



## Role of Diplomacy and Deterrence in Managing Pakistan-India Crisis: A Case Study of Post-Bombay Attacks Crisis

Farooque Ahmed Leghari\*

Hussain Abbas†

Ashfaq Ali Banbhan‡

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### Abstract

*The menace of terrorism gives another blow to Indo-Pak relations in 2008 when the terrorists hit Mumbai, one of the major economic hubs of India killing hundreds of people and creating panic for almost four days. India alleged Pakistan for its involvement in the attack. India claimed that Pakistan's territory was used against India. Pakistan rejected Indian allegation, condemned the terrorist attacks and stated that it has no involvement in the terrorist attacks. The major objective of this article is to look at the role of nuclear deterrence in averting war between India and Pakistan during 2008 post-Mumbai Attacks crisis. The qualitative methodology is used in this research. Semi structured interviews give a rich data to better understand the crisis. The article gives three findings. First, it indicates that militant group involved in Mumbai terrorist attack wanted the nuclear weapon states to fight a war. Second, it indicates that the diplomacy plays a vital role along with nuclear deterrence in averting crisis between India and Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** India, Pakistan, Nuclear Deterrence, War, Crisis, Peace, Diplomacy

### Introduction

India and Pakistan once again came at the edge of a full-fledged war against each other in 2008 after terrorist attacks in Mumbai. The terrorists attacked many places at Mumbai killing hundreds of people. Indian security forces responded the situation immediately but it took them about four days to control the situation. They became successful in capturing one terrorist and killing nine others. India alleged Pakistan of its involvement in the terrorist attacks. India brought its forces on the border and prepared itself for a war. Pakistan also did same and mobilized its forces on the border to face any Indian aggression. War seemed to be a real possibility between the two states. The nuclear deterrence failed to have effective role in averting crisis between the two states. The diplomacy averted the crisis as international community became active and convinced both parties not to go for a war and especially forced Pakistan to take steps against militant groups. The tension was reduced when Pakistan took action against the militants.

### Diplomacy During Indo-Pak Crises: A Historical Analysis

The issue of nuclear threat in South Asia came to the limelight for the first-time during Indo-Pak 1986-87 crisis. The subsequent crises occurred between India and Pakistan in 1990, 1999, 2001-02, 2008, 2016 and 2019 also had the germs of the full-fledged and limited conventional war. In these crises, both countries It should be noted here that 'nuclear threat' did have psychological effect, thus deterring these two South Asian nuclear weapon states from actually engaging into conventional war. However, this deterrence did not stop them completely from engaging into crises but motivated the major powers especially the US to play its role reducing the tension and defusing the crisis. As said by Kidwai, "it is the nuclear factor which motivates them (international community) to intervene in the times of crises to defuse the tension. If there had been no nuclear factor, perhaps,

\* Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

† PhD Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ Assistant Professor, Institute of Commerce, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

they may not have been too pushed as in 1965 and even in 1971” (Kidwai, K. A., Expert Informant, Interview, 19 November 2015). When these countries faced a series of crises, it was the employment of ‘diplomacy’ by the major powers especially the United States that had effectively managed and averted both India and Pakistan from engaging in all-out war.

In this connection, Fatimi was of the view that it is the nuclear deterrence which has brought international mediation especially the US role in diffusing the tension in times of crises and “I (Fatimi) want to tell you that if you are weak and vulnerable then very few foreign powers are even interested in coming and proposing that they wish to play role of an honest broker” (Expert Informant, Interview, 30 October 2015). While Lieutenant General (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai witnessed the international community especially the US coming to play its role in defusing the tension in times of crisis because they (international community) did not want nuclear weapon states to indulge into any conflict or war (Kidwai, K. A., Expert Informant, Interview, 19 November 2015).

Kidwai further added that when Pakistan asks the US to play its role in conflict resolution, it is not willing to indulge in conflict resolution and it (US) argues that both India and Pakistan should resolve their disputes bilaterally and it (US) will come as a third party when India will also invite it to play its role (Kidwai, K. A., Expert Informant, Interview, 19 November 2015).

