

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY POSTURE IN ASIA-PACIFIC AND ENHANCED SECURITY DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that United States is adhering to an offensive military posture of 'AirSea Battle' (ASB) concept in the backdrop of military, political, and economic rise of China. It aims to strengthen extended deterrence and deter China to initiate limited conflict. However, this paper posits that such military posture is resulting into an intense security dilemma and triggering an arms race between the United States and China. Such outcome may not be compatible with existing grand strategy of the United States, which emphasise economic interdependence and nuclear non-proliferation. This paper recommends that the United State needs to change its existing military posture and reassure China that the United State would not threaten its vital interests.

Keywords: *Asia-Pacific, AirSea Battle, US military posture, Nuclear non-proliferation, Security dilemma*

INTRODUCTION

China continues to rise militarily, politically, and economically. It is rapidly increasing the number of its nuclear arsenals and delivery systems. Such developments are threatening the existing military domination of the United States in Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, experts are fearing that the United States extended deterrence assurances are eroding in wake of Chinese rise. Experts are also

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apprehensive that China's nuclear parity with would enable her to initiate limited regional conflict. It implies that China's assured second-strike capability against the United States might encourage her to wage limited conventional conflict below the nuclear threshold. For countering these developments, the United States is adhering to 'AirSea battle' (ASB) concept (Biddle & Oelrich, 2016). This posture implies that during conflict, the United States military forces would keep military domination in regional battlefield and strike deep inside China. Furthermore, this posture is entangling conventional and nuclear forces (Hiim et al., 2023). It is based on rapid escalation and creating the first strike instability.(Goldstein, 2013) Therefore, it aims to reduce any incentive for China to initiate limited conventional conflict.

However, experts fear that execution of this posture and conventional strikes deep inside China may destroy some of Chinese nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. While Chinese nuclear doctrine claim that, it would retaliate with nuclear weapons in case of conventional strike on its nuclear weapons. Conventional strike on Chinese nuclear weapons may give false perceptions that opponent is seeking counterforce strike. Therefore, it may use nuclear weapons during such conflict due to fear of losing its nuclear weapons. Such fears on part of China and the United States may encourage both sides to modernize their nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. This paper highlights that on the one hand, the United States is adhering to this offensive military posture for strengthening extended deterrence and to deter China from initiating limited conflict while, on other hand, this posture is intensifying security dilemma and triggering an arms race between two sides.

Furthermore, this offensive military posture is threatening the security of China. While scholars have long argued that states cannot increase their security while decreasing the security of their opponents (Glaser, 1996; Jervis, 1989; Tang, 2010; Waltz, 2010). More to the point, contrary to expectation of the United States, regional states in Indo-Pacific are not adhering to policy of balancing. Hard

balancing is missing because China is not posing existential threats to these states with exception of Taiwan (Han & Paul, 2020). Moreover, increasing security dilemma and an arms race is not compatible with the grand strategy of the United States. Such phenomenon may lead to disruption of economic interdependence and may encourage states to pursue their own independent nuclear weapons programmes in an era of relative declining power of the United States.

The first part of the Japan discusses the theoretical underpinning of offensive military posture and related concepts and argues that offensive military posture commonly leads to intensification of security dilemma between states. The second section explains nuclear revolution theory and argues that states cannot increase their security by decreasing the security of other states. Therefore, mutual vulnerability is beneficial for both states. Third section explains the United States military posture of 'ASB' in wake of rising China and its impacts on allies and partner. Fourth section notes that besides other factors, the United States military posture 'ASB' is increasing security dilemma and arms race China, which could lead to an inadvertent nuclear war between two sides. Finally, it concludes that contemporary military posture of the United States may not increase its security. Therefore, it recommends changing existing military posture of the United States and reassure china that its core interests would not be threatened while adhering to robust defence and deterrence policies in Indo-Pacific.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Underpinnings of Offensive Posture

Vipin Narang (2010) notes that the effective working of nuclear deterrence is the function of nuclear posture. He contends that an asymmetric escalation posture is deterrence optimal and defines it 'to develop capabilities and procedure that credibly enable the rapid and first use of nuclear weapons in the event of a conventional attack.' He argues that it is not mere possession of nuclear weapons, which determine pattern of conflict and peace in global politics but rather it

is nuclear posture. He further notes that such posture not only deters conflict initiation but also prevents escalation. Vipin Narang develops asymmetric escalation posture theory particularly in context of South Asia. In his theory he discusses that Pakistan adherence to asymmetric escalation posture deterred India on several occasions from initiating conventional conflict while Indian posture failed in deterring Pakistan to support sub-conventional conflict in Indian Kashmir (Narang, 2010, 2013, 2014).

