



Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy and Engagement with Global Nuclear Norms: Balancing Deterrence Requirements with International Recognition Efforts

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy has entered an intricate dimension where the state has to maintain a viable deterrence system at the same time showing a conformity to the world in line with nuclear practices. Though the nuclear posture of Pakistan has long been conceived in terms of the unilateral security fields of South Asia, modern strategic forces, such as the contentious trend toward modernization experienced by India or the evolving politics in the superpower field, have caused Islamabad to re-calibrate the way it represents and justifies the nuclear decisions. Although still not a signatory to the NPT, Pakistan has steadily institutionalized its export-control rules, reinforced nuclear security and architecture and promoted a discourse of prudent care. However, there is still the long-standing discrepancy between the way Pakistan views itself as a responsible nuclear power and the selective acknowledgment by the international community of its efforts by the country. This paper explores the way in which Pakistan balances this dualism: on the one hand, by meeting the deterrence criteria based on the regional threat perception, and on the other hand, by operating at the diplomatic level to demand acceptance and possible inclusion of Pakistan in the international nuclear governance institutions like the NSG. The research problem focuses on whether the current diplomatic policies adopted by Pakistan are enough and adequate to transform deeply embedded images of the country in the world and what the structure, politics, and normative restrictions impede the process.

Introduction

South Asian geopolitical strategic calculus in the context of South Asian geopolitics took a decisive turn in the year 1998 when Pakistan procured nuclear weapons and placed the state at the intersection of the deterrence theory and the global order of nuclear governance. The process of nuclearization in Pakistan cannot be advocated and simplified as a technological success or a politically symbolic act, but rather as a carefully planned reaction to the asymmetric profile of security, especially the traditional and nuclear disadvantage before India. Since its emergence, and in keeping with the national security doctrine, the nuclear posture of Pakistan is no longer separable from its overall policy towards security, in which it foresaw its diplomatic, international law complying and cautious stewardship. As a result of this, the twin concerns of maintaining credible deterrence and simultaneously seeking international legitimacy have become characterized as being the .

The constitutive foundation of the modern nuclear order is a constellation of treaties, institutions, and informal regimes meant to control nuclear behavior, to prevent proliferation and to promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology. The most important of them, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and export-control measures exemplified by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) stand out. The concertation of these tools breeds restraint and transparency and compliance principles that support the international constitution of nuclear legitimacy. Not being a member of the NPT, Pakistan is now placed on the margins of this order, in spite of having a long-developed nuclear weaponry and having highly developed command-and-control infrastructure. This is institutional marginalization that always opposes the security interests of Pakistan with normative ideals which it preaches. This tension is further enhanced by the dynamic security environment in South Asia where deterrence stability is shaped by historical animosity, unsettled territorial claims as well as the changing military doctrines. The nuclear deterrence policy in Pakistan has traditionally been geared towards preventing the outbreak of large scale conventional war and counterbalancing conventional superiority of India. Refinements in the doctrines have over the years aimed at filling in what was perceived to be gaps along the spectrum of conflict e.g. the doctrine of full-spectrum deterrence. Even though all these steps are internally positioned as stabilizing policies against external threats, they also carry with them the request of international criticism, requiring long-term diplomatic involvement to place the strategic decisions of Pakistan in a wider framework of deterrence reasons as opposed to the proliferation discourses.

It is against this context that Pakistani nuclear diplomacy has shifted to a more organized project rather than reactive crisis management aimed at creating an impression on the international community and thriving on the international norms. Nuclear diplomacy in this regard includes participation in the international fora, forming the formal as well as the strategic communication, regulatory reforms, voluntary participation in the norms and cooperation within the institutions. Interest in the IAEA, strengthening of nuclear safety and security systems, as well as having Pakistan align itself with international exportation-control standards are all evidence of an attempt to demonstrate responsible nuclear behavior. These efforts are indicative of a conscious effort to balance deterrence needs with the normative demands, despite the lack of treaty membership.

The issue of international recognition takes a central role in the Pakistan diplomacy. In this respect, recognition does not mean a full-fledged acceptance of nuclear weapons, as such, but is based on the premise that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear state that can control its nuclear weapons according to the international standards. Centrally, Pakistan has maintained that the legitimacy in the nuclear order must be based on behavior and compliance and not just on the status of treaties.

This position challenges the dominant normative order of international nuclear governance, where NPT membership has prevailed and very few avenues through which non-NPT states can become institutionalized exist. Nuclear diplomacy therefore, functions within a narrow normative framework with engagements often facing structural constraints in their operations in Pakistan.

The most conspicuous forms of these structural barriers are seen in the discussion of questions relating to access to civilian nuclear cooperation and qualification as an export-regime member. The example of exclusion of Pakistan in the NSG despite adhering to various guidelines of the group can be viewed as a typical illustration of the political aspects of nuclear norms. These exclusions fuel the sense of unfairness in the international nuclear order and cast the ineffectiveness of non-proliferation regimes that divide states according to historical entry points, as opposed to modern practices. In the case of Pakistan, diplomacy has become an inseparable part of its overall nuclear policy in dealing with these asymmetries.

