

## INDIA'S NUCLEAR OPTIONS AND ESCALATION DOMINANCE

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Since the early 2000s, Indian strategists have wrestled with the challenge of motivating Pakistan to demobilize anti-India terrorist groups while managing the potential for conflict escalation during a crisis. The growing prominence of nuclear weapons in Pakistan's national security strategy casts a shadow of nuclear use over any potential military strategy India might consider to strike this balance. However, augmenting its nuclear options with tactical nuclear weapons is unlikely to bolster Indian deterrence in convincing ways.

### Deterrence and Escalation in South Asia

- India continues to develop offensive conventional military options to respond to future terrorist attacks emanating from Pakistan, but these options do not mesh well with India's restrained nuclear doctrine and arsenal.
- Pakistan's adoption of tactical nuclear weapons lowers the threshold for nuclear use, further complicating India's conventional and nuclear options to deter and, if conflict cannot be avoided, defeat its neighbor.
- Some Indian and American strategists advocate India's development of tactical nuclear weapons to counter Pakistan's. This could give India sufficient perceived advantage in an escalating conflict to motivate Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism.
- The prospect of employing limited nuclear options raises unresolvable questions about whether nuclear war can be limited and about India's capabilities to acquire and manage forces to prosecute limited nuclear war.

### Implications for Indian Strategy

**India's existing and projected nuclear capabilities are sufficient to deter Pakistan from starting a conventional war.** The risk of war arises primarily from terrorism emanating from Pakistan. If India does not intend to put military boots on Pakistani soil in response to a terrorist attack, which could trigger Pakistani nuclear use, then India has no need for tactical nuclear weapons.

**India's current nuclear capabilities do not give it credible options for limited use.** India would need significant investments in military hardware, software, and an array of enabling capabilities to make employment of limited nuclear options feasible and credible.

**Indian tactical nuclear weapons are unlikely to motivate Pakistan to demobilize groups that attack India.** There is little basis for confidence that additional nuclear capability can resolve this challenge.

**Indian tactical nuclear weapons may increase the likelihood that a future conflict on Pakistani territory will go nuclear.** Use-or-lose pressures on Pakistani military commanders would grow if India acquired these weapons, making unintended escalation likelier.

**If India opts to develop limited nuclear options, policymakers should refrain from announcing a capability before it exists.** There is a tendency in India to announce or publicly discuss operational concepts or weapons systems before they exist. Doing so would prompt Pakistan to develop new countermeasures.

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