Furthermore, Vipin Narang ignores that asymmetric escalation posture can lead to an increased security dilemma and an arms race between States. Moreover, asymmetric escalation posture on part of Pakistan prompted India to increase its defence spending, which also include development of anti-ballistic missile defence shield. It has reformulated its military posture and as a result, its military posture has become more offensive. Some studies (Ladwig Iii, 2015; Ladwig, 2008) also claim that India is trying to achieve counterforce capability against Pakistan. In nutshell, asymmetric escalation posture on part of Pakistan has increased security dilemma and an arms race between two sides (Clary & Narang, 2019). It even compelled India to develop counterforce capabilities. According to Summit Ganguly (2019) in near future, the region may face crisis and arms race instability.

However, an asymmetric escalation posture is an operational doctrine, and it is offensive posture. According to Barry Posen (1986), offensive military doctrine is designed to achieve rapid military victory. Adhering to offensive military doctrine enables states to formulate competitive policies, which may lead other states to react with harder competitive policies. Such strategic dynamics can proceed to intense arms race and even war. Meanwhile Posen considered doctrine and posture in same context.

Furthermore, military posture plays a significant role in states' potential involvement in conflicts. States perceive intentions of other states from their military postures and formulate security policies by viewing other state's intentions and motives. States commonly opt for a policy of balancing rather than bandwagon when they perceive

other states as aggressive. However, states can demonstrate their benign intentions by unilaterally reducing their forces and adhering to defensive posture and opting for arms control measures. Such policies can enable states to derive intentions of an opponent. If an opponent possesses benign intentions than both states can achieve cooperation and thus reduce uncertainties and fear arising from international anarchical structure of international politics. Sometimes the state may reduce its relative power as a measure of conciliatory reassurance. While such phenomenon may lower the likelihood of winning potential war, but it also decreases the possibility of occurring of inadvertent war (Glaser, 1996). When state is willing to accept increased vulnerability, it may signal credible reassurances to an opponent.

Contrary to it, small gestures on part of stronger state would likely to be discounted when they were not affecting its significant fighting capabilities. Hence, there is a difficult trade-off for the state to avoid fighting unnecessary war and deter potential aggressors. As Glaser (1996) notes, it is important for security seeking state to convey its benign intentions to its opponents. However, misperception about its motivation may decrease its own security. Because misperception about its motivation may provoke opponents to increase its arms for its defence. Thus, it is necessary for the state to signal benign intentions for achieving security and simultaneously it also attempts to discover whether its opponents are also security seekers. Therefore, it is imperative for security seeking state to opt defensive military posture, which signals benign intentions to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

More to the point, the advent of nuclear weapons enabled states to seek security at relatively low cost. As relatively weaker nuclear states succeed in preventing stronger states from attacking (Lynn-Jones, 1995). As Kenneth Waltz (1990) explains, it is very difficult to develop defences against incoming nuclear attacks. First, it may not be possible to develop such complicated system and second, if it became possible others would develop countermeasures.

During the Cold War, no superpower was able to defeat the other side and resulted in long peace. Writer's attribute such an outcome to the presence of nuclear weapons (Jervis, 1988). Influential realists like Kenneth Waltz (1990) and Robert Jervis (1988) maintain that increasing military power will not necessarily lead to more security. In addition, the relationship between increasing power and security is far from certain. These realist scholars maintain that when states intend to increase their security by adhering with offensive postures and surging defence expenditure, such phenomenon may lead to increase security dilemma and it could not only beget arms race but also war.