At the same time, nuclear norms in the whole world are on the way to a change as well. Changes in great power politics, technological developments and new discourses about nuclear risk reduction make the normative environment more difficult. Responsible nuclear behavior, strategic restraint and crisis stability are becoming concepts that are being appreciated in addition to the conventional non-proliferation goals. Such changing environment is also portrayed in the diplomatic interaction of Pakistan which tries to adapt to the new normative discourses without losing the main deterrence purpose. To understand this alignment, we have to go beyond the frozen understandings of the nuclear pose by Pakistan towards a more vibrant response of its diplomatic behavior.

The existing scholarly research has focused extensively on the nuclear policy of Pakistan based on the two aspects of deterrence theory and regional security competition. Although this academic literature contributes useful information on the dynamics of doctrinal development and crises, it often does not give much attention to the role of diplomacy and normative interaction. The analysis perspective on deterrence only is prone to depict the foreign behavior of Pakistan as a reaction, thus neglecting the proactive aspects of its interaction in the international institutions and norm-setting procedures. This gap limits the ability of the field to realize the totality of the Pakistani approach to the nuclear strategy, especially its efforts to project the legitimacy in an exclusionary world system.

This study attempts to fill that void by preempting nuclear diplomacy as one of the key areas of analysis. The study seeks to combine both the aspects of strategy and diplomacy which are usually considered separately by examining the way that Pakistan interacts with the world nuclear principles keeping a credible deterrent offer. The focus of diplomacy does not lessen the deterrence; it just creates deterrence as a subset of a more extensive context of international relations, perception, and normative negotiation. This allows a more detailed insight into the manner in which the attempts of nuclear-armed states to form the rules and practices of international governance are realized by the states not members of the NPT.

This method allows a systematic analysis of the discourse and institutional behavior of the Pakistani diplomacy throughout history. Through the domestic and international sources, the study follows the rhetoric of a statement of Pakistani nuclear identity and its response in the international associations.

Lastly, the research attempts to shed light on the interaction between nuclear rhetoric and the world reception of Pakistan by questioning the documents of the domestic policy and international submissions. In that regard, it points out how Pakistan bargains its interests of strategy in the normative frameworks that constitute nuclear order in the modern world.

Literature Review

The existing scholarly literature on the nuclear path of Pakistan has been characterized by the deterrence-based explanation of the nuclear actions of Islamabad as necessarily fitting into the bigger picture of the South Asian strategic competition. According to early and recent research, the development of nuclear weapons by Pakistan was mainly driven by security needs that were occasioned by the conventional advantage of the Indian factor and the ever increasing nuclear interests. These publications predict the stability of deterrence, dynamics of escalation, and crisis behavior, which show the nuclear posture of Pakistan as a rational reaction to structural insecurity and not an ideologically motivated proliferation agenda (Sagan and Waltz, 2003; Ganguly and Kapur, 2010).

Based on this, later studies have developed the deterrence analysis by analyzing the developments of doctrine in depth and operational postures. As Narang and others argue, the transition to the full-spectrum deterrence in Pakistan is the adaptive policy aimed at preventing conventional and sub-conventional threats. This literature highlights the purpose of doctrinal changes to bridging the perceived gaps in deterrence without disrupting the strategic stability. Nevertheless, such works often ignore diplomacy by being analytically strong and putting much emphasis on military signaling instead of international interaction (Narang, 2014).

Similar to the deterrence-oriented scholarship, another literature line is questioning nuclear diplomacy as a channel of international perception and acquisition of strategic legitimacy. This literature conceptualizes nuclear diplomacy to include arms-control dialogue, confidence-building, membership in multilateral institutions and strategic communication. Just as scholars argue that the use of diplomacy by nuclear-armed states does not just serve as a means of prevention but also building of narratives of responsibility and restraint. However, a bigger part of this literature is pegged on the known nuclear-weapon states, thus limiting its relevance to the experience of Pakistan (Potter and Mukhatzhanova, 2012).

Particularly literature concerned with Pakistan nuclear diplomacy is relatively small. The available literature recognizes the international forums that Pakistan has been involved in like the IAEA and the effort that it has tried to build export-control regimes and nuclear safety architecture. Based on these analyses, it can be argued that Islamabad has been placing more emphasis on regulatory compliance and institutional transparency to avoid the perception of irresponsibility. However, these conversations are more of a description than an analysis and have minimal assessment on the interplay of these diplomatic activities with the needs of deterrence (Khan, 2019).

Large part of the literature is focused on international nuclear norms and the institutional underpinnings of international nuclear norms. Scholars analyzing the NPT-based nuclear order believe that world nuclear governance is found to be hierarchical, which favours membership within the treaty and outsiders. This literature highlights the unequal application of norms of non-proliferation, restraint and transparency which, in many cases, is a geopolitical power and not international adherence. With such a structure, non-NPT states like Pakistan find the structure imposing inherent limitations to legitimacy and recognition (Tannenwald, 2007).