The United States played a commendable role in averting conventional war between India and Pakistan during Indo-Pak 1986-87 Brasstacks crisis. It was Pakistan’s nuclear threat in the first place and the United States pressure in the second place that defused the tension between India and Pakistan during 1986-87 Brasstacks crisis.

The international community played an important role in reducing tension between the two countries and especially the United States’ assurances to both sides helped to defuse the tension. The U.S President Reagan’s phone calls to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistan’s President Zia ul Haq played a role in defusing tension between the two states. Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi also took a sensible decision not to go for an offensive against Pakistan. India started negotiations with Pakistan and the diplomatic efforts were accelerated to reduce tension and that helped both states to start withdrawing their forces to the normal positions by 19th February, 1987. In this connection, Kidwai argued while speaking on the US role during Indo-Pak 1986-87 crisis in this way, “it (Brasstacks) sounded like a threat to Pakistan and deterrence effect surely worked there and it also convinced Americans to work to defuse the tension between the two states” (Kidwai, K. A., Expert Informant, Interview, 19 November 2015).

The United States involved in the situation to avert conventional war between India and Pakistan during 1990 crisis. The US became active to play its role in convincing the leaders of the two nuclear weapons countries to avoid taking the two states to dangerous place by opting the option of war after its intelligence reported about the complexity of the situation where the two states can lead towards a war which could further result in nuclear confrontation (Wieninger 2004: 233). The United States closely looked at the developments occurring during the crisis. Fearing the worst in South Asia, the US President George Bush asked his Deputy National Security Advisor, Robert Gates, to visit India and Pakistan to defuse the tension between the two states. Robert Gates briefed Pakistani and Indian leaders that war is not going to give benefit to any side (Wieninger 2004: 233). The crisis in 1990 became a major focus point in the world. There was a greater anxiety in the world that South Asia has become a hot spot and any war between India and Pakistan could lead to a nuclear conflict as these two powers were having the nuclear capabilities and the United States, Russian, Japanese and European analysts agreed on that point (Chari et al. 2007). The US diplomacy seemed to play more effective role than nuclear deterrence during 1990 crisis as the US assurances to the two sides played a significant role in defusing tension between India and Pakistan (Wieninger 2004: 233).

In this connection, Kidwai argued that the United States and the Western countries wanted things to remain in control and that is why they came to influence the two states and asked them to remain cool and calm (Kidwai, K. A., Expert Informant, Interview, 19 November 2015). Furthermore, Nye (2016) as international analyst said that Indo-Pak 1990 crisis stimulated the United States to play its role in defusing the crisis between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states (Nye, J. S., Expert Informant, Email Interview, 9 February 2016). And finally, the crisis which seemed to be a serious in nature was averted and tension abated as both states started taking measures to bring things to normalcy.

Indo Pak Kargil conflict 1999 was a serious conflict which had the potential to be converted into a conventional war. Although the nuclear deterrence brought a restraint on Indian side, the United States role in averting conventional war cannot be denied any way. The international community worried about the situation initiated diplomatic efforts to avert full-fledged war between the two South Asian nuclear weapons states. The United States played a very important role in reducing the tension between India and Pakistan during the Kargil conflict. The U.S President Bill Clinton convinced the leaders of the two states to reduce the tension. After Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's meeting with the U.S President Bill Clinton, the crisis, India and Pakistan took efforts to defuse the crisis. Diplomacy had a pivotal role in reducing the tension and averting a full-fledged war between India and Pakistan during 1999 Kargil conflict. Therefore, the US diplomacy remained successful to avert war between the two countries.

