance.

Research Questions

1. What strategic goals drive India's arm race in South Asia, and how do these goals influence its military strategies?
2. How have South Asian neighbors modified their military strategies and plans in response to India's growing military capabilities?
3. What effects does India's weapons race have on South Asia's regional stability, specifically with regard to security dynamics and the possibility of conflict?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study, "The Impact of Indian Induced Arms Race on Regional Stability Equilibrium," is grounded in three interrelated theories: *Realism in International Relations*, *Security Dilemma Theory* and Conventional Deterrence Theory. Together, these theories explain the dynamics of arms races, strategic stability, and the ensuing security calculus in South Asia. According to Realism, governments prioritize survival and security due to the anarchic international system, which frequently leads to power struggles (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). Structural realism states that relative power dynamics rather than moral considerations determine the actions of states (Waltz, 1979). By encouraging governments to address escalating threats through alliances or military enhancements, the balance of power mechanism ensures stability (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). This realism logic is best exemplified in South Asia by India's pursuit for hypersonic weapons (HSWs), which forces Pakistan to respond and thus fueling an arms race that destabilizes the whole region.

The Security Dilemma Theory describes how a state's efforts to strengthen its security unintentionally put others in danger and start an arms race. Regional instability is increased by this action-reaction dynamic, which produces a security spiral (Wivel, 2011). This dilemma is illustrated by India's deployment of hypersonic weapons, which Pakistan views as a direct threat leading to escalating measures.

India's deployment of hypersonic weapons in Indian Ocean weakens the early warning systems and raising the possibility of miscalculation, which can further intensify the regional conflicts ad tension.

Conventional Deterrence Theory seeks to avoid aggression of the opponent country through strong military capabilities that can deny the ability of an adversary to achieve its objectives (Moloney, 2024). Strong military strategy combined with technology and numerical advantage is necessary for effective deterrence. However, the conventional force imbalance between Pakistan and India increases the need for nuclear deterrent, creating new hazards. By enabling precise attacks that can destroy vital defensive systems, the emergence of hypersonic weapon systems threatens conventional deterrence and encourages escalation under a "nuclear hangover" (Raza & Mehmood, 2023). Stability depends on striking a balance between quantity and technology, and Pakistan must create reliable conventional countermeasures to India's hypersonic weapon system in order to maintain regional stability.

Methods and Materials

The research study is qualitative in nature and thus carried out under qualitative approach using textual analysis of secondary data collected from internet source including reliable news articles, online official websites, academic journals, and institutional publication. The study employed deductive thematic analysis to organize and interpret the data under specified categories or themes base on research questions of the study. The main themes derived include India's strategic objectives, regional responses to India military expansion, and the impact of the arms race on regional stability. In order to provide direct and relevant answers to research questions, text sample were group into various relevant themes developed. This approach ensured a focused evaluation of the impact of India's arm race on regional stability within the broader historical and geopolitical context of South Asia.

Strategic Objectives of India's Arms Race i

The idea of strategic stability grew throughout the Cold War and evolved with the development of nuclear weapons. Influenced by the experiences of the US and the USSR, India and Pakistan eventually incorporated Cold War nuclear vocabulary into their strategic thinking. The theoretical view of strategic stability in South Asia was influenced by Western academics (Noor, 2023). Strategic stability, according to Thomas Schelling, is the capacity of both parties to retaliate after absorbing a nuclear blow, with mutual vulnerability preventing a first strike (Schelling, 2020). First strike stability, as defined by Glenn Kent and David Thaler, makes sure that neither side believes it has an advantage to strike first (Kent & Thaler, 1989), and that both sides concentrate on the capabilities of their forces to survive in order to maintain stability (Noor, 2023). With a 13% increase to $72.6 billion for fiscal year 2023–2024, India has substantially raised its defense budget (Kumar, 2023). Pakistan, on the other hand, has a $10.3 billion defense budget for 2022–2023 (SIPRI, 2022). Since 2010, India has become the world's largest importer of weapons, obtaining cutting-edge equipment like as missile defense systems and airplanes (SIPRI, 2023). In order to preserve parity, Pakistan is forced to use nuclear weapons due to this conventional asymmetry

(Crockett, 2014).