The exclusionary characteristic of export-control regimes including the NSG is criticized by further scholarship. Analysts believe that membership criteria are politically motivated as opposed to being based on behavior thus corroding the normative credibility of such institutions. Research observes that adherence to some of the NSG requirements in Pakistan has not been converted to any institutional inclusion, which further confirms the understanding of normative discrimination. This body of literature provides a fundamental guideline on the comprehension of diplomatic

grievances of Pakistan, but often lacks the ability to study the strategies of response of Islamabad (Tellis, 2017).

The concept of responsible nuclear behavior has recently entered into research as an emerging norm in the global nuclear governance. According to scholars, responsibility is coming to be characterized by practices of strong command-and-control systems, nuclear safety systems, and compliance with international conventions instead of status as a treaty. This change opens up theoretical room to allow non-NPT states to enjoy normative legitimacy, but the scope to this transferring into recognition is debated (Acton, 2022).

In this new emerging discourse, the nuclear safety and security in Pakistan has come under increased scholarly attention. Responsible stewardship is characterized by the institutionalization of regulating institutions, legislative changes, and collaboration with international organizations as noted in studies. These sources contradict previous discourses that pit Pakistan as a proliferation threat, implying a more complex and dynamic nuclear governance picture. Nevertheless, they pay little to no systemic attention to how these developments are tied to the overall diplomatic strategy of Pakistan (Kerr and Nikitin, 2023).

The other literature which is applicable is that of strategic communication and signaling in nuclear diplomacy. According to scholars, the way states define their nuclear posture, through official pronouncements, white papers and diplomatic interactions, forms perceptions at the international level in no less important than material capabilities. In the context of Pakistan, there has been a little focus on the way Pakistan diplomatic discourses are trying to reconcile the normative expectations with the deterrence doctrine. This is one of the gaps in the current research (Jervis, 2017).

There are further studies on comparative studies on non-NPT nuclear states which are underdeveloped. The studies of India, Israel and Pakistan tend to distinguish the cases and overlook the possibility of comparative analysis of the legitimacy-seeking behavior. Although the experience in India has been well-researched, due to its agreement on civil nuclear cooperation and its waiver of the NSG, the diplomatic course of Pakistan has not been consistently investigated, which creates disproportion in the literature (Krepon, 2020).

More recent works recognize that international nuclear norms are not fixed but that they undergo change due to technological change, the geopolitical rivalry and even the debate on risk reduction. Scholars believe that the development of norms presents limitations and possibilities to other states such as Pakistan who can capitalize on the new discourses to drive the claim of responsibility and inclusion. However, there are limited empirical studies that can be found to have connected norm evolution with the diaspora politics of Pakistan (SIPRI, 2024).

The study contributes to the current body of literature but outdoes it by conducting a detailed examination of the manner in which Pakistan balances the aspect of deterrence needs with the aspect of participating in the international nuclear norms. The study utilizes the knowledge of the deterrence theory, the norm scholarship, and the nuclear diplomacy literature to provide a more holistic explanation of nuclear behavior in Pakistan and its pursuit of international recognition in a changing nuclear regime across the world (Acharya, 2018).

Literature Gap

Although there is a significant scholarly literature on nuclear deterrence in Pakistan and on the growing literature on nuclear norms in the world, one can sense an analytical gap in terms of analyzing the role of nuclear diplomacy as an intermediary between the need to deterrence and

demand of international identity to non-NPT states. Existing literature has the propensity to separate the deterrence doctrine, normative compliance, and diplomatic engagement into separate domains, thus giving rise to fragmented analyses that fail in producing a comprehensive understanding of reciprocity interactions of these venues. Besides, the language of the day often stresses institutional exclusion and normative bias in the international nuclear order and does not focus on systematic investigation of how Pakistan is using diplomatic signaling, regulatory reforms, and international engagement, to negotiate legitimacy. Consequently, there is very little empirical research on the integration of the deterrence posture of Pakistan and its diplomatic policy and norm-based approaches in a single analytical theory. This paper has attempted to fill that gap with a unified analysis of nuclear diplomacy in Pakistan as one of the strategic tools to balance the security requirements against the normative involvement in a developing global nuclear environment (Acharya, 2018).

Objectives of Study

1. To examine the role of nuclear diplomacy in Pakistan's efforts to balance deterrence requirements with engagement in global nuclear norms.
2. To analyze how Pakistan's nuclear deterrence posture influences its diplomatic strategies and interactions with international nuclear governance institutions.
3. To assess the extent to which Pakistan's regulatory reforms and institutional engagement contribute to its pursuit of international recognition as a responsible nuclear state.
4. To evaluate the structural and normative constraints that limit Pakistan's integration into the global nuclear order despite its normative engagement.

Research Questions

1. How has Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy evolved to balance its deterrence requirements with engagement in global nuclear norms and non-proliferation regimes?
2. What constraints and opportunities shape Pakistan's efforts for international recognition as a responsible nuclear state outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework?
3. To what extent has Pakistan's participation in global nuclear governance initiatives contributed to its strategic legitimacy without undermining its core deterrence posture?

Significance of the Study

This study is important in that it questions an important gap in the literature that survives on - namely how the state balances deterrence needs with the necessary participation in the global nuclear norms regime. In the existent global context, where non- NPT states are marginalized, a subtle interpretation of Pakistan diplomatic signaling, institutional change, and attempts to depict responsible behavior is critical in examining the development of its strategic identity.