The US played an important role in convincing the two states not to opt for conventional war. The international community played its role in attempting to defuse the situation with the United States on diplomatic over drive to keep both states away from starting a war. It pressured Pakistan to take action against the militants, while also convinced India to exercise restraint and give Pakistan some time to take steps against the militants. The pressure from the international community forced Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to publicly announce that he would take strong action against the militant groups in the country and banned two major militant groups but refused to hand over 20 militants to India. Additionally, Pakistan arrested about 2000 militants in the country and closed down about 300 offices of the banned militant organizations. In this connection, Dr. Maria Sultan argued that Sultan argued that the US asked India to adopt a restraint during Indo-Pak 2001-02 crisis. India and Pakistan's deterrence calculations always needed a third party into action and it was the reason that the United States have always played its role as a "Balancer" during crises between India and Pakistan in South Asian region as it does not want the two nuclear weapon states to fight a war (Sultan, M., Expert Informant, Interview, 5 November 2015) While Dr. Zafar Khan said that the nuclear deterrence had been the primary factor which averted conventional war between the two states in times of crises while the US role was secondary one as it was the nuclear deterrence which brought the US role in Indo-Pak crises (Khan, Z., Expert Informant, Interview, 12 November 2015).

Furthermore, in this connection Singh (2015) further clarified the US role, "Colin Powell visited New Delhi after a stopover in Islamabad and assured India of Musharraf's intention to crack down on terrorism while Richard Armitage extracted a promise from Musharraf to end infiltration permanently". In this connection, Das argued that the US stopped India from going after Pakistan as the Indian slow mobilization period provided space for the US diplomacy, "It (India) wanted to punish Pakistan with a shallow punitive incursion" but two things averted the crisis, first; it is the longer period of Indian mobilization which was almost three weeks which provided space to the United States to intervene diplomatically and defuse the tension between the two states and second, the role of nuclear weapons which averted conventional war between the two states (Das, P., Expert Informant, Email Interview, 9 February 2016). Under US pressure, the steps taken by Pakistan to curb militancy reduced tension between the two countries. In this connection, Professor Dr. Zulifkar Khan argued that it was diplomacy and also coupled with nuclear factor with averted the crisis (Khan, Z., Expert Informant, Interview, 6 November 2015).

The international community including the United States and the United Kingdom started playing its role to reduce tension between India and Pakistan in Indo Pak 2008 crisis. In this connection, The United States asked both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and forced Pakistan to take action against the militant groups using its territory to hit at Indian targets. Under an extreme pressure from the international community, Pakistan closed some of the offices of the militant group Laskar e Taiba and made some of its activists under house arrest and closed its websites ([Ganguly 2009](#)). In this connection, Prof. Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal admired the role of the United States in diffusing the tension between India and Pakistan during Mumbai crisis 2008 (Jaspal, Z, N., Expert Informant, Interview, 13 November 2015). Therefore, it was the diplomacy which successfully reduced tension between the two countries.

The international diplomacy and especially the US role were commendable during 2016 crisis which influenced the two states to adopt a restraint. The international community especially the United States started utilizing all channels to calm down the situation once India decided to take revenge after the terrorist attack on its Military

Headquarter in Indian held Kashmir. The US National Security Adviser Susan Rice “strongly condemned the attack and reiterated that Pakistan should take effective action against terrorist entities like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed” (Aaron 2016). After Indian claim of Surgical Strikes, the United States asked the leaders of the two states to calm down the situation and bring things to normalcy. In this connection, Peter R Lavoy, senior director for South Asia at the National Security Council, while answering a question on US’ response after Uri while speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said:

Every country has a right to self-defense, but I also highlight that in a heavy militarized relationship like that of India-Pakistan, a relationship that has experienced at least three...four wars in the past... in frankly where forces along the LoC and the international border are on a hair trigger alert, there really is a need for caution and prudence on both sides (Aaron 2016).

Above said words by Lavoy highlighted the severity of the situation prevailing between India Pakistan on the one hand and the US role to keep the two states away from fighting war on the other hand.

