FROM CRISIS ONSET TO DE-ESCALATION: EXAMINING ROLE OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE PULWAMA CRISIS

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Abstract

The enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan has been manifold due to the trust deficit, threat perception, and non-resolving nature of their disputes. The hostile nature of the two neighbours demands a deep understanding of their relationship, and focus is required on how a particular crisis management approach has helped them manage their conflict and avoid war during the Pulwama crisis. The paper applies Michael Brecher's four-stage model to explain the Pulwama crisis and describe how the situation between India and Pakistan has shifted from a perception of nuclear war to de-escalation after the attack. Crisis management helped the two states to retaliate back from their position and avoid the war-like scenario anticipated at that time. The various dimensions and underpinnings of crisis management entail that the synthesis of traditional and modern concepts of crisis management will better explain the theoretical contours of crisis management.

Keywords: Pulwama Attack, De-escalation, Crisis Management, Nuclear Deterrence, India-Pakistan Rivalry.

Introduction

If India uses force, Pakistan will not think to retaliate but retaliate. It is effortless to start a war, but it is in no one's control when it starts.[1] The onset of a crisis is most likely to occur between parties and states that share hostile relations as adversaries seeking opportunities to take advantage of each other. India and Pakistan have shared hostility and animosity towards each other since independence (1947) and have fought three wars. They have come face to face with many crises, the recent one being in 2019.[2] The crisis is characterized by danger, stress and instability. The word crisis comes from the Greek word 'Kris', meaning 'judgment and decision.'[3] It refers to any interaction between states in a conflict where perception and a high probability of actual war exist. The crisis appears suddenly and tends to threaten

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one's interests and demand quick actions in extreme stress where the situation crosses the critical threshold between war and peace.

A crisis not only disrupts relations between two states but also destabilizes their relation and impacts domestic, regional, and global stability as it might involve other actors. Therefore, identifying common factors that play a role in crisis management is necessary. In addition, the hostile nature of the two neighbours demands a deep understanding of their relationship, and focus is required on how a particular crisis management approach has helped them manage their conflict and avoid war.

Role of Deterrence in Crisis Management

The enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan has been manifold due to the trust deficit, threat perception and non-resolving nature of their disputes. The disputes and conflicts manifested initially in terms of war till 1971 and then crises despite both acquiring nuclear weapons in the late twentieth century. From the Kargil crisis to the recent Pulwama attack, the reluctance on both sides to enter a total war has been attributed to deterrence created by nuclear weapons between the two states. The sudden onset of crisis after the attack in Pulwama and skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) has been managed by two states where the crisis was de-escalated. Crisis management through deterrence predicts that states avoid war when there is the presence of nuclear deterrence between them. Therefore, the present case study of the Pulwama attack will examine the role of deterrence in crisis management.

Paul Gorden Lauren, in his article, explains crisis management theory.[4] As per the author, the sudden nature of crisis demands quick decisions, and there remains a slight difference between war and peace. The question of concern is why some crisis results in war while others are successfully managed. A traditionally descriptive approach was used, and historians only limited themselves to crisis details. Later political scientists tried to explain the nature of crisis and crisis management by looking into systemic variables, the nature of international environment, dyadic relations between two states, arms race between states, and how it impacts the crisis. Some theorists also explain decision-making processes and the role of perception and processes involved in decision-making. In decision-making, some may use a crisis as an opportunity to bargain and take an edge specifying the technique as coercive diplomacy where coercion, i.e., use or threat of use of force, is used.[5] Hence, there is no consensus on which factors contribute to crisis management in various conflicts. Others also view crisis management because

of nuclear diplomacy and personalisation of international diplomacy, as Kissinger did.[6]

Synder explains the varying explanations of crisis management. His article explains three schools of thought that have a varied understanding of crisis management. As per the first school of thought, crisis management is to resolve the confrontation peacefully and prevent war by evading the high risk and dampening the situation. While the second school of thought believes crisis management is an attempt to take advantage of the crisis and avail this opportunity to glorify one position; hence they view crisis management as an act to influence the rival state to be capsulated. Thus, the second school believes crisis management is a zero-sum game where crisis is used to achieve one's interests. Analysing the various factors in Pulwama, many scholars saw the Pulwama attack being highlighted by the Modi government to appease the masses and get maximum support in the next elections. Moreover, blaming Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism, India created the crisis to draw the world's attention. Although Pakistan denied any such claims and India could not prove its point, the attack resulted in a crisis that was just a decision away from war. Therefore, the third school believes crisis management avoids war and gains something from it.

