**Summary: Nuclear Posture as Strategy — Not Structure**

This article challenges the structuralist view of nuclear posture, which assumes states adopt fixed deterrence doctrines—such as **catalytic**, **assured retaliation**, or **asymmetric escalation**—based on regime type, alliances, and force balance. Instead, it proposes a new model: the **Strategic Ends-Based Theory of Nuclear Posture**, which reframes posture as a **dynamic strategic signal**, not a static structural outcome.

According to this theory:

* **Nuclear posture is a communicative tool**, performed to serve shifting **political ends**—including deterrence, compellence, escalation control, alliance reassurance, and domestic legitimacy.
* States **adapt posture without structural change**, recalibrating behavior and rhetoric in response to crises, audience perception, and strategic reassessment.
* Posture is a **layered performance**: missile tests, doctrinal ambiguity, elite discourse, and deployment choices are all part of the signaling repertoire.

The article uses detailed case studies of **North Korea, India, and Pakistan** to illustrate this model:

* **North Korea** evolved from catalytic ambiguity to coercive, tactical nuclear signaling without alliance shifts.
* **India** maintained a formal No First Use (NFU) doctrine while developing counterforce capabilities and signaling preemptive intent.
* **Pakistan** shifted from overt escalation threats to calibrated restraint, depending on international audiences and domestic pressures.

Across all cases, **posture change occurred without structural transformation**, violating the assumptions of posture optimization theory. Instead, these shifts align with the ends-based model: posture evolves as leaders pursue different goals and interpret audience feedback.

The article concludes that in the 21st century, nuclear posture should be treated as **strategic performance**, not doctrinal fixity. Analysts and policymakers must read posture **as signaling**, understand its multi-audience logic, and prepare for posture manipulation in crises.