The last crisis between India and Pakistan occurred in February, 2019. Indian Air Force violated Pakistan’s sovereignty and entered into Pakistan’s air space and while on its way back also made a bombardment on the plain areas of Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This resulted in Pakistan air Force’s befitting response the next day in which one of Indian Aircraft was destroyed and pilot was also arrested. This led a serious concern in the international community especially the United States. The efforts were launched at all diplomatic channels the international community especially the United States to defuse the tension between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states and this resulted in the normalcy.

To sum up, although nuclear deterrence created a cautiousness on the two sides but there was a need for the need for the international community and especially the US to play its role in defusing Indo Pak crises. Therefore, it was the nuclear deterrence which brought international diplomacy and especially the US role into action during Indo Pak crises.

### **Indo-Pak Crisis 2008**

The people were busy in their daily routine in Mumbai when the terrorist hit the city and created a panic. There were ten terrorists. Terrorists divided them into different groups and started targeting different places in the city. They started killing people at various places including railway station, major hotels. They took control of various places including hotels. Indian security forces responded immediately but it took them four days to capture and kill terrorists.

The US and Indian intelligence agencies have perceived a terrorist threat. According to the report, the US intelligence has communicated to Indian government that the terrorists are planning a major terrorist attack on Indian mainland but the intelligence agencies of the two states were not successful in tracing the terrorist target. Indian government had taken steps to counter any terrorist attack in the country. But the terrorists’ plan became successful as they entered into Mumbai on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2008 and started hitting their targets. The two terrorists attacked Leopold Café killing 15 people and injuring many others. Terrorists also planted two bombs in taxis which killed 5 people and injured many others. Four terrorists entered Taj Mahal Hotel, two in Oberoi Trident, two into Nariman House and two of them entered the passenger hall of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station with firing and throwing hand grenades killing 52 people and injuring 109. The terrorist attack was of high intensity and put severe repercussions. Indian troops responded fast but they couldn’t succeed to control the terrorists on the immediate basis as it took them about four days to kill nine terrorists and capture one. India alleged that Jamaat ud Dawa, a terrorist group having its bases in Pakistan has launched Mumbai terrorist attacks with the backing of Pakistan’s intelligence agencies. Pakistan refused to accept the responsibility that Mumbai terrorist attack had been planned on its mainland and called it an Indian propaganda against it.

India asked Pakistan to handover 40 terrorists involved in the planning of the terrorist attacks on its mainland and to take action against Jamaat ud Dawa and other terrorist groups. It also discontinued its ongoing negotiations with Pakistan.

Pakistan condemned the terrorist attacks and claimed that it has no links with Mumbai attacks. It asked India to provide proof about the people involved in Mumbai terrorist attacks and stated that once if it is proved that if any Pakistani is involved in terrorist attack against India, it will bring that person to justice according to its own

law but refused to hand over 40 Pakistanis to India. India produced the copy of proofs to Pakistan. The government of Pakistan stated that it is looking at the proofs and if it found the proofs original then it will take action against those people involved in terrorist attacks in Mumbai but the things were going so slow that it didn't give any result.

The conditions went severe as India brought its forces on the border and planned to target terrorists in Pakistan. The response was also same one on Pakistan's side as it brought its forces on the border to face any Indian aggression. Both states seemed to be at the edge of the war with each other.

The international community including the United States and the United Kingdom started playing its role to reduce tension between India and Pakistan. The United States and the United Kingdom tried to convince the two states that war is not going to benefit any side. International community became successful in melting the ice between the two nuclear weapon states. And finally, the tension between the two states started diffusing when Pakistan under extreme pressure of the United States and the United Kingdom closed some of the offices of Jamat ud Dawa and made some of its activists under house arrest and closed its websites. ([Ganguly, 2009](#))