- The current research provides the key information on how Pakistan uses the nuclear diplomacy to influence and re-brand the international perception thus explaining the delicate relationship between deterrence programs and normative engagement policies.
- It questions the effects of the reconnaissance of the diplomatic efforts by Pakistan, and shows how these efforts moderate the response of the regional enemies, as well as participants in global nuclear regulation.

- The study also explores the dilemmas facing the non-NPT states in the quest to gain legitimacy providing a solid framework of analysis to understand the inherent structural impediments that infuse the nuclear politics in the modern world.
- The study provides a substantive addition to the overall academic debate that aims to reconcile security demands with responsible state behavior thus providing practical learning responses to upcoming nuclear states of the world.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is more rooted on the neoclassical theory of deterrence which explains the behavior of nuclear actors in terms of structural constraints and domestic state interpretations of deterrence. In contrast to the classical theory of deterrence, which revisits only material competencies, as neoclassical theories, strategic culture, the perception of leadership, and external diplomatic pressures are taken into the equations of deterrence. This framework is especially relevant when applied to the situation in Pakistan, since, in addition to reacting to the military potential of India, nuclear deterrence has been adjusted to meet the growing regional and global demands of moderation and responsibility. Therefore, deterrence cannot be perceived outside the context of diplomatic signaling and normative interaction, which makes neoclassical deterrence theory an appropriate basis of the current research (Narang, 2014).

Developing the deterrence theory, the work integrates the nuclear norms theory in the study of the influence of international expectations on the behavior of states beyond the material power factor. Nuclear norms theory emphasizes how collective ideas, legitimacy and acceptable behavior can be used to organize the nuclear order in the world. Researchers have argued that the international norms like non-proliferation, restraint, and responsible stewardship affect the state policy justifications and communication in nuclear policies. In the case of Pakistan, interacting with international nuclear norms although not a member of the NPT is an attempt to align its behavior with the emerging normative standards to boost the credibility and acceptance. It is a theoretical prism through which the study evaluates the interaction of the normative pressures with the deterrence imperatives instead of replacing them (Tannenwald, 2007).

As a way of bridging deterrence and norms, the framework also relies on the role theory which entails how states generate and project identities in the international system. According to role theory, states wish to be recognized and hence they play some roles, which are socially approved by the international system. In that respect, the can be viewed as an effort to establish the image of a responsible nuclear state by means of regulatory changes, institutional collaboration, and diplomatic interactions. This view is quite handy in analyzing the disparity between the self-perceived place of Pakistan and the insignificant recognition that it gets in the global nuclear governance frameworks. Role theory is therefore analytically advantageous in making sense of legitimacy-seeking behavior in the conditions of structural exclusion (Harnisch, 2011).

Combining these strategies, the conceptualization of nuclear diplomacy as an intervening variable in the mediation of the demands of deterrence and the approach to international nuclear norms is conceived through the theoretical framework. Deterrence theory then explains the reason Pakistan continues with its nuclear posture, norm theory explains the expectation that it is faced with, and role theory would explain the use of diplomacy to make the two meet. This unified concept can be used to systematically examine the process of Pakistan bargaining over the security needs as it seeks international acknowledgement in a changing nuclear order. The combination of material, normative, and identity-based explanations enabled the research to escape the limitations of using single theories and provided a complete overview (Acharya, 2018).

Pakistan's Nuclear Deterrence Framework

The nuclear deterrence system in Pakistan has been developed based on the chronic structural insecurity in the South Asian region, which has been influenced mainly by asymmetries of conventional military strength and lack of sustainable conflict-resolution systems. Ever since developing nuclear capability in 1998, Pakistan has also framed its deterrence stance as a stabilizing mechanism to ward off mass warfare as opposed to permitting warfighting. The rationale behind this framework is that nuclear weapons neutralize the conventional disfavours and employ the expenses of escalation thus deterring adversarial coercion. The modern literature underlines the fact that the deterrence policy of Pakistan is dynamic and not linear and has to adjust to shifts in the regional and global security context (Siddiqi & Shahid, 2020).

Pakistan Nuclear Doctrine Development

The development of the Pakistani nuclear doctrine shows slow but steady transformation of the seemingly vague initial position to the more explicit and stratified deterrence policy. Pakistan has focused on credible minimum deterrence in the early post-1998 period, a doctrine that is based on the idea of having a survivable nuclear capability adequate to stop existential threat without any numerical or qualitative arms competition. This ideological stage emphasized moderation, secrecy, and strategic equilibrium to match the goals of deterrence with the shortage of resources and the international attention. According to the scholars, this strategy aimed at assuring the local and foreign public that Pakistan was on defensive nuclear orientation (Shafi & Taj, 2023).

However, with time, the military doctrine and the modernization of the Indian forces led to the recalibration of the doctrine. The expression of the limited war ideas and the development of conventional precision weapons in India caused some concerns in Pakistan with regard to the deterrence stability under the nuclear threshold. As a reply, Pakistan slowly shifted to full spectrum deterrence which aimed to deter threats throughout the whole spectrum of conflict, including sub-conventional situations, as well as limited conventional situations. This changes of doctrine did not represent the rejection of restraint but the extension of the deterrence coverage to cover the perceived gaps in escalation (Saqib & Ali, 2023).