Nuclear Revolution Theory

Waltz (1990) and Jervis (1988) have long argued that states cannot increase their security by spending more on the military. Moreover, appreciation of security dilemma can facilitate states to seek cooperation among states. However, it is difficult to achieve cooperation among states due to anarchical global structure.

Robert Jervis notes that the concept of security dilemma has not gotten attention of nuclear experts. When a state try to gain unilateral security advantage over its opponent, such phenomenon may lead to inadvertent spiral of tensions and hostility. While states cannot derive intentions of an opponents and therefore, it is better to design policies and posture to protect their own security without threatening the security of others (Jervis, 1979). He notes that states policies even based on deterrence can heighten security dilemma with an opponent. He explains that if deterrence strategy is not executed appropriately, it could lead to enhance security dilemma (Jervis, 1989). He advocates the condition of mutual vulnerability and criticised the U.S. policies of not restraining its capability to destroy retaliatory capability of Soviet Union during the Cold War. He emphasises that it is important to keep invulnerable retaliatory capability and both side are require too vulnerable against each other nuclear strikes. Such strategic dynamics may lead to alleviation of security dilemma. However, when states increase its retaliatory

capabilities and maintain its C3 systems (Command, Control and Communications) on alert, it may increase its capabilities to strike first (Jervis, 1989). Such conditions can trigger crisis instability and therefore, intensify security dilemma between two states.

Robert Jervis has noted that nuclear revolution has the following implications. First, nuclear weapon states will avoid direct confrontation and accept that military victory is impossible in nuclear war. According to Kenneth Waltz, it is nearly impossible to achieve escalation dominance due to MAD condition. Second, nuclear weapons states would have territorial or political status quo orientations. However, such argument cannot be held when some states are highly motivated to change the status quo and threatened vital interests of opponents. Third, nuclear weapon states will prefer avoiding escalation in crisis. Fourth, the political outcome of the two nuclear weapon states will not depend on the conventional or nuclear balance.

According to Waltz, the advent of nuclear weapons has enable states to reduce their arms as long as opponent are not able to achieve comprehensive first strike. Therefore, the number of nuclear weapons do not matter. Fifth, nuclear capable states will seek arms control and confidence building measures to strengthen strategic stability. Moreover, states are able to control arms race. Six, alliances network has little impact on strategic balance when states possess assured second-strike capability (Jervis, 1989; Waltz, 1990).

Furthermore, nuclear revolution does not deal with the conflict at a lower level. The argument goes, when two nuclear weapons states possess assured second-strike capability, it can lead to strategic stability between two states, while such strategic landscape can undermine extended deterrence. During the Cold War, such situation implied that Soviet Union capability to strike the United States means that it might not be in position to credibly threatened Soviet Union with nuclear weapons in event of Soviet attacks on allies and partners. In the same vein, Chinese modernization of nuclear forces and nuclear parity with the United States may enable it to fight limited

conventional war in the region without fear the United States nuclear forces reprisal.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The United States Military Posture

China continues to modernize its conventional and nuclear forces. According to one estimation, China's nuclear posture might resemble that of the United States and Russia by 2030. Increasing capabilities of China are posing significant challenge to the United States, its allies and partner in Pacific and East Asia. Security experts are worrying that in near future U.S. may have to deter two adversaries simultaneously. It is facing unprecedented challenges for the first time since the post-WWII era.

Increasing conventional and nuclear capabilities of China are making already complicated strategic landscape more complex. In the wake of these developments, maintaining credibility of the United States extended deterrence in Indo-Pacific is a challenge. Moreover, such developments are eroding the efficacy of the U.S. extended deterrence. Economic, political, and military rise of China is drawing apprehensions on part of allies and partners that the United States might not risk its security by fighting war with China for the security of its allies and partners due to its assured retaliatory capability. Brad Roberts has noted that the U.S. extended deterrence guarantees are eroding in recent year amid rise of China and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

During the Cold War, such issues were also raised when the Soviet Union achieved nuclear parity with the United States. Some scholars called it stability Instability paradox. According to Robert Jervis, strategic stability at higher level may encourage states to pursue their objective their use of force at lower level. Thus undermining extended deterrence (Jervis, 1989). Moreover, the credibility issue of extended deterrence never resolved until the end of the Cold War (Frühling & O'Neil, 2022).