Leslie Lipson explains crisis management as means of solving a crisis without war.[7] Traditionally, crisis managers have time to decide, but with technological advancements, quick decisions and prompt actions are required. Various explanations exist for why a crisis is managed, how it is collected, and who controls it, giving varying reasons for developing the crisis management theory. Deterrence is a preventive measure, but this research entails its significance in crisis management and the other factors involved in managing the crisis towards de-escalation.

Deterrence is to persuade another actor not to perform an action and maintain a status quo using a threat to use force. Nuclear deterrence implies that nuclear weapons are a means of deterrence as they prevent states from initiating war as nuclear war is costly, and there is no win-win situation. The debate about nuclear deterrence started in the cold war era when Bernard Brodie termed nuclear weapons as means of averting war due to the nature of destruction they caused.[8] Scholars like Robert J. Art and Thomas C. Shelling supported Brodie's stance that nuclear weapons have changed how states see war and the concept of victory. Overall, this created a deterrence theory that nuclear weapons presence deters states from going to war. Hence it can be said that it is also a way of managing a crisis. When a crisis erupts between two nuclear states, they avoid confrontation, and even if they confront each other, they de-escalate their situation before heading towards war. When the two

South Asian rivals India and Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons, their territorial disputes manifested in crisis despite nuclear deterrence. Scholars like Michael Crepon gave their stability-instability theory of deterrence.[9] This theory explains that nuclear deterrence can help prevent nuclear war, but peace remains fragile and conventional wars are more likely to occur. This instability can be seen in the Kargil crisis. Hence, the research paper proposes that crisis management needs to entail various variables because, in crisis management, multiple factors play their part, and hence without considering all those factors, i.e., the external environment (relation of states with significant powers, their alliances, geography). The internal environment of both conditions (historical adventures, their perception, leadership and crisis managers, their power capabilities) and crisis management in any crisis cannot be fully understood.

Moreover, the post-crisis stage of the crisis is practical when accompanied by confidence-building measures, as misperception and trust deficit inherent in Pakistan-India relations lead to the eruption of the problem. In the case of the Pulwama attack, deterrence could be explained through the prism of the stability-instability paradox. Crisis management was possible because of any state's threat of nuclear use, which led to the rational decision on both sides to revert from their position.

Pulwama Crisis – A Case Study

Brecher's four-stage crisis model has been used to build the Pulwama crisis case.[10] According to Brecher, there are four stages of the crisis: onset, escalation, de-escalation, and post-crisis stage. Onset is the pre-crisis situation where an event or happening leads to incipient distortion and marks the beginning of the escalation stage where the crisis occurs. After that, there is peak distortion in the relation between the two states. Subsequently, the two parties move to the de-escalation stage, ending the crisis and accommodating each other. The post-crisis stage is also crucial because it determines the impact of the crisis between prominent actors and whether they have developed norms of competition or moved on to cooperation and confidence-building measures to avoid future crises. The research applies the Brecher model to understand how the Pulwama crisis moved from onset to de-escalation and whether it led to any post-crisis interaction between two nuclear rivals, India and Pakistan.

