
BOOK REVIEW

The Security Imperative: Pakistan's Nuclear Deterrence and Diplomacy

Zamir Akram (Pakistan: Paramount Books (Pvt.) Ltd, 2023), 457

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This book, authored by Ambassador (retired) Zamir Akram, provides invaluable and unique insights into Pakistan's nuclear journey and strategic diplomacy that played a crucial role in achieving its nuclear deterrence capability. The central argument is that Pakistan's decision to acquire nuclear deterrence was not motivated by a thirst for prestige or great power status. Instead, it responded to the complex security challenges originating from the Indian ambitious and hegemonic force postures.

The introductory chapter discusses how Pakistan's security needs were intricately linked to its historical and geographical factors, where a history of disputes and strained relations with India played a pivotal role in defining its security framework. Initially, Pakistan relied on an external balancing strategy, which included forming military alliances with friendly countries, to safeguard its security. Nevertheless, this approach proved futile in deterring India's aggression in 1971. Moreover, Pakistan's security challenges were exacerbated by its geographical location in an unstable neighborhood, with persistent threats emerging from Afghanistan. Subsequently, in the wake of India's 1974 nuclear test, Pakistan opted to pursue nuclear weapons capability as a security measure.

During its close alliance with the United States following the 1979 Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan leveraged the opportunity to advance its nuclear capabilities, taking advantage of the strategic opportunity created by these circumstances. As long as Pakistan refrained from conducting nuclear tests, developing a weapon core, and sharing technology, it managed to avoid US pressure, the author argues. However, the exemptions granted for American non-prolifer-

ation laws and adherence to an implicit understanding allowed Pakistan to obtain assistance and continue advancing its capabilities.

The initial chapters include critical questions about what compelled Pakistan to pursue nuclear weapons. How did it achieve this technology? And how did it develop a nuclear doctrine in light of shifting realities? The author elucidates that the enduring legacy of disputes and enmity with India, alongside geographical factors, form the core of Pakistan's security imperatives. He posits that Pakistan's quest for deterrence was primarily aimed at countering a nuclear-armed India and minimizing the possibility of war with it, as both nations had reached a point where a full-scale war was no longer viable.

The book also encompasses evidence-based analyses of South Asian security dynamics. The author believes the world has witnessed a paradigm shift in South Asia after the Indian nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998. To counter the Indian military prowess and to bring strategic stability to the region, Pakistan also conducted its nuclear test on 28 May 1998. The nuclear tests marked a pivotal moment in Pakistan's history, reshaping the historical power balance between Pakistan and India and ushering in a new security dimension of the region. Additionally, Akram points out the dynamic nature of credible deterrence, which evolves due to technological advances and changes in a state's policies. Therefore, Pakistan must remain vigilant and continually enhance its conventional and nuclear capabilities to deter potential nuclear blackmail from India.

The author posits that Pakistan faced de-hyphenation after the change in the world order occurred after the disintegration of the USSR. The US looked upon India as its strategic ally. Thus, the efforts began to normalize the proliferation dimension for India. The West and India propagated that the militant spread-over in Afghanistan raised concerns about Pakistan's nuclear security to pressure Pakistan to discontinue its nuclear efforts. Pakistan established a robust nuclear safety and security mechanism to safeguard its nuclear arsenals by forming the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) in 2001, along with other supporting organizations and sharp security and safety measures, including Permissive Action Links (PALs). With such efforts, Pakistan, unlike India, has never faced any nuclear accident or incident since its inception.

Furthermore, India has been using Afghanistan's soil to implement its indirect war strategies against Pakistan. The false-flag operations, disinformation campaigns, support for insurgencies and hybridity, steps to target the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Financial Actions Task Force (FATF) trap are the tactics used by India to downplay the role of Pakistan. Indian military build-up and push for an arms race disrupt the region's peace and strategic stability.

The book's later chapters revisit the recurring theme of nuclear discrimination, specifically regarding the 2005 US-India nuclear deal and its potential repercussions for Pakistan's perception of "nuclear exceptionalism." The author argues that, on the one hand, the US administration supported the Indian nuclear program by providing fuel to the Tarapur reactor. On the other hand, it imposed stringent sanctions on Pakistan through several amendments, such as the Pressler amendment, to halt its nuclear weapons program.

The unequal treatment Pakistan received from the US-led Western alliance was aimed at hindering progress on its nuclear program, but Pakistan's diplomatic maneuvers effectively protected and advanced its nuclear and missile programs amidst these challenges. Following India's 1974 nuclear test, Pakistan found itself penalized for India's actions. For example, due to the American pressure, France suspended its nuclear fuel reactors in Pakistan, which were for harnessing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. At the same time, Canada did not agree to further agreements with Pakistan after transferring its first nuclear reactor to Islamabad in the 1970s. Hence, Pakistan was compelled to pursue a clandestine nuclear weapons program.

In 2008, the US and India signed a nuclear deal in a so-called attempt to assist New Delhi in coping with its energy crisis, which eventually led to strengthening its strategic capability. Under this deal, the US enabled India to get a waiver of a Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). This exception to India has eased its path for its membership in export control regimes, including the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which allowed India to increase its missile range. India has always sought options to launch a limited war against Pakistan, which can lead to escalation. The BrahMos missile misfire into Pakistan's territory and the Balakot incident are cases in point.

Lastly, the book underscores Pakistan's consistent position that the development of its nuclear program was a direct response to its "security imperative," primarily aimed at countering India. The inability of security alliances to safeguard Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty during the conflicts of 1965 and 1971 contributed significantly to reinforcing Pakistan's resolve to acquire nuclear capabilities. Moreover, diplomacy played a crucial role in Pakistan's pursuit of security by achieving a credible nuclear deterrence. Ambassador Akram has thoroughly examined Pakistan's nuclear history, adeptly distinguishing between fact and fiction. Positioned as a firsthand diplomatic perspective on Pakistan's nuclear program within the broader geopolitical context, this book represents a noteworthy addition to the existing literature in this domain.

Reviewed by Dr Rahat Iqbal, Associate Director Research at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad.