

Dr. Naeem Salik (ed.), *India's Habituation with the Bomb: Nuclear Learning in South Asia*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 200.

It is a matter of satisfaction that Pakistani scholars have produced ample well-researched, documented and well-argued literature on the evolution of Pakistan's nuclear programme, its dynamics and different aspects, including the dimension of deterrence and security in the form of books, monographs and articles. Most of this work engages with Western academic discourses on dimensions of nuclear weapons and security. Some Pakistani analysts have dealt with India's nuclear programme, its origins and how it evolved over time, its doctrine and relevance to the security issues in South Asia. Some of them compared the factors and considerations shaping the nuclear weapons programmes of India and Pakistan as well as dealt with the propaganda against Pakistan's nuclear programme by Western, Indian and Israeli writers.

Another feature of Pakistan-based scholarship on nuclear weapons related issues is that former officials of the Strategic Planning Division have made a significant contribution, although the contribution of other scholars is equally important. By now we have several Pakistani scholars, mainly based in Islamabad, who have made an important contribution in debating and defending Pakistan's nuclear policies and challenges.

Dr. Naeem Salik is a leading example of incessant work in this field, producing three books in 2009, 2017 and 2019. His latest book "*India's Habituation with the Bomb*" is a companion or a follow-up book to the 2017 book "*Learning to Live with the Bomb*" that focuses on Pakistan's nuclear learning process. The latest book contains articles that focus on India's learning experience, substantiating the notion of learning and its various dimensions by examining India's

experience. It not only focuses on the nuclear debate in India but also examines how Indian experience diverges from Pakistan.

Nuclear Learning as articulated by Naeem Salik emphasizes several important notions that include:

1. Learning is “a non-unilinear and graduated process” spread over time which also includes “learning from the experience of others.” It involves the processes of “acquisition, absorption and retention of information” as well as bringing about improvement in these processes.
2. Learning is acquired through “experiential learning”, that is, you do the task and improve on it by your own experience and by learning from the experience of others.
3. The evidence of learning is how you create “institutions and processes” for effective management of different aspects of the nuclear programme. You go on working on them to meet the changing technological processes and imperatives of security.
4. There is a distinction between “simple learning” and “complex learning” and there is no upper limit to learning. It is a continuous process.
5. Five inter-related areas of learning identified by Naeem Salik include: “the nuclear doctrine, command and control, safety and security, export control, and nuclear regulatory regime.”

The chapters in the book written by different writers, including the editor, combine historical, analytical and comparative approaches. These chapters not only discuss the notion of learning but also examine how India has done in the above-named five areas of learning.

The first chapter offers a brief overview of India’s nuclear programme. It includes an informed review of the nuclear debate in India, especially the Indian notion of the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion for covering up the May 1974 nuclear test and how some important people in India dominated the debate in the post 1998 period. The

debate in India on nuclear technology and weapons can be divided into four major phases: Pre-1964 period, 1964-74, 1974-1998, the post -1998 period, including the renewed India-U.S. cooperation in the nuclear field from 2005-2006 onwards. A review of official, semi-official and non-official statements clearly shows that India acquired nuclear weapons not only for security reasons but also for its wider agenda of acquiring a noticeable status in the global power structure.

In Pakistan the debate on the nuclear option started quite late. Some officials and non-officials in Pakistan took a note of the debate that began in India after October 1964 Chinese nuclear explosion. However, more interest in this field was visible after India's May 1974 explosion, although the domestic debate remained low-key. Newspaper and magazines carried articles and comments on the implications of India's 1974 explosion and some official statements are also available. Some articles appeared in Pakistan and abroad in the late 1970s and the 1980s that discussed the prospects of India and Pakistan acquiring nuclear weapons.

This reviewer published a monograph in February 1975 that dealt with the debate in India on the nuclear option in the post Chinese explosion period going up to India's 1974 explosion. It questioned the rationale of the PNE, and discussed the reaction to Indian explosion in the first six months in Pakistan and abroad. Akhtar Ali's two books on nuclear technology and weapons, published in 1984 and 1987, received attention during the 1980s. The initial debate on Pakistan nuclear programme that began abroad in 1978-79 onwards was negative in the context of the notion of an "Islamic Bomb" and its clandestine efforts to acquire the enrichment capability. The second phase of negative propaganda against Pakistan's nuclear programme started after September 2001 when some western writers built the scenarios of terrorist groups getting access to Pakistan's nuclear installations and nuclear material.

It was in the late 1990s and especially in the first two decades of the 21st Century that Pakistan falsified the propaganda against its nuclear programme by managing its nuclear programme in a highly professional manner. It was during these years that Pakistani scholars produced articles and books that offered a strong defence of Pakistan's nuclear programme based on hard data and strong arguments.

This returns me back to Naeem Salik's work which has become a must reading for anyone working on Pakistan's nuclear programme. The latest book on Indian learning process is equally relevant for pursuing debate on dimensions of nuclear developments in South Asia.

The book "*India's Habituation with the Bomb*" has several important ideas to explore for better understanding the politics of bomb in South Asia. He is right in suggesting that India's Nuclear Doctrine as presented first in August 1999 and then in January 2003 with an emphasis on "credible minimum deterrence" and "No-first-Use" (NFU) does not necessarily reflect the actual policy. He rightly talks about "a dichotomy between the declaratory doctrine and the actual operational doctrine." (p. 187). Therefore, the statement of India's Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, in August 2019, on the possibilities of giving up the NFU policy did not come as a surprise. Even in the past, India had attached "several caveats and false presumptions" with the NFU policy that its operational relevance was compromised.

Other important ideas that draw attention include the conclusion that India's learning experience reflects mixed trends. It has learnt some useful lessons in some domains which the author describes as "simple learning" but its performance needs attention in what is described as the "complex learning." (pp. 189-190). The areas that show limited learning from other's experience include Command and Control, Safety and Security and Regulatory Regime. The experience of other nuclear states shows that there is hardly any room for exploring the option of "military Instrument" in one way or the other after the

introduction of nuclear weapons. Indian strategists continue to toy with the idea of a limited war, carefully managed military action that would not provoke full war, the Cold Start doctrine. These are dangerous ideas in a situation of Mutual Assured Destruction.

The chapters written by different writers offer a succinct and knowledgeable evaluation and analysis of different dimensions of India's nuclear programme. How India created different institutions and processes in the nuclear domains and how some arrangements are different from Pakistan, especially governance of India's nuclear weapons, India's export control regime and nuclear regulatory regime.

Given the experience of managing foreign and security policy in the backdrop of weaponization of South Asia, it is important to continue moving on in the learning process from doing things as well as from the experience of others. However, the two decades of nuclearization of South Asia have raised a number of diplomatic and security issues that we need to pay attention to, while pursuing the professional and security imperative of the nuclear programme. Some of the issues are:

Nuclear weapons deter war, but they do not ensure the resolution of a conflict. The problems and conflicts persist at a lower level, posing challenges to peace and stability.

The states pursue their agendas against their adversaries through non-military means by using modern communication and information technology. They also exploit internal discontinuities and dissension within a country by extending political and financial support to dissident groups. Transnational violent groups are created, or the existing ones are encouraged to target the adversary state. Other instruments of non-military war include internal subversion by nonmilitary means and hurting economic interests. Today security involves conventional, nuclear and non-military wars. We should not

overlook the imperatives of comprehensive security, covering all sources of threat.

Written in a readable style, avoiding jargons, and relying on arguments and data, Naeem Salik's book is a valuable addition to the literature on the nuclear issues in South Asia.

Reviewed by Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi, distinguished political scientist.