Recent literature has made it clear that full-spectrum deterrence must be seen as an adaptive response and not an intrinsically escalatory display. Analysts claim that the change in doctrines of the Pakistani Army has been a learning process influenced by crisis in the region, technological transformation as well as lack of signaling. Instead of reducing the nuclear threshold blindly, the doctrine seeks to strengthen deterrence credibility by making calculations of adversaries' complex at various levels of conflict. This analysis questions the previous discussion that defined the evolution of Pakistan doctrines as destabilizing but places it in the wider context of deterrence theory (Amin, 2024).

Deterrence posture is based on strategic thinking

The strategic justification of the nuclear deterrence stance of Pakistan is based on ensuring the compensation of conventional asymmetry and maintaining strategic autonomy. The leadership of Pakistan has always demonstrated nuclear deterrence as a way of guaranteeing national survival and avoiding coercive diplomacy by stronger hostile forces. The historical experiences of conflict support this argument as it has influenced the feelings of vulnerability and threat by elites. In this meaning, deterrence is more of a security equalizer and not an aggression instrument (Khan, Ahmed, & Nisar, 2025).

In addition to material factors, the signaling needs targeted at the regional adversaries and the international community also shape the deterrence posture in Pakistan. A deterrence credibility policy involves ability and communication and this is the reason why Pakistan stressed on doctrinal articulation and controlled signaling. Meanwhile, Islamabad does not want to send signals that might be construed as irresponsible or provocative due to the diplomatic expenses of having an undesirable international image. The duplicity of signaling this issue puts deterrence between the niche of military strategy and nuclear diplomacy (Khan, Saeedullah, and Rahman, 2025).

The recent analyses point out that deterrence rationale by Pakistan is starting to move towards the consideration of risk management and control of escalation. As opposed to these automatic vulnerability, mutual vulnerability enabling automatic stability, the policymakers realize the necessity to deal with misperceptions and instability of crisis. This appreciation has instructed the Pakistani support of confidence-building, hotlines, as well as plans of strategic restraint regimes, despite any political challenges. Deterrence therefore works in association to diplomatic work employed to strengthen predictability and minimize accidental escalation (Hanif & Muzaffar, 2024).

Evolution of Pakistan's Nuclear Diplomacy

The nuclear diplomacy of Pakistan has developed as a two-track approach that maintains the credible minimum deterrence and at the same time, engages the world nuclear norms responsibly. Since 1998, when Pakistan nuclear-tested, the country has continued to position its nuclear policy as security-oriented and region-focused with its core on the strategic imbalance with India, as opposed to revisionist interests in the international stage. This framing enables Pakistan to counteract deterrence as well as demonstrate restraint by its centralized command and control, civilian control through the National Command Authority, and declaration of commitment to nuclear safety and security standards, making deterrent consistent with normative responsibility (Khan, 2012).

In the long run, the diplomatic activity of Pakistan has changed with defensive norm rejection to selective norm internalization. However, though Pakistan has not ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it has actively engaged in international nuclear security activities, harmonization of export control and the confidence-building processes. This is an indication of the realization that the legitimacy in the modern nuclear order is not only based on treaty membership but also behavior, practice of compliance, and institutional maturity. As a result, the Pakistan nuclear diplomacy is an expedient response to the multipolar nuclear environment where reputational credibility supplements material deterrence (Kapur, 2015).

Notably, the diplomatic history of Pakistan highlights the inter-connectedness of deterrence and regional peace in South Asia. Islamabad is continuously claiming that strategic restraint is inseparable with the perception of regional threats, especially the modernization of the Indian force, the desire to have missile defense, as well as the changing counterforce doctrine. The connection of its nuclear posture with such dynamics places the diplomatic strategy of Pakistan in a realist context and avoids a direct clash of its policy with the nonproliferation standards in the world community, thus ensuring a level of consistency between the need to maintain the deterrence and its international interaction (Narang, 2014).

Constraints and Opportunities in Pakistan's Quest for Recognition beyond the NPT Framework

Structural barriers of the world nonproliferation setup are limiting the efforts by Pakistan to gain international acceptance of its status as a responsibly nuclear-armed country. The exclusionary framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the preferential treatment to India through such mechanisms as the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver have created an unequal normative structure in the South Asian region. This imbalance limits the civilian nuclear trade of Pakistan and enhances the development of discrimination that restricts the maneuver of Islamabad in diplomacy despite its relatively equally strong nuclear qualification (Tellis, 2017).

However, Pakistan has sought other sources of legitimacy through strengthening its home regulatory systems, and aligning its export-control regime with the internationally recognized standards. The establishment of the Strategic Export Control Division and the following compliance with the guidelines in balance with the Missile Technology Control Regime and the NSG guidelines are some of the examples of the effort of Pakistan to integrate itself functionally, though not formally, into the global nuclear governance construct. The measures are signaling instruments that are aimed at bridging the legitimacy gap without interfering with the autonomy of deterrence (Fitzpatrick, 2020).

At the same time, the realities of the multipolar nuclear order influence the recognition endeavors in Pakistan. With the diffusion of global power undermining the authority of one normative center, space is created on which non-NPT nuclear states can exercise conditional legitimacy based on behavioral norms, and not treaty status. Multipolarity as a diplomatic opportunity, but not a constraint, is exploited by the fact that Pakistan is involved with China, it has attended the international nuclear-security summits and it has focused on the safety culture. However, such a course of action is still conditional on keeping deterrence credibility against India and, therefore, enhance the ongoing conflict between strategic imperative and normative ambition (Pant and Joshi, 2019).

Strategic Legitimacy through Selective Participation in Global Nuclear Governance without Diluting Deterrence

The case of Pakistan in global nuclear governance is a case of stratified participation strategy so as to strengthen the strategic legitimacy without interfering with deterrence efficacy. Instead of seeking wholesale assimilation into the existing regimes, Pakistan enjoys the benefits of issue-specific cooperation in areas like nuclear security, emergency preparedness, and material security. This partial participation allows Islamabad to convey responsible guardianship, saving the doctrinal adaptability that is required to maintain regional deterrence stability (Sagan, 2021).

This manipulation presupposes a certain topicality in the South Asian context, where deterrence balance is fragile and subject to crises per se. By avoiding arms-control negotiations that have the potential to entrench asymmetries supported by the conventional superiority of India or high-technological capacity, the Pakistan diplomatic stance serves as a force to reinforce risk-reduction policies, dialogue processes, and declaratory restraint as a method of deterring escalation without committing itself to formal disarmament. This kind of perception can be seen as an indication of a growing recognition that legitimacy in a multipolar system is increasingly becoming dependent on performance as opposed to compliance with codified rules (Kroenig, 2020).

Overall, the throws light on a larger transformation in the global nuclear politics, which is based on a negotiated balance between deterrence and normative systems. Pakistan wants to be recognized not on its concessions but on its consistency by placing itself as a wise, security-minded nuclear

player in an unstable regional environment. It can be noted here that in the multipolar nuclear order, the strategic legitimacy is slowly established by plausible deterrence, institutional responsibility and limited engagement as opposed to unconditional compliance with normative imperatives (Waltz, 2012).

Regional Security Dynamics

The nuclear deterrence system in Pakistan has been determined by regional security dynamics. The South Asian security environment is typified by the lack of settlement of territorial issues, historical mistrust and the development of military doctrines that all form the basis of their continuing instability. The growing conventional potential, missile defence program, and strategic alliances with the great powers have contributed to building up the sense of strategic imbalance in the minds of the Pakistani. They are directly reflected in the calculations of deterrence in Pakistan and their doctrine (SIPRI, 2024).

Even the period of deterrence behavior is further supported by the role of regional processes in the post-nuclearization period, and it is accentuated by a crisis episode. The critical reviews of crises that have taken place since the major terrorist attacks and the border crises have all shown that nuclear deterrence has also limited escalation besides enhancing the significance of diplomatic crisis management. Through these episodes, the authors demonstrate that the deterrence stability of South Asia does not rest on capabilities only but also on communication channels, the clarity of signaling, and perception by third parties (Shafi & Taj, 2023).

The more recent literature indicates the increasing effect of extra-regional factors on South Asian deterrence dynamics. The overall environment in which Pakistan is developing its strategy of deterrence has changed due to strategic competition between key powers, changes in arms control standards, technological dissemination, etc. These are external factors that push the calculation of deterrence by adding more variables to the bilateral India-Pakistan dyad. As a result, the deterrence system in Pakistan is becoming more indicative of the consciousness of world normative demands and regional security concerns (Saqib & Ali, 2023).

Overall, the development of nuclear deterrence in Pakistan is a changing strategy to address the threats of insecurity in the region, the issue of doctrine, and the dynamic nature of the international arena. The development of its doctrine, its strategic explanation and its responsiveness to the regional dynamics highlight the ambiguity of its ability to continue holding deterrence credibility and yet prevent escalation and diplomatic isolation. This framework is critical to the analysis of the way in which deterrence and nuclear diplomacy are combined in the context of Pakistan, which is especially important when considering its interaction with international nuclear conventions and the desire to gain international respect (Amin, 2024).

Global Nuclear Norms and Governance

Global nuclear governance may be termed in terms of an institutional framework, which comprises formal agreements, institutional processes, and informal normative frameworks that combine to form the collective expectations of nuclear-armed nations. The principles of this architecture are the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, (NPT), which stipulates the legal framework needed to curb the use of nuclear weapons, outlines verification protocols and encourages peaceful applications of nuclear energy. These conditions can only be successfully implemented through technical involvement assisted by the supportive bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the export-control regimes especially the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The academic literature confirms the existence of these standards to reduce the risk of proliferation, increase

transparency, and strengthen strategic stability, which was confirmed by the latest findings (Khan, Ahmed, and Nisar, 2025).