Onset Phase of Crisis

Crisis onset is the pre-crisis phase, where a particular event threatens one party's response and results in incipient distortion. Crisis onset was thoroughly studied during the cold war by many scholars, and they tried to identify system

effects as any international conflict can become a flashpoint for the crisis due to competition or superpower intervention. In recent Pakistan-India history, several potential crisis-making events (such as a terrorist attack on Indian Parliament, the Mumbai incident or the Uri attack) have created tensions between Pakistan and India repeatedly. Still, only a few events escalated to full-fledged military confrontations. According to Pakistan's Foreign Office,[11] India breached the ceasefire 860 times along the LoC in 2017, doubling to 1629 times in 2018 and 3200 times in 2019.[12] An increase in the frequency of ceasefire violations across the LoC indicates the dramatic rise in the tensions between both sides under Modi's government. On February 14, 2019, a young Kashmiri in Pulwama conducted a suicide attack that resulted in forty-four causalities of Indian forces.[13] India accused Jaish-e-Muhammad of the attack, claiming that Pakistan backed this terrorist organization. Previously, India also blamed Pakistan for the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Uri despite all contrary reports.

In contrast, Pakistan always denied India's accusations of backing Jaish-e-Muhammad. The Pulwama attack was the major military standoff that escalated India-Pakistan tensions and brought the situation to the verge of war. Without the support of any evidence or investigation, India blamed Pakistan for this attack. Pakistan rejected Indian allegations by mentioning that India was using the Pulwama attack as an excuse to escalate tensions and to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. The next day of the attack, India removed Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status and imposed two hundred per cent of duties on Pakistani goods.[14] In addition, the Indian government also formally announced their aim to halt the flow of rivers that Pakistan shares.[15]

Escalation Phase of Crisis

Escalation in any crisis refers to the increase in the intensity of a crisis where weapons are employed that are not used in normal times, resulting in an increased frequency of attacks.[16] It is the peak stress stage where there is a change from embryonic to a significant crisis and peak stress, violent means to hurt the adversary. During his election rally, Modi used nuclear diplomacy to threaten Pakistan as he mentioned that they have the mother of atomic weapons and that they would respond to Pakistan. General Manoj also stated that after the Pulwama attack, they reserved the right to attack Pakistan across the LoC. These aggressive statements show the irresponsible nuclear act of Indian military and political leadership that affected stability in South Asia. Pakistan's Former Foreign Minister also revealed Indian plans that India would launch surgical strike-based operations inside Pakistan. Subsequently, Indian warplanes conducted a bombing raid through an airstrike on February 26, 2019, in Balakot against an alleged terrorist training

camp. The satellite source later revealed that Indian claims were baseless and that no such training camps existed.

The surgical strike conducted by the Indian Air Force was an Indian response that escalated the crisis. Pakistan responded by making a surgical strike inside the territory of IIOJK. Pakistan Air Force shot down two Indian jets and captured their Pilot.[17] It was high time that the two states were pressured to respond aggressively. In that war heat, Pakistan called a National Command Authority meeting and discussed the matter to respond to Indian aggression. In this situation, the international community was reluctant to react to India's aggression due to the fear that this escalation could lead to a nuclear war.

De-escalation Phase in Crisis

De-escalation refers to the stage in crisis where the peak distortion ends and states agree and accommodate each other to reach a mutually agreed stalemate. The risks of escalating the crisis in the South Asian region are severe. Escalation could have had a different trajectory if Pakistan had not shown responsible and restrained behaviour in releasing the captured Indian pilot. Retaliation from Pakistan humiliated India and raised questions regarding India's credibility of surgical strikes.

Pakistan successfully re-tested its tactical nuclear 'Nasr', which has a range of sixty to seventy kilometres, on January 31, 2019. At this stage, deterrence had worked out and de-escalated the war. India and the international community understood that if further escalation occurred, Pakistan would have no option but to use its nuclear assets. The US Administration also played a significant role in restraining Pakistan towards restraint by expressing their confidence that India is not interested in further escalating the war by underscoring the need to de-escalating tensions by avoiding further military action.[18] Pakistan sent the captured Indian pilot, which led to the situation de-escalation.