Many scholars have long argued that China's anti access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities are increasing and in near future it might be in position to counter primacy of the U.S. in part of western Pacific. China's A2/AD capabilities have significant implications on the U.S. security policy. For countering these threats, it is relying on offensive military posture, particularly 'AirSea Battle (ASB)'. This posture aims to provide credible security assurances and security guarantees to its allies and partners in Indo-Pacific. The materialization of 'AirSea Battle Concept' get prominence when the U.S. 2018 NDS further reiterate that it plan to operate its forces within range of China's A2/AD capabilities in future conflict (2018). This posture maintains that in case of conflict with China, the U.S. forces would target China's A2/AD capabilities early in crisis. This offensive strategy would utilize 'cross-domain synergy' by exploiting U.S. space, cyber, air and maritime assets with an objective of destroying Chinese A2/AD infrastructure. It also includes striking deep inside mainland China (Biddle & Oelrich, 2016).

Security experts also note that striking deep inside China might lead to destruction of some of the nuclear capable missiles, which might convey false notion that the U.S. aimed to launch counterforce strike. While China nuclear doctrine states that, it would retaliate in case of conventional or nuclear attacks on its nuclear installation. Therefore, such scenario can trigger an inadvertent nuclear war between two states (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). Scholars posit that states may deliberately create first-strike instability for strengthening strategic stability. As Caitlin Talmadge (2017) notes, for strengthening extended deterrence, the state may introduce policies to deliberately undermine first-strike-stability with rapid nuclear escalation.

Furthermore, the U.S. forward deployment of military forces along with military posture of ASB has successfully coupled the security of the U.S. and its allies. Stationing of dual capable aircraft is raising risk that during conflict U.S. nuclear forces may also be involved. It raises escalation risk in limited conflict between U.S. and allies and China

(Frühling & O'Neil, 2022). Besides, ASB has successfully entangled nuclear and conventional forces. According to Goldstein (2013), entanglement of nuclear and conventional capabilities may decrease the degree of instability between the two sides. This entanglement may reduce incentive to striking first in conventional war. Because instability at nuclear level may have disastrous consequences.

Indeed, ASB aims to achieve stability in both conventional and nuclear conflict. As stability Instability, paradox explains that nuclear parity and stability at nuclear level may bring instability at conventional level. Therefore, entanglement of conventional and nuclear forces might have prevented perceived strategic gap between nuclear stability and conventional instability by which states may wage limited conventional conflict for pursuing their objectives below the nuclear threshold. Unlike Russia, entanglement of conventional and nuclear forces relived the United States from introducing battlefield nuclear weapons for preventing limited conventional conflicts.

Critiques claim that existing U.S. grand strategy and its military posture will increase unnecessary risks to the U.S. defence. It also suggests withdrawing the U.S. forces from Indo-Pacific and abandon alliance commitment (Gholz, Press & Sapolsky, 1997). Other scholars argue that withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Pacific might lead to reduction of its influence in the region and it might embolden China to capture some disputed territories (Brooks & Ikenberry, 2013). While some of the security experts have taken another position, and it is 'active denial' strategy. The execution of this strategy would lead to withdrawal of U.S. forces and it would strengthen the forces of its allies and partners. This strategy aim to maintain deterrence and prevent China from achieving decisive military victory and at the same time it assure China that it would not face massive attack on initiation of war (Beckley, 2017). In the same vein, Cunningham, argued execution of such type of offensive military posture in time of conflict with China might provoke an inadvertent war between two sides and recommend pursuing policy of naval blockade during

conflict with China. For making such campaign successful, the United States requires an access to ports and airfields of its allies and partners. Distant blockade may be an appropriate response in face of limited conflict with China. Such response can prevent nuclear escalation relating to conventional strike on China's mainland and avoid civilian casualties (Cunningham, 2020).

