Militancy, Great Powers, and the Risk of Escalation in South Asia’s Nuclear Crises

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Summary
Recent threats posed by non-state actors and the intervention of third parties have made traditional theories of nuclear proliferation inadequate when it comes to explaining South Asia’s complex security environment. As a result, a number of policy adjustments are required in order to manage the tense relations between India and Pakistan, as Nicolas Blarel and Hannes Ebert argue.

Introduction
On August 16, 2012, the Pakistani air force base at Minhas was attacked by what the authorities claimed to be Islamic militants from the tribal areas of North Waziristan (Walsh 2012). What made this attack so different is that Minhas is alleged to store components of Pakistan’s nuclear stockpile, which is estimated to include 90–110 warheads. Yet while there is no conclusive evidence that the attack was specifically targeting these weapons, it adds further substance to recent speculation that Islamabad is losing control of its nuclear arsenal to militant non-state actors (Narang 2009, 2010: 40). The latest skirmishes at the Line of Control between the Indian and Pakistani-controlled parts of Kashmir in early January 2013, the origins and responsibilities of which are not yet clear, have further fueled fears that the firing of bullets could escalate into a nuclear confrontation (Timmons 2013). Both of these incidents seem to demonstrate the limits of utilizing traditional theoretical approaches like deterrence stability to analyze South Asia’s nuclear security dynamics (DeYoung 2011; Riedel 2009).

To date, academic studies of nuclear proliferation and deterrence have focused upon bipolar confrontation and large-scale wars while neglecting nuclear deterrence in regional contexts. Existing deterrence theories might even produce opposite effects in varying contexts. The South Asian security environment, for instance, presents a