To upgrade its military, India has been increasing its defense budget by 7 to 9 percent every year (Rehman, 2012). According to critics, these initiatives are intended to offset China's military strength (Kanwal, 2012). However, in accordance with its Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), which prioritizes quick military action in the event of war, many of the weapons that India purchases or develops are meant to be used against Pakistan (Indian Defense and Security Analysis, 2012). India's strategic influence is further expanded by its long-range ballistic missiles, which are aimed toward China (Abbas, 2017). In addition to addressing security issues, India's military build-up is a declaration of its geopolitical objectives in South Asia. By securing its control over Pakistan, it hopes to offset China's expanding military strength in the area. As the world's third-largest military spender and second-largest arms importer, India's military race clearly demonstrates a desire toward modernization (Tahirkheli, 2022). Purchasing advanced weapons like missile defense systems and intercontinental ballistic missiles is part of India's military strategy. These changes are consistent with a shift from the "no-first-use" doctrine and toward a "Counter Force First Strike" strategy in favor of an offensive nuclear posture (Naz, 2020). India's policy of maximizing regional strength, which aims for both military and geopolitical domination, includes this offensive posture (Tahirkheli, 2022).

India's military modernization attempts to confront China's and Pakistan's conventional and nuclear threats, including the construction of anti-ballistic missile systems and a nuclear triad (Khattak, 2019). India seeks military dominance in order to establish supremacy in South Asia and increase its influence internationally. Due to China's and Pakistan's increased security concerns over India's military expansion, both nations are trying to enhance their defenses, which is escalating the arms race (SIPRI, 2019). As India's military confidence grows, so does its military power, as seen by its surgical strikes and Line of Control (LoC) breaches (Abbas, 2017). According to Lavoy (2008) and Jones (2005), these changes have the potential to destabilize South Asia, reduce the threshold for nuclear confrontation, and increase regional vulnerabilities.

Regional Responses to India's Military Expansion

South Asia's nuclear learning process has been slow and has developed differently than the traditional Cold War experience. In contrast to the established nuclear powers, India and Pakistan entered the nuclear arena without the advantages of operational experience, institutional maturity, or well-developed strategic doctrines for managing nuclear security and deterrence (Khan & Jacobs, 2014). Both India and Pakistan have escaped full-scale conflict since nuclearization, but regional security has been threatened on several occasions by crises like the Kargil War (1999), the military standoff (2001–02), the Mumbai attacks (2008), and the Pulwama/Balakot crisis (2019) (Hassa, 2021).

After a militant attack in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir on April 22, 2025, which claimed 26 civilian lives and was connected by New Delhi to cross-border terrorism, tensions between India and Pakistan escalated into one of their most

serious military conflicts in decades in May 2025 (Atlantic Council, 2025). India claimed that its coordinated air and missile attacks on targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir on May 7, 2025, were lunched to destroy insurgent infrastructure. Along the Line of Control, Pakistan responded with drone launches, artillery fire, and other measures. A truce was reached on May 10, 2025, after days of negotiations and pressure from foreign diplomats (Stimson Centre, 2025; Reuters, 2025). While neither side was able to secure a definite strategic victory, analysts pointed out that the four-day battle demonstrated a significant escalation in the use of modern strike capabilities. This reaffirmed the risks associated with high-end conventional conflicts between rivals equipped with nuclear weapons (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Stability in the South Asia has been further threatened by the development of advanced weapon systems. Since 1998, India and Pakistan have both greatly improved their missile delivery systems, which has resulted in a rapid proliferation of missiles (Noor, 2023). India is among the nations with intercontinental-range missile capabilities including Agni and submarine-launched K-series missile programs (Kristensen & Koda, 2022; O'Donnell et al., 2014, Khan, 2025). In response, Pakistan has created cruise missiles like Babur and Ra'ad as well as nuclear-capable ballistic missiles like Ghaznavi and Shaheen (ISPR, 2011; Ali & Sidhu, 2023). Significant advancements in missile accuracy, survivability, and delivery platforms have intensified competition for deterrence and raised the possibility of making a mistake in a crisis (Acton, 2018; Kristensen & Korda, 2022; SIPRI, 2023). Pakistan has developed a second-strike capability using missiles like Babur III and the MIRV-capable Ababeel because India's military build-up, which includes the Agni-V ICBM and K-series submarine missiles, threatens regional security (Ali & Sidhu, 2023). Pakistan and China are increasing their defense expenditures in response to India's increased conventional military budget, which has intensified security worries (SIPRI, 2023).