The U.S. military postures effects on alliances and partners in East Asia

This study highlights that the United States is trying to strengthen extended deterrence through military posturing. In extended deterrence, great power provides security umbrella to one or more countries (the proteges). However, there is an issue of credibility in extended deterrence when vital interests of great power is not at stake. Thus, it is perceived less credible than nuclear deterrence. According to Partric Morgan when a state provides extended deterrence to other states, it is always willing to pay to price less than the conceivable destruction of its territory. Some scholars have noted that extended deterrence is problematic from an alliance standpoint. While others, have argued that conventional deterrence is more credible than extended deterrence. The U.S. abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan is giving an impression that it is adhering to policy of restraint and it may abandon the security of its allies and partners in Pacific and East Asia. There is also perception in East Asia that U.S. may abandon their security. Therefore, some scholars and politician in East Asia support the policy of hedging (Sauer, 2022).

Moreover, Biden administration is determined to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in the United States national security strategy. Besides, it also intends to abandon tactical nuclear weapons deployed on submarine ballistic missiles. Such declaratory policy on part of Biden administration is a matter of concerns for allies and partners. States like South Korea and Japan are persuading the U.S. to deploy battlefield nuclear weapons for countering perceived threats and even hinted to start their own nuclear weapons program (Frühling & O'Neil, 2022).

Moreover, literature on alliance management investigate that weaker alliance can drag great power toward unwanted conflicts but not on how to weaker power react in wake of rising threat (Beckley, 2015). Other literature relating to alliance emphasize that great powers may not honour alliance commitment in time of war when expected cost become too high (Leeds, 2003). However, there is a dearth of literature that answer the question that how regional states respond in wake of increasing military competition between the United States and China. The existing literature deals with the fact that in face of rising threats secondary states may opt balancing or bandwagoning. Most of the scholars argue that secondary states in East Asia are hedging between China and the United States (Lim & Cooper, 2015). Nonetheless, pool of scholars argue that secondary states opt bandwagoning with rising power. They explain that bandwagoning with great power is by product of the international system as argued by Mancur Olson in his Collective action theory.

Collective action theory implies that East Asian states have interests in counter rising China. However, on other hand, these states do not have incentives for achieving collective interests of large number of states while carrying disproportionate burden of resisting China. This theory entails that secondary states in Indo-Pacific may opt bandwagoning with rising China because of the fear that they might face the catastrophic consequences of war or conflict for balancing China while great power at distance would remain safe (Labs, 1992).

While there are many scholars who note that secondary states may opt balancing against the rising power due to perceived threats as argued by Stephen Walt in his balance of threat theory (Walt, 1985). While dealing with the response of secondary regional states of East in wake of rising competition between U.S. and China, Castille and Downes (2023) note that If secondary states perceive that the great power is unable and unwilling to fulfil its alliance commitment than they may hedge. They may hedge diplomatically by keeping relations with challenger and they may start developing their own nuclear weapons program while continuing to maintain relations with

patron. If proteges severely perceive doubt about reliability of patron security commitment in such scenario, it may lead to quitting of alliance. The Choice between defection and neutrality depend upon the severity of threat pose by challenger to proteges. If challenger pose an existential threat to proteges, then it may opt for neutrality but when challenger provide assurances to their security it may take a side of challenger and opt defection (Castillo & Downes, 2023). While on other hand, balance of threat theory argue that states opt balancing in case of rising threat (Walt, 1985). However, scholar have noted that against expectation of balance of threat theory, balancing behaviour on part of regional states of East Asia is missing. They argue that balancing behaviour is missing because East Asia states are not perceiving existential threat from China. It has limited territorial disputes with regional states with exception from Taiwan (Han & Paul, 2020).

As the above discussion reveals that one of the objectives of the U.S. for adhering to offensive military posture is to strengthen extended deterrence and provide credible security assurances to allies and partners in Indo-Pacific. However, contrary to such expectations the U.S. allies and partners are not opting policy of balancing against China. Empirical evidence reveals that most of the states in East Asia are adhering to a policy of hedging. In addition, offensive military posture on part of the former is leading to intense security dilemma with China.