Although it is important in practical terms, the international normative order exhibits structural biases implicitly. When states become members of the NPT, they gain some form of legitimacy, the non-member states are deprived of the forum of important governance and other cooperative provisions. Such asymmetries are also supported by the geopolitical nature of decision making in such institutions as the NSG and the IAEA.

This institutional design, according to analytical discourse, gives rise to a sense of normative superiority whereby compliance is selectively sustained, hence causing the burden to fall upon the non-members of the treaty who could have viable nuclear stockpiles in particular, Pakistan being a relevant example (Siddiquei and Shahid, 2020). Moreover, there is a growing body of literature that foretells the growing role of norms that govern behavior in the realms of nuclear governance. Introduced ideas like responsible nuclear stewardship and strategic restraint have become part of the international requirements to go hand in hand with treaty requirements. These standards are focused on safe command-and-control systems, safe storage, mitigation of risks and compliance with global safety conventions. According to scholars, adherence to such norms is allowing non-NPT nuclear states to interact with the global nuclear order despite official exclusion clauses, and therefore creates avenues to normative legitimacy (Shafi & Taj, 2023).

The emerging changes in nuclear governance in the world also highlight the role of changing technological as well as geopolitical conditions. The use of missile-defenses, sophisticated delivery, and the use of cyber capabilities have necessitated the revising of the normative discourse to include the crisis management, prevention of accidents, and control of escalation. It has been proposed that these developments influence the policy-making process of nuclear-armed countries such as Pakistan as well as their approach to international diplomacy by broadening the spectrum of actions that are considered responsible and legitimate (Saqib & Ali, 2023).

The involvement of Pakistan in the international nuclear standards

Pakistan involvement in international nuclear standards is an issue that is evidenced by the constant struggle to harmonize its deterrence stance with the international standards of responsible conduct. Although Pakistan is not part of the NPT, it has attempted to comply with the norms by reforming its institutions, improving regulations and cooperating with international organizations. An example is that the country has enhanced its nuclear control mechanisms, has enforced stringent safety measures, and has undergone IAEA peer reviews, hence a pointer towards the acceptance of internationally- recognized safety and security measures (Khan, Saedullah, & Rahman, 2025).

Besides, Pakistan has also made efforts to be in line with multilateral export-control provisions even though there are structural impediments to official accession. Adherence to NSG-related safety and security standards, the adoption of extensive export licensing procedures, and the introduction of strict security measures internal controls are some examples of how Islamabad is dedicated to non-proliferation and the responsible management of nuclear materials. Researchers argue that the actions are proactive diplomatic signaling in a quest to win international goodwill and maintain strategic independence (Khalid Mahmood Shafi and Taj, 2023).

In addition to technical compliance, Pakistan has strategic diplomatic involvement to convey its responsible nuclear identity. The top-level talks, the involvement in the international forums, and the general publicity of the nuclear policy documents will also help strengthen the image of a responsible nuclear state of Pakistan. This diplomatic action adds to structural approaches as it

influences the global discourse of actions, intent of deterrence, as well as strengthening the positive role of Pakistan in nuclear security in the region and the entire world (Amin, 2024).

The role of including the involvement of Pakistan with the global norms in a larger normative and strategic context is also emphasized by the recent scholarship. Analysts note that normative integration is not only possible through compliance but also on consistent signaling, transparency and responsiveness to international issues. The example of Pakistan shows that normative recognition is an issue of proactive diplomacy and institutional behavior as it is one of material capability (Hanif and Muzaffar, 2024).

Nuclear Diplomacy and International Recognition

This is a critical point of conduction whereby, the country aims at attaining international recognition as a responsible nuclear state. Although it is not signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a multidimensional approach balancing institutional compliance, proactive communication and normative signaling has been engineered by Islamabad. The scholars emphasize that the nuclear policy of Pakistan does not end with the treaty talks; it covers the regulatory reforms, bilateral and multilateral conversations, and the active inclusion of Pakistan in the technical and policy discussion that would express transparency and responsibility (Khan, Saeedullah, and Rahman, 2025).

An essential constituent of the diplomatic calculus in Pakistan is institutional reforms. The strengthening of the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority (PNRA), the compliance with the safety standards of the IAEA and the introduction of serious export-control regimes serve as the practical evidence of responsible nuclear stewardship. Such actions placed the state at the intersection increase the credibility of Pakistan and strengthen the normative claim that recognition must follow observed behavior and not formal NPT membership. Researchers argue that this type of institutional involvement represents an active attempt to influence the perception of the international community and, thus, fill the gap between structural exclusion and the need to seem legitimate (Shafi & Taj, 2023).

The second pillar of this is strategic communication. Through statement of policy, attending international conferences and passing of official statements that emphasize the credibility of restraint, deterrence, Pakistan tries to portray itself as a responsible and predictable nuclear player. It has been observed that the key aspect of nuclear diplomacy is consistency in signaling, as well as clarity in doctrine, which is critical to reducing misperceptions and strengthening international trust (Amin, 2024).

is also supported by bilateral and multilateral involvement. Collaboration with the regional partners, the involvement into the IAEA peer reviews and the contributions to the discussions on nuclear safety and security allow Pakistan to maintain the dialogue with the key stakeholders and indirectly influence the creation of the normative frameworks. It is observed by scholars that such engagements reflect the readiness of Pakistan to be able to operate within internationally accepted norms notwithstanding formal structural restraints and that the connection between deterrence credibility and normative recognition is intertwined (Khan, Ahmed, and Nisar, 2025).