India has violated the Indo-Pak ceasefire since 2013, which raises fears that this discrepancy might exacerbate regional instability and even aggression (Daniel, 2015). According to experts, India's military modernization might lead to a regional arms race or a reduction in the nuclear threshold by increasing the disparity between its conventional forces and those of Pakistan (Lavoy, 2008). This conventional disparity forces Pakistan to increase its nuclear arsenal in order to maintain deterrence, as noted by Rodney Jones and Michael Krepon (Jones, 2005; Krepon, 2012). India's expanding military might has changed regional geopolitics and Pakistan views India's military and economic involvement in Afghanistan as a security concern (Rashid, 2014). By creating short-range nuclear weapons and guaranteeing a second-strike capability to preserve strategic stability, Pakistan has adopted a strategy of Minimum Credible Nuclear Deterrence in response to India's military buildup (Khattak, 2019; Bibi & Lee, 2023). India has been reluctant to participate in arms control debates, which has resulted in a continuing arms race despite efforts to create arms control and confidence-building measures (Naz, 2020). In order to counter

India's increasing nuclear and conventional superiority, Pakistan is modernizing its military, especially its missile weapons (Bibi & Lee, 2023).

Financial limitations have influenced Pakistan's reaction to India's military buildup, making it difficult for the country to match India's technological superiority, especially in the area of hypersonic weapons. However, Pakistan is attempting to preserve strategic balance by creating advanced technologies and defenses against India's technological edge. South Asia has become even more unstable as the arms race in the Indian Ocean region has been more intense due to the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons, including hypersonic ones (Raza & Mehmood, 2023). India's increasing military strenght has urged China and Pakistan to raise their defense budgets (SIPRI, 2025; Times of India, 2025). Pakistan is investing in tactical nuclear weapons to maintain deterrence, contributing to the growing military gap between the two nations (Krepon, 2012, The Star, 2025). This disparity is a major contributing cause to worries of instability and an arms race in the area, particularly in light of the ongoing conflict in Kashmir (Butt, 2024).

Impact of the Arms Race on South Asian Regional Stability

The stability of South Asia is significantly influence by the ongoing arm race between India and Pakistan. The region is destabilized by India's military buildup, especially due to its investment in Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system in response to Pakistan's missile capabilities. In order to restore mutual vulnerability, Pakistan is likely to respond with countermeasures like MIRVs and larger arsenals in response to India's BMD, a double-tiered system that can intercept missiles at both exo- and endo-atmospheric altitudes (Gady, 2017; Abid, 2022; Negal, 2016; Haider & Sultan, 2023). This arm struggle contributes further to the already existed tension between the two states. Another source of instability is the emergence of cyberspace as a possible battlefield. According to reports, India has developed offensive cyber capabilities and cyber-intelligence against Pakistan (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021; Strategic Vision Institute, 2024; Pytlak, 2025). In response Pakistan also make use of cyber capabilities to respond effectively.

Hackers from Pakistan launched coordinated cyber-attacks on Indian critical infrastructure websites in May 2025. These attacks, which include malware campaigns, distributed denial-of-service attacks, and website defacements directed at defense, government, and critical service targets, demonstrate how cyberspace is evolving into a crucial and destabilizing front in the larger regional conflict. These events suggest that the wider Indo-Pakistan war has expanded beyond traditional military confrontations, with cyberspace emerging as a significant and disruptive area (Pytlak, 2025, Times of India, 2025). The arm race between the two states results into significant economic and developmental effects. Funds for people-centric development are reduced while that for defense are increased, which leads to inflation, economic hardship, and a shortage of vital social services. In the Human Development Index, India is ranked 130th out of 193 countries, but its defense budget is still growing (UNDP, 2025). The strategic stability of the area is threatened by the growing conventional military gap between India and Pakistan. Pakistan is being

forced into a cycle of escalation by India's military developments, significantly destabilizing the area (Bracken, 2012, Khan Afridi *et al.*, 2026).