Military Posture and Intensification of Security Dilemma

According to Robert Jervis when a state increase its security it often decrease the security of other states (Jervis, 1978). He further notes, 'the attempt by one state to increase its security has the effect (often unintended and sometimes unforeseen) of decreasing the security of others' (Jervis, 1999). While Shiping Tang argues that international anarchy leads to uncertainty about intentions of other states, such phenomenon create fear and for removing fear, states compete with each other's. These dynamics activate dormant security dilemma and it can lead to war (Tang, 2009). Scholars have long argued that in

recent years security dilemma between the U.S. and China is increasing due to latter's economic rise and military modernization (Liff & Ikenberry, 2014).

Scholars fear that modernisation of conventional and nuclear forces may embolden China during crisis with the US. As Christensen has argued that both sides in the crisis may firmly perceive that they are defending status quo and against an aggressive state (Christensen, 2012). While Medeiros notes that despite having cooperation and engagements, US-China relations are changing. The evolving dynamics between two states are becoming competitive (Medeiros, 2019).

Experts have also highlighted that execution of 'AirSea Battle' concept require deep strike inside mainland China, which could lead to destruction of some of Chinas' nuclear missiles which might provoke nuclear response from the later perception that the U.S. is contemplating counterforce strike. In a nutshell, such scenario may result in an inadvertent nuclear and conventional war between two states (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015; Riqiang, 2022; Talmadge, 2017).

Nevertheless, China is strictly adhering with 'no first use policy' and it is keeping limited ambiguity in its NFU (no first use) that in case of conventional attack on its nuclear forces it may use nuclear weapons. The U.S. conventional attack on Chinese nuclear forces may compel China to use its nuclear weapons before they are eliminated. This scenario may encourage the United States to further modernize its nuclear arsenals and their delivery system. Under such scenario, it would face tremendous pressure to use its nuclear weapons before they are eliminated. Such limited ambiguity may prompt the United States to further modernize its new triad and encourage it to plan conventional pre-emptive strike at Chinese nuclear forces. Prevailing strategic dynamics demand China to increase its nuclear capabilities and get into an arms race, which it otherwise intends to avoid. The U.S. policy to achieve strategic primacy against China could lead to crisis instability between two states. As the former is developing new tirade, missile defences and counterforce conventional capabilities.

As Cunningham and Fravel note that the modernization of U.S. arms and modification of its military posture confirm Chinese fear, the former is seeking to contain China (Cunningham & Fravel, 2015). This military posture is also entangling conventional and nuclear forces. This entanglement is generating uncertainty that whether in conflict the United States intend to use conventional or nuclear forces (Hiim, Fravel, & Troan, 2023).

The U.S. ASB posture aim to strengthened nuclear deterrence and provide credible security assurances to allies and partners. It is also relieving the U.S. to not have reliance on battlefield nuclear weapons for future conflict in Pacific. However, on the other side it is an increasing security dilemma and can trigger intense arms race between two sides. Furthermore, experts who believe that security dilemma and military competition is increasing between two sides, they also believe that security dilemma can be alleviated, and military competition can be managed (Shambaugh, 2018; Tang, 2008).

The United States Grand Strategy and military posture

Furthermore, it appears that ASB military posture is not compatible with the objectives of the U.S. grand strategy. Many scholars have developed consensus that the U.S. is adhering to grand strategy of “primacy” and maintaining its dominant military position in Asia-Pacific. This strategy has four main precincts. First, the U.S. would maintain a dominant military position in Indo-Pacific. Second, it continues to provide security assurances to allies and partners. Third, it aims to promote economic interdependence. Fourth, it is strongly adhering to the policy of non-proliferation (Avey, Markowitz, & Reardon 2018; Brooks et al., 2013; Gavin, 2015; Porter, 2018).

As Brooks and Wohlforth describe that this strategy promotes peace and prosperity and aims to prevent the emergence of more dangerous and unstable world (Friedman, 2022). The leading experts also argue that in wake of rising China, the U.S. core interests are not at stake in Pacific and East Asia (Goldstein, 2013). While Cunningham contends that U.S. interests in Indo-Pacific are limited relative to its interests in

Europe during the Cold War period. Therefore, it is worth to increase the risk of nuclear war with China in Indo-Pacific (Cunningham, 2020). Moreover, Fravel and Glaser also note that U.S. is require to avoid unnecessary conflict with China in South China Sea and recommend to not exaggerate the value of such region (Fravel & Glaser, 2022; Glaser, 2015).

