

Book Review
By
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***Confronting the Bomb: Pakistani and Indian Scientists Speak Out*, Edited by Pervez Hoodbhoy, Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan, 2013. 446**

Confronting the Bomb: Pakistani and Indian Scientists Speak Out edited by physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy is a collection of seventeen essays on Pakistani and Indian nuclear programs. Six have been contributed by Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy; two by Zia Mian and remaining have been co-authored by different contributors, with a prologue by John Polyanic. It offers a different view point from that commonly held views among the Pakistani and Indian public. Perhaps, nuclear physicists want to compel the reader to consider the actual realities of going nuclear and challenge the reasons used to justify the making of nuclear weapons.

The book deals with the political, historical and ethical aspects of the nuclear weapons in South Asia, dangers of the nuclear arms race and prospects of nuclear confrontation in the region. In the prologue to the book, Nobel Laureate John Polyanic, strikes the unequivocal note that nuclear bombs are a man-made plague on earth, which is the underlying theme of all the essays in the book. Hoodbhoy in his introduction describes how Pakistan acquired the nuclear capability for deterrence but continues to cash it for influence in international community and achieving strategic goals.

Main strength of the book is Hoodbhoy's technical knowledge of physics that helps in understanding of making a bomb. He presents the historical and political reasons for making atomic weapons and its effects in the shape of economic sanctions, etc. The essays critically analyze numerous aspects of possessing the bomb and the possibilities of nuclear war in the future. Essays in the book are diverse and loaded with scientific and historical facts. For instance, in "Scientists and India's Nuclear Bomb", M V Ramana relates the Itty Abrahams' notion of 'Strategic Enclave' with India's nuclear history and points to deep rooted orientation of nationalistic agenda in Indian scientists. Zia Mian in his essay "the coming of the Atomic Age to Pakistan" explains that the foundations for Pakistan as a nuclear weapon state could be traced to historical relations with US at all levels of military, economic planning and scientific co-operation. In another essay, Mian presents salient features of Pakistan's Nuclear Command and Control System but does not mention India's nuclear command and control system. A comparison of Pakistani command and control systems with that of

the other countries particularly with Indians, would have helped readers to better understand effectiveness of the two systems.

In one of his essays, Hoodbhoy alleges that Pakistan's military and civilian leadership did not have a clear vision of nuclear capability. He discusses Kashmir as the most crucial and multi pronged issue which has been complicated by involvement of religion and regionalism. His essay on the myth of the 'Islamic bomb' is one of the most controversial. It may be interesting to note that no policy maker in Pakistan in the last three decades has ever referred to Pakistani nuclear capability as an 'Islamic Bomb'. Yet it has been made the topic of an essay in the book. The exaggerated interpretations by the author are about Pakistan's changing strategic nuclear objectives, as reflected in the Kargil conflict, and the fact that the bomb is now labeled by Islamic political trends. In the essay on "Post bin Laden: The Safety and Security of Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal", he argues how Pakistan's changing culture is strengthening Islamic fundamentalism. The issues of drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas, the presence of Bin Laden at Kakul in his opinion, are the other factors impacting nuclear security of Pakistan. Contradiction in the argument is visible when in the same essay he says Pakistan's nuclear weapons are very well protected. Two essays analyze nuclear energy generation in Pakistan and India and argue that it won't work in either country for a variety of scientific, environmental, and medical reasons. In an essay called "What Nuclear War Could Do to South Asia", written by an American, a Pakistani, and two Indian nuclear scientists, the authors discuss whether a nuclear war would cause total destruction or any possibility of control can be expected. They concluded that nuclear war in one word is a 'catastrophe'.

Another negative point of the book is the overlapping of ideas in a number of essays. The weakness of the book is that majority of the essays have quoted from secondary sources and authors' own earlier works. This book is predominantly about the Pakistan's bomb. Out of seventeen essays, sixteen are about Pakistan's nuclear programme. The book could more appropriately have been entitled Confronting the Pakistani bomb.