Conflict between Normative Engagement and Deterrence

Although Pakistan is actively involved in the process of interacting with the international nuclear norms, there is an underlying conflict between the need to have a credible deterrent and the need to seek normative acceptance. Deterrence requires obscurity, war preparedness, and plausible retaliatory power, whereas normative interaction includes openness, restraint and predictability.

According to scholars, balancing such demands is one of the main tasks of non-NPT nuclear states, such as Pakistan; being too open may undermine the credibility of deterrence, and being too inactive may reinforce the idea of recklessness (Saqib and Ali, 2023).

This stress can be seen in the way Pakistan takes its strategic decision in the area of doctrinal communication. Although full-spectrum deterrence includes the requirement of signaling ability throughout the spectrum of conflict, diplomatic necessity demands that such signaling be tuned so as to prevent misunderstanding or uproar. Analysts also posit that the nuclear posture and the diplomatic activism in Pakistan are therefore mutually constitutive: the security base is constituted by deterrence, and international legitimacy and norm-conforming acceptance are guaranteed by diplomacy (Khalid Mahmood Shafi and Taj, 2023).

This tension is exacerbated by regional security forces. Escalatory pressures induced by the conventional and nuclear modernization of programmes in India force Pakistan to maintain a strong deterrent. Being at the same time, the international scrutiny and structural exclusion by the normative institutions require restraining and obeying. This two-fold requirement is the reason that the Pakistani way of nuclear signalling, force posture, and transparency in regulations is an ongoing compromise between the imperative of security and the imperatives of normativity (Hanif and Muzaffar, 2024).

The recent literature emphasizes the idea that to handle this tension, there should be a balanced approach that is not only straightforward in terms of doctrine but also institutional changes, and diplomatic gestures. The case of Pakistan shows that credible deterrence and normative engagement do not exclude each other but require careful coordination. Pakistan aims to curb the risks of structural exclusion by balancing operational doctrine and responsible nuclear practices as well as transparent communication to ensure that it maintains a strategic stability (Khan, Saeedullah, and Rahman, 2025).

Conclusion

This paper shows that the nuclear policy of Pakistan is the dynamic combination of the requirements of deterrence and normative involvement, aimed at achieving the national security and international legitimacy. The shift to full-spectrum deterrence out of credible minimum deterrence indicates an adaptive mechanism that Pakistan has put forces to deal with the aspects of national security and the changing of technology to ensure that the nuclear posture of the country will be credible in the forecast of different threat levels. Simultaneously, the active involvement of Pakistan in the international nuclear standards in the form of regulatory changes, safety standards, and diplomatic signaling indicate that the country is ready to behave responsibly in the nuclear context, regardless of structural marginalization of the institutional schemes. The analysis also highlights that nuclear diplomacy is an important tool that can be used to resolve the dilemma of ensuring operational deterrence and pursuing normative recognition. By alignment of the doctrinal clarity, open institutional practices and strategic communications, Pakistan is able to sustain deterrence credibility whilst giving an image of responsible international conduct. Comparative views also show that the legitimacy in the form of behavior and proactive involvement can to some extent offset the structural restrictions in the international nuclear system.

Recommendations

Combine Deterrence Policy and Diplomatic Signaling

Diplomatic outreach must be closely linked to deterrence strategies to prevent any discrepancy between the operational preparedness and display of responsibility. Misperceptions can be reduced

by clear statements of nuclear doctrine, moderate publicity, enduring consultation with regional and international partners, and promote crisis stability and normative credibility of Pakistan.

Active Preferential Treatment of Multilateral Nuclear Forums

Pakistan must increase its involvement in the global fora, technical review missions and non-binding measures related to nuclear safety, security and risk reduction. This active participation will provide the country with a chance to influence the development of norms, become a more responsible actor, and create communication channels despite being formally excluded in the treaties like the NPT.

Encourage Confidence Building Solutions in South Asia

As an add in its nuclear diplomacy, Pakistan should consider regional confidence-building strategies, such as hot lines, data exchange and transparency mechanisms with India and other regional participants. Such tools are capable of controlling the threats of escalation, fostering an understanding of each other, and strengthening the validity of both deterrence and normative interaction.

Develop Research and Strategic Analysis

An unending research agenda of the changing nuclear norms, technological trends, and regional security trends has to be institutionalized in the think-tanks, military academies, and policy-planning units. The use of evidence-based analysis will help Pakistan foresee the demands of the world, pursue its nuclear diplomacy at an early stage, and develop the policies that would logically combine the deterrence and the normative compliance.

Advantage of Behavior-Based Legitimacy to gain International Recognition

As the basis of seeking international recognition of Pakistan should look ahead to its adherence to responsible nuclear behavior, in terms of strong command-and-control security, accident-prevention measures, and export-control measures. Through encouraging behavior legitimate, the nation can bargain incorporation and credibility without having to be an official participant in the NPT membership.

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