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the United States national security strategy and its core interests in Asia-Pacific are not compatible with its existing military posture.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that in the contemporary strategic landscape of Indo-Pacific the U.S. is adhering to offensive military posture of 'ASB'. Scholars have long argued that asymmetric escalation posture is deterrence optimal. Critical analysis of 'ASB' reveals that it is asymmetric posture and leading to increase security dilemma and arms competition with China. Furthermore, asymmetric escalation theory is developed in context of South Asia. India—Pakistan relations are characterized with hostility, aggression, and repeated conflicts. While strategic landscape between the U.S. and China has different dynamics.

Apparent reason of opting 'ASB' posture on part of the U.S. to ensure security assurances to allies and partners in backdrop of military, economic and political rise of China. Policy makers fear that modernization of Chinese nuclear forces may enable her to initiate limited conventional conflict without fear of the U.S. nuclear forces. Chinese nuclear parity in near future may erode the efficacy of its extended deterrence. For tackling such issues, the U.S. is adhering to offensive military posture and entangling conventional and nuclear forces. Such posture is creating first strike instability and reducing Chinese incentives to wage limited conventional conflict. This posture implies that limited conventional conflict could rapidly escalate at nuclear level. Critics claim that such posture can escalate conventional conflict into inadvertent nuclear war. Execution of ASB

posture entails that some of the Chinese nuclear weapons can be destroyed by the U.S. conventional strike. Such scenario could appear to Chinese policy makers that the United States was launching conventional counterforce strikes. Therefore, Chinese policy makers might come under pressure to face an option of using nuclear weapons or losing such weapons. The fear of expected Chinese nuclear attack may prompt the United States to modernize its existing triad and defence system. Consequently, both states get into an intense security dilemma and an arms race. One can argue that increasing security dilemma and an arms race between the U.S. and China would also increase security threats to U.S. allies and partners. Therefore, the U.S. allies and partners would consolidate their defence relations with the United States and adhere to a policy of balancing against China. However, against such expectation, the U.S. allies and partners are not adhering to policy of balancing. Majority of the states in Indo-Pacific are opting policy of hedging and they are keeping strong relations with the United States as well as with China. Some states are even keeping a dormant nuclear weapons program as a contingency plan. Scholars argue that hard balancing is missing in Indo-Pacific as regional states are not perceiving existential threat from China with exception of Taiwan. Thus, there is no certainty that regional states of Indo-Pacific opt policy of balancing against China in near future. In addition, influential scholars have already stated that the United States interests in Indo-Pacific are limited unlike its interests in Europe during the Cold War.

Moreover, increasing security dilemma and an arms race between U.S. and China because of the former military posture is not compatible with the overall objectives U.S. contemporary grand strategy of 'primacy'. One of the important objectives of the US grand strategy is to promote economic interdependence but increasing security dilemma may compel both sides to reduce economic interdependence. Such a scenario may lead to a spiral of tensions between two sides, and it could further complicate process to managing bilateral relations. More to the point, non-proliferation is one of the most important aspects of the contemporary U.S. grand

strategy. This study highlights that increasing hostility between the U.S. and China can affect this policy. As certain scholars have highlighted that few states in Indo-Pacific particularly South Korea is keeping an option to pursue its independent nuclear weapons program. The U.S. relative power is declining and increasing arms race and hostility with China may compel some states to pursue their independent nuclear weapons program. Such a phenomenon may trigger regional nuclear proliferation.

Finally, the U.S. is opting offensive military posture for strengthening extended deterrence and to deter China to initiate limited conventional conflicts, but it is increasing security dilemma and triggering an arms race. Military postures which enhance security dilemma, and an arms race may not increase security of the United States. It might not have positive impacts on extended deterrence and to deter China to wage limited regional conflict. This study recommend that the United States is required to change its existing military posture and signal reassurances to China that its vital interests would not be threatened.

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