### **Critical Analysis of Indo Pak 2008 Crisis**

There has been a greater tragedy with India and Pakistan. These two states had been indulged into rivalry with each other since the day of their independence. Kashmir has been a major point of conflict between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states. [Shaikh \(2006\)](#) argues that Pakistan's 'revisionist' stance on Kashmir as 'the unfinished business of Partition' is a key factor keeping the conflict alive—a conflict that, now it is hedged in by nuclear weapons, has become more rather than less crisis prone. These two states have been supporting militant groups against each other since long. And that kind of state support to militants has strengthened the militant groups and we have seen in last three decades that these terrorist groups were so strong that they could lead two nuclear weapon states towards confrontation at any time. If we look at 1990 crisis, 1990 Kargil war or 2001-02 crisis, it will be clear that all these crises were the result of the state supported militancy against each other. The crisis occurred between India and Pakistan in result of Mumbai terrorist attacks also indicated to the same issue highlighted above that the terrorists have become so stronger that they could create a major rift among the two South Asian nuclear weapon states with their one action. The same thing was done by the terrorists in 2008. Exploiting Pakistan's support, these militants became successful in targeting the major Indian city killing hundreds of innocent civilians. This resulted in a major crisis between the two South Asian nuclear weapon states. The credit for the normalization of the situation goes to the United States and the United Kingdom as they convinced the two states not to go for a war against each other and forced Pakistan to take action against the militant groups working in its territory.

It becomes difficult to experience that terrorists are so powerful in South Asia that whenever they like they bring two nuclear weapon states at the edge of conventional war against each other. India and Pakistan think that these two states are exploiting the militant groups for getting their policy objectives but they are unaware of the fact that these terrorists have become so strong that they exploit the two states and lead them towards a war.

There is a greater need that India and Pakistan should put an end to trust deficit and develop confidence into each other. [Rana \(2010\)](#) states that there are signs for a cooperation between India and Pakistan even though these two nuclear weapon states are bitter adversaries of each other. They should collectively face the terrorists. They should not give any chance to terrorists to exploit the two states. The terrorists seem to be very sharp and they know that have the exploiting tactics with which they can bring these two nuclear powers at the edge of war. Both states should shun their policy of supporting terrorists against each other. They should try to resolve their issues by dialogue and have some flexibility in their attitude. The policy of supporting militants to get objectives is not going to pay to any side.

If we look at the crisis occurred after both states became nuclear were on the issue of terrorism. All the times, India alleged Pakistan of its support to militants involved into terrorism on Indian mainland.

Pakistan needs to shun the policy of its support to militants because if it is not going to give it any favour in resolution of its long-standing dispute of Kashmir with India. Pakistan's support to militancy is leading the two states towards a conventional war which could result into a nuclear warfare. These militants can exploit the situation at any time and create a pace for a war between the two nuclear powers.

All the crises including Indo-Pak crisis of 2008 were averted with the efforts of the international community. The United States had very important role in reducing the tension and averting wars between the two states.

The democracy had also a partial role in reduction of the tension between the two states. Indian democratic governments have tried all the times not to opt for the option of war and have given time to settle things in times of crisis. Indian government did same in 2008 crisis between the two states and tried to avert the crisis by giving time to Pakistan to agree to take action against the militants.

The nuclear deterrence was not so effective one in reducing the tension between the two powers. Though there is a psychological impact on the minds of the people of the horrors of the nuclear weapons but still it fails to stop states to go to war due to their different approaches on the theory of nuclear deterrence. The same thing was noticed in 2008 crisis when the nuclear deterrence was not so successful in averting the crisis between India and Pakistan. If there has been no role of the international community in reducing the tension between India and Pakistan, these two states have surely fought another war with each other in their five crisis including Indo-Pak crisis 2008.

