

Nuclear Arms Control in South Asia: Politics, Postures, and Practices

Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Paramount Books, Pakistan, 2025), 416

The book “Nuclear Arms Control in South Asia: Politics, Postures, and Practices,” authored by Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, PhD, is a scholarly study of the complicated dynamics of nuclear arms control in South Asia. The author is a Professor and Dean of the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad. The book is organized into three sections, i.e., Politics, Postures, and Practices. The structured approach deployed in this volume provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the intricate interplay of political motivations, strategic postures, and practical measures within the theoretical context that shapes South Asia’s nuclear environment.

The first section of the book, titled *Politics*, discusses the philosophical constructs of nuclear arms control in South Asia from a realist perspective. It explains in detail how the realist perspective has influenced the strategic thinkers in South Asia and how they consider that the security dilemma has encouraged Pakistan and India to acquire nuclear weapons. The author has analyzed the dynamics of the India-Pakistan relationship through the lens of offensive and defensive realism. He opines that officials dealing with Pakistan seek to obtain Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD), akin to the defensive realist’s point of view. While applying the perspectives of nuclear optimists and pessimists on South Asia, the author emphasized that nuclear pessimism has struggled to gain importance in the region due to the perception that nuclear weapons have effectively deterred conventional wars between India and Pakistan. This perception is particularly evident in key events such as the Kargil conflict in 1999, the India-Pakistan military standoff in 2001-2002, and the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis. These incidents underscore the role of nuclear deterrence in maintaining strategic stability in the region.

There is discussion about the transitioning trends in contemporary nuclear order, dominated by the strategic competition between the nuclear-armed states. At the global level, there has been a rift between the United States and Russia, and China and North Korea. Additionally, competition exists between France and Russia, India and China, and India and Pakistan. Due to constantly growing rifts and competition, states are modernizing their nuclear arsenals and conventional forces, marking a new era of force modernization and military growth. The author discusses how the Indian and Pakistani applications to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) have sparked a debate about the international expansion of the Export Control Regimes. The author believes that the reliance on nuclear weapons for security purposes is unlikely to decrease. Moreover, the absence of tangible initiatives for denuclearization may push a few more latent states to develop nuclear weapons capabilities.

Section II of the book, *Postures*, applies the concepts of deterrence and compellence to India and Pakistan. It also identifies the doctrines and postures related to nuclear weapons, with a special focus on India and Pakistan. The author observes that compellence is often employed in coercive diplomacy. Compellence involves threatening to inflict harm on another state until it complies with an explicit set of demands; in contrast, deterrence uses conditional threats to prevent an adversary from taking undesirable actions and disrupting the status quo. The author argues that compellence is inherently an offensive strategy, frequently employed by India against Pakistan. This approach includes options such as war, which can destabilize nuclear deterrence. Conversely, deterrence is primarily defensive and has been Pakistan's preferred strategy to prevent regional war. In South Asia, nuclear deterrence plays a more significant role by influencing an adversary's decision-making process rather than eliminating its strategic options.

This section also provides a comprehensive account of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the US, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the United Kingdom (UK), France, China, North Korea,

and Israel. The available data on nuclear policies and postures of the above states is listed in the book. While discussing India's Nuclear Doctrine and Posture, the author notes that India's current nuclear force posture aligns with a nuclear first use (FU) policy designed to counter Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs). India has modernized its nuclear arsenal to maintain credible nuclear deterrence. There is substantive data available on the development of India's nuclear forces, delivery systems, strategic bombers, ballistic missile systems, and nuclear-powered submarines.

While discussing Pakistan's nuclear doctrine and posture, the author explains that the debate regarding Pakistan's nuclear posture requires a fresh examination. Pakistan does not follow a no-first-use (NFU) nuclear policy backed by capabilities, delivery systems, and centralized command and control (C2). Pakistan's strategic defense policy is to: a) maintain a robust conventional military, capable of addressing conventional and sub-conventional threats; b) implement a full-spectrum nuclear deterrence doctrine and force posture; c) ensure an adequate stockpile of nuclear weapons and reliable delivery systems for assured second-strike capability; and; d) develop a survivable strategic force alongside a robust National Command Authority (NCA) for centralized control of nuclear weapons.

Section III of the book, *Practices*, explains the theoretical foundations of nuclear arms control and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime (NPR). It discusses the underlying principles that have historically guided efforts to curb both vertical and horizontal proliferation. The author has further focused on how the NPR has traditionally functioned to prevent the unchecked spread of nuclear weapons while promoting peaceful uses of nuclear technology. Moreover, the author discusses how India rhetorically supports the NPR without practically embracing the norms. Indian diplomats, on international forums, often take a moral high ground on disarmament issues and use terms like "nuclear apartheid" as a shield to hide their vertical proliferation. India's arrogant attitude towards Pakistan and its lack of reciprocity to the proposed arms control initiatives, are major contributing factors to the nuclear arms race in South Asia.

On the other hand, Pakistan's engagement with the NPR is more constructive and pragmatic. The author highlights Pakistan's commitment to responsible nuclear stewardship and its emphasis on regional strategic stability. Islamabad advocates for non-discriminatory frameworks that address its legitimate security concerns and promote equity in nuclear non-proliferation efforts. This approach emphasizes Pakistan's willingness to engage meaningfully with the NPR, despite facing significant challenges and international scrutiny.

The author also discusses the impact of emerging technologies on arms control and nuclear postures in South Asia. It focuses on how emerging technologies, including hypersonic weapons, missile defense systems, cyber capabilities, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are reshaping the strategic landscape. These technologies not only create opportunities for strategic coercion but also encourage risk-taking behaviors among nuclear-armed states. The author identifies that India's incorporation of these emerging technologies into its surgical strike doctrine poses significant challenges to regional stability.

This book is thoroughly researched, well-written, and engaging, making it accessible to scholars, policymakers, and students of strategic and nuclear studies. The clear and concise writing style ensures that it reaches a wide audience and serves as a valuable textbook on nuclear arms control in South Asia. The book has numerous key strengths, providing an academic perspective and adopting a textbook format to benefit Pakistani students. The separate chapters dedicated to Pakistan and India provide a detailed comparison of their nuclear policies, forces, postures, missiles, and missile defense systems. This book is particularly valuable given the dynamic nature of these doctrines and the limited public information available.

This book has particularly identified India's nuclear posture as of FU, supported by examining the history of various strategic events in the region. The primary focus of the book is that nuclear politics remains a significant genre, central to the strategic discourse; however, there have been few

Nuclear Arms Control in South Asia

studies of this subject, especially by Pakistani authors. While much of the existing literature on South Asian nuclear issues is dominated by Indian perspectives, this book incorporates Pakistani perspectives and narratives, offering a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the regional security dynamics.

Reviewed by Anum Riaz, PhD, and Fakhar Alam. Anum Riaz is Associate Director Research, and Fakhar Alam is Research Officer at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad