

Rabia Akhtar, *The Blind Eye: US Non-Proliferation Policy Towards Pakistan from Ford to Clinton*, (University of Lahore: Lahore 2018), pp. 345.

The subject of Pak-US relations is an area where the literature is mostly burdened with conflicting narratives on both sides rather than a matter of fact analysis of historical events. Rabia Akhtar's book, *The Blind Eye: US Nonproliferation Policy Towards Pakistan from Ford to Clinton* makes an attempt to set the record straight. This book is a timely addition to the literature which provides a new prism to look at Pakistan's pursuit of the bomb during times of changing US nonproliferation goalposts. In its critique on the US non-proliferation policies, the book concludes that Pakistan's popular narrative needs a reset with respect to the objectives and successes of the US non-proliferation policies towards Pakistan.

The Blind Eye, provides a riveting account of the US Pakistan nuclear relationship and "how the US enabled the creation of nuclear Pakistan by turning a blind eye to its nuclear developments at the height of their alliance relationship during the 1980s." It is the first academic account based on primary sources, i.e. archival data from US national archives, declassified documents from the presidential archives, and declassified Digital National Security Archives, reconstructing for the reader the story at several levels; i.e. the changing preferences of several US administrations, the overall strategic environment, the evolving nonproliferation laws globally and within US and Pakistan's security considerations as well as the resolve reflected by its successive leaders for acquiring the nuclear capability.

Rabia's account of the story of the US nonproliferation policy towards Pakistan offers several takeaways. Firstly, the compromise made by US to accommodate Pakistan and its

inconsistency in enforcement of nonproliferation legislation has implications for the efficacy and success of the US nonproliferation policy with prospective proliferants. Secondly and more importantly, this story of US willfully turning a blind eye towards Pakistan's nuclear program does not find space in Pakistan's narrative.

The book talks about five US administrations' non-proliferation policies from US President Ford to that of Clinton. The timeline from Indian PNE in 1974 to that of after the overt nuclearization in 1998 is crucial for understanding the history of Pakistan-US relationship.

The book seeks to answer three significant questions through examining the US non-proliferation policy towards Pakistan; Was the US non-proliferation policy towards Pakistan a case of selective enforcement of US non-proliferation laws? Second, what did Pakistan get out of the alliance during the period of engagement when it was developing its nuclear weapons? and finally, how did Pakistan get away with the bomb at the height of its criticism of US non-proliferation policy?

The novelty of looking at US-Pakistan relationship as a mutually beneficial relationship, in which "both countries used each other to get what they wanted – Pakistan more adeptly than the United States" doesn't fail to surprise a Pakistani reader who has mostly believed its relationship with US to be that of a client state. However, the Blind eye convinces the readership through its presentation of historical facts that "Pakistan achieved more than it had bargained for – it not only modernized its conventional military capability through U.S. military assistance but also developed a threshold nuclear weapons capability at the height of its engagement with the United States in the final decade of the Cold War. It was made possible due to minimal interference from the five administrations."

The author answers the questions she initially put forth before the reader in the conclusion succinctly, by stating that “a systematic historical examination of the US non-proliferation policies toward Pakistan using archival data from presidential and congressional archives reveals a peculiar pattern, which shows that although the non-proliferation policy by each administration was designed to create an imbalance in favor of Pakistan not going nuclear ended up with achieving just the opposite.”

The Blind Eye also highlights the continuing tension between the US Congress and the Executive, which were not on the same page while underlining non-proliferation policies towards Pakistan. The author writes, “Pakistan benefited from the disconnect that resulted from this good cop, bad cop routine played by the Congress and the Executive.”

One cannot but appreciate her candor in admitting that “all the manipulation, deception and duplicity, that West blames Pakistan for, was *Machiavellian art*, which history taught us, to achieve national security objectives.”

The book argues that the US failure to prevent Pakistan from achieving its nuclear weapons capability was an ‘enforcement failure’ and not a ‘policy failure’; while all five administrations from Ford to Clinton pushed Pakistan to choose ‘between aid and the bomb’, however in doing so, each administration prioritized foreign policy over non-proliferation.

One, it is the US who compromised on its own non-proliferation policies to achieve its foreign policy objectives under different administrations. The author rightly pointed out that, while giving Pakistan choices, US prioritized foreign policy goals over its non-proliferation policy. Several instances from the book demonstrate that.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan and the US became partners in fight against Soviet expansion, the Carter Administration waived the Symington Amendment to achieve its foreign policy goals against Soviet expansion.

The relations between Pakistan and the US under Reagan Administration were much easier than during the previous administration. While assisting the US campaign in ousting Soviets from Afghanistan, Pakistan continued to work on its nuclear program. The author minces no words when she writes that “Reagan’s waiver of the Solarz sanctions in 1987 was strategic in nature and not a favor. The US needed Pakistan on board for agreements to finalize the settlement of the Afghan situation.”

After the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, under US President Bush, Pakistan witnessed the most damaging sanctions under the Pressler amendment. There was a feeling of complete betrayal by the US; however, what is interesting to note is that the chapter on Bush’s nonproliferation policy provides a detailed account of the Administration’s attempts to find ways to bypass the Pressler amendment to accommodate Pakistan.

Similarly, the US turned a blind eye towards stories of possible cooperation between Pak-North Korea on missile technology, with the enactment of the Brown amendment; which resulted in the release of defence equipment for Pakistan. The author narrates how the changing of the nonproliferation goalposts by US was motivated by commercial reasons rather than “for the love of Pakistan.”

Second, the book also busts another popular myth that all US nonproliferation laws were Pakistan-centric. During Ford’s presidency, the Symington amendment (US nonproliferation legislation relating to the sales of armament) wasn’t solely aimed at Pakistan but a result of a broader evolution of US nonproliferation and nuclear exports control policy, aiming at

countries like Brazil and South Korea, that helped take “the focus off Pakistan.”

Third, the historical narrative manifests Pakistan’s commitment and political will of the civilian governments from Bhutto to Sharif which remained firm for the cause of achieving a nuclear capability in the face of all pressures and against all odds.

In Pakistan, the history of Pak-US relations is generally approached through a heightened sense of disgruntlement and feeling of abandonment, totally sidestepping the gains Pakistan accrued as a US partner in the region. Therefore, this book is a major contribution to reorient the apologetic tenor of the Pakistani narrative on the US nonproliferation policy.

Also, one cannot but endorse the author’s regret in being constrained to present a story that is one-sided, in the absence of declassified documents providing an official Pakistani perspective on the issue. However, this excellent work of historiography of US nonproliferation policy towards Pakistan generates hopes for a realistic and wholesome appraisal of the US-Pakistan nuclear relations approaching the issue from Machiavellian school of thought, leading to Pakistan shunning away the apologetic attitude in approaching the issue.

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