Regional instability has increased because of India's relatively stronger economy and quickly developing defense capabilities, which are supported by its strategic alliance with the US. India's proactive military posture that includes cross-border surgical operations inside Pakistan and attempts to establish supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) further exacerbates this scenario. To protect its security interests, Pakistan has responded by taking countermeasures (Khan & Khan, 2023). The arm race between China, India and Pakistan is probably going to continue to influence the security situation in the region. India's development of hypersonic weapons raises the possibility of confrontation and quick escalation of conflict (Raza & Mehmood, 2023). India's increasing military strength and the traditional disparity between the two nations are the main causes of Pakistan's dependence on nuclear deterrent. Both countries are in a constant state of uncertainty due to the absence of effective weapons control or confidence-building measures, which increases the possibility of making a mistake (Ladwig, 2017). India's increasing naval power and missile defense capabilities fuel tensions with China and Pakistan (Bibi & Lee, 2023).

External powers have also been involved in the arms race, especially China and the United States, both of which have an interest in maintaining regional stability. Most of the international efforts to promote weapons control dialogues and agreements have largely been ineffective. Instability in the area increased by the arms race between India and Pakistan, which is fueled by India's aggressive military buildup. Miscalculation and escalation are major hazards in a volatile security climate created by the conventional military imbalance and the expanding nuclear threat. To secure South Asia's long-term security, the international community has to be more proactive in advancing communication, measures to boost trust, and weapons control (Naz, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The arms race sparked by India has significantly affected the stability of South Asian countries. Because of the rapid growth and development in the field of both nuclear and conventional weaponry, especially in the areas of missiles technology and advanced weaponry, the tensions between India and Pakistan have increased. The Kargil War, the 2001–2002 military standoffs, the Pulwama/Balakot issue, and the May 2025 military clash are only a few examples of the recent crises. These crises have shown how serious the security situation is, even though both nations have avoided full-scale battles since becoming nuclear-armed. India’s increasing military dominance, especially in the fields of nuclear submarines, high-performance aircraft, and advanced missiles, and cyberspace technologies has led to a military imbalance in the region. This military imbalance has created serious consequences for the security of South Asians along with Pakistan and India the development of advanced weapons like short-range missiles, a reactive nuclear buildup and second-strike capabilities are the results of Pakistan’s perception of this discrepancy as a direct existential threat.

The rapid advancement of weapons like the possible introduction hypersonic missiles adds complexity to the already unstable security situation. India has changed the balance of power in the region beyond the nuclear arms race because to its expanding defense budget and strategic importance in areas like Afghanistan and the Indian The possibility of a larger regional arms race grows as Pakistan and other surrounding nations react to India's military growth. The possibility of the arm race grows in the whole region as Pakistan and other neighboring countries respond to India military growth. The past territorial conflicts, especially those related to Kashmir, and the current arm race increase the possibility of instability not just between India and Pakistan but also throughout the larger South Asian area. The increasing arm race has persisted because of India's unwillingness to participate in effective disarmament negotiations, despite Pakistan's attempts to suggest arms control measures and endeavors to raise confidence. The past conflicts over territory, especially those occurred over Kashmir issues, and the ongoing arm race is likely to create opportunities for instability and tensions between not only Pakistan and India but also thought the larger South Asian region. The arm race is getting intensify because India is not ready to participate in arm control negotiation despite Pakistan's effort to suggest arm control measures.

Recommendations

In order to maintain regional and global peace, international community should urge India to halt its arm race and consider diplomatic engagements and multilateral initiative to encourage arm control and reduce military spending. To stabilize the areas, world powers should facilitate mutual dialogue between India and Pakistan, support confidence-building measures (CBMs) and establish mutual security framework to de-escalate convention and nuclear military adventures. Similarly, to reduce escalation risks and promote stability, India and Pakistan should prioritize diplomatic discussion on arm control top priority, concentrating on regional agreements and confidence-building measures (CBMs). Both the nations should restrict the role of nuclear weapons in their security plans by implementing stability-oriented policies and minimizing nuclear deterrence. Moreover, the international community especially the united nation should effectively mediate to minimize tension between India and Pakistan and to stop further escalation of conflicts.

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