Therefore, India and Pakistan need to take following steps to bring eternal peace to the region. First, these two states should not give space to militants to exploit the two countries and bring them at the edge of the war. Second, the two states should take steps to end trust deficit present on the both sides. Third, they should try to have confidence building measures. Fourth, both states should try to resolve their issues with the dialogue. Fifth, both states should try to bring flexibility in their viewpoint. Sixth, they should stop depending on the nuclear deterrence for peace. Finally, India and Pakistan should try to focus on other stakes such as trade, people to people contact and cultural cooperation. If the diplomacy to a greater extent and democracy to a little extent play its role in reducing the tension between the two nuclear weapon states, then the questions remains for us that how much benefit other stakes can have to bring peace to India and Pakistan? These two nuclear weapon states need to concentrate on finding answer to the above-mentioned question. If these two states will depend on other stakes than the nuclear deterrence for peace, then surely they will be successful in averting the chances of any crisis in the future course and will have eternal peace in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Indo-Pak crisis in 2008 in the aftermath of Mumbai terrorist attacks was a very severe crisis between two nuclear weapons states in South Asia. Once again, the terrorists had become successful in bringing these two states at edge of a war. The circumstance became alarming when India and Pakistan brought their forces on the border. It was a good luck that international community intervened on time and played its role in reducing tension between the two nuclear weapon states as it had done to avert previous Indo-Pak crises. The role of the United States and the United Kingdom was very appreciable in averting war between India and Pakistan in 2008 crisis. The democracy had also a partial success in averting war between the two states as the democratic government of India tried to delay the option of the war against Pakistan.

There was a one clear lesson from Indo-Pak crisis 2008 that the terrorists have become so strong that they can exploit the rivalry of the two nuclear powers and bring them at the edge of the war. And if India and Pakistan do not take steps to end trust deficit, it will help terrorists to exploit these two nuclear weapon states in the future and bring them to a war with their heinous terrorist attacks. Another lesson seemed to clear for India and Pakistan after 2008 crisis that these two states need to shun their reliance on nuclear deterrence as it has failed to avert crises between the two states and depend on other stakes such as trade, people to people contact and cultural ties which will strengthen their relations with each other, end trust deficit, increase cooperation and will avert the chances of any future crisis between the two nuclear weapon states.

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## Appendix

**Table 1.** List of Expert Informants Interviewed At Pakistan, India and the United States

S. No	Name	Organization/Status	Type of Interview	Date	Place
1	Amb (R) Syed Tariq Fatimi	Special Assistant to Pakistan's PM on Foreign Affairs	Face to Face	30/10/2015	Islamabad, Pakistan
2	Athar Abbas	Major General (R) Pakistan Army	Face to Face	2/11/15	Islamabad, Pakistan
3	Asad Durrani	Lieutenant General (R) Pakistan Army	Face to Face	3/11/2015	Islamabad, Pakistan
4	Dr Nazeer Hussain	Associate Professor, Quaid I Azam University, Islamabad	Face to Face	3/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
5	Dr Maria Sultan	President, South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI)	Face to Face	5/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
6	Dr Zafar Khan	Assistant Professor, National Defense University, Islamabad	Face to Face	6/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
7	Prof. Dr Zulifkar	Professor, National Defense University, Islamabad	Face to Face	6/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
8	Dr Pervez Hoodboy	Professor (R), Quaid I Azam University Islamabad	Face to Face	6/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
9	Prof. Dr Nasrullah Mirza	Professor, Quaid i Azam University Islamabad	Face to Face	9/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
10	Akram Zaki	Ambassador (R)	Face to Face	11/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
11	Dr Rizwana Abbasi	Assistant Professor, National Defense University, Islamabad	Face to Face	12/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
12	Prof (R) Dr Zafar Iqbal Cheema	President, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad	Face to Face	13/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
13	Dr Pervez Iqbal Cheema	Professor and Dean, National Defense University, Islamabad	Face to Face	13/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
14	Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Director, School of IR, QAU	Associate Professor, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad	Face to Face	13/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
15	Zamir Akram	Ambassador (R)	Face to Face	14/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
16	Khalid Ahmed Kidwai	Lieutenant General (R), Pakistan Army	Face to Face	19/11/2015	Islamabad Pakistan
17	Dr Onkar Marwah	Distinguished Fellow, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, India	Email Interview	25/01/2016	India
18	Dr Joseph Nye	Professor, Harvard University	Email Interview	30/01/2016	The United States
19	Pushan Das	Research Assistant, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, India	Email Interview	9/02/2016	India