Post-Crisis Phase

The post in a post-crisis situation implies that the differences between rivals have been sufficiently resolved to prevent any re-escalation. In this stage, the impact of the crisis is assessed. In the case of Pakistan and India, no norms of competition have been developed, and relations remained fragile throughout these two years. Although both sides had severe technical and logistical disagreements regarding the Kartarpur corridor, the construction of the Kartarpur corridor was still regarded as a notable and significant confidence-building measure during the historically charged and politically strained relations. Despite searing tensions, the construction of the Kartarpur corridor had left spectators in awe and was seen as a ray of hope.[19] Prime

Minister of Pakistan has repeatedly mentioned that the inauguration of the corridor has the potential to foster religious tourism and increase people-to-people linkage – hence aiding conflict management by opening the dialogue avenues.[20] Other initiatives Pakistan took were the restoration of Buddhist and Hindu sites. Kartarpur could not overall improve relations between both states. They cut off their diplomatic and political ties, halted trade, and no competition norms were developed. Management of crisis de-escalates the situation, but conflicting states must develop competition norms to achieve stable relations.

States must build confidence-building measures to avoid future mistrust and misunderstanding. During the cold war era, the US and USSR established hotlines to communicate misunderstandings to prevent crises. However, the post-Pulwama relations indicate little has been done to avoid misunderstanding. A crisis between any two conflicting states also presents opportunities, but in the case of Pakistan and India, each crisis results in a more negative attitude towards each other. Though Prime Minister Modi got popular support domestically, it created more divisions and differences in the regional sphere. The air strike was a significant upside for Modi and its party in upcoming elections. On the other hand, when Pakistan captured Indian pilot Abhinandan, it enjoyed a domestic, military and political win.[21]

Though the Kashmir issue in 2019 has highlighted the need to take immediate measures to de-escalate future tensions, unfortunately, no progress has been made in this regard. Both sides have shown no sign of flexibility; instead, the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A has just increased tensions.[22] The international community is also considering this issue on the back burner and further exacerbating tensions by considering it a bilateral issue between Pakistan and India. Regarding the people-to-people linkages, it was asserted from the Indian side that the construction and inauguration of the Kartarpur corridor do not mean that bilateral dialogue will begin; instead, it shows that both sides can set the differences aside for the interest of ordinary people.[23] Hence, India has taken opposite phenomena that one finds hard to imagine the remnants of Nehru and Gandhi's India.

Conclusion

The Pulwama crisis case study explains that crisis management played a significant role in managing the crisis, where India initially threatened Pakistan with an attack and Pakistan was also ready to retaliate. Although they came close to war as India crossed the border and infiltrated, and Pakistan also captured its pilot. The pressure of the US on both states, the cost-benefit analysis on the part of leadership,

and especially the threat of nuclear war and its destruction have changed the attitude of policymakers, and a crisis was de-escalated. Pakistan's possession of nuclear technology de-escalated the situation. Pakistan retaliated against India's traditional misadventure that proved a politico-military success.

The enduring historical rivalry between the two states has manifested in wars and crises. Each time the two states tried to negotiate their conflict, an event or happening like the Mumbai attack, the Uri attack, and the Pulwama attack halted any such process. The Pulwama crisis has resulted in the further breaking of relations, and India has used this crisis to propagate against Pakistan. In contrast, Pakistan has denied Indian false claims and termed these accusations as baseless. Pakistan is also retreating and using international platforms to highlight the cruelty Muslims face in India and demands pressure on India to reaffirm itself to the UN resolution on Kashmir, where Kashmiri people will decide their fate. Pakistan also requires India to revert its position on articles 370 and 35A, as Kashmir is still disputed. Though the Kashmir issue in 2019 has highlighted the need to take immediate measures to de-escalate tensions in the future, unfortunately, no progress has been made in this regard. Since the Pulwama crisis, there has been a downgrading of political, diplomatic and economic ties and suspension of trade between the two states and reluctance on both sides to move forward and settle their protracted conflicts on Kashmir and other areas. History reveals that although the crisis has been managed after artillery exchanges between the two states, the inability of the two states to move beyond their short-term objectives provides space for a further crisis in the future.

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