

**Naeem Salik, The
Genesis of South Asian
Nuclear Deterrence:
Pakistan's Perspective,
New York: Oxford
University Press, 2010.**

*Yogesh Joshi**

On any subject, there are always two stories to tell- or may be more. This book seems to do the same when it comes to the debate over the nuclearisation of the South Asian region. As the title of the book suggests, Brig. (Retd.) Naeem Salik seeks to revisit the history of South Asian nuclear weapons from Pakistan's perspective. The author feels that the story told, so far, has been obtuse and has worked to the detriment of Pakistan's interests. In order to create a balance in the literature, the author claims to provide 'dispassionate and objective analysis' (prologue).

However, objectivity is no more a cherished virtue in social sciences. A profoundly subjective narrative is at times a better tool for understanding the 'other' than a

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rational, scientific study. If that be the case, then this book is worth reading. In the chapter delineating the development of India's nuclear programme, the author does not have anything new to offer other than the narratives offered by Raj Chengappa, Itty Abraham and George Perkovich. However, one point is worth discussing: the nature of nuclear weapon programmes across the globe. The author is quick to point out that like all other states, India's nuclear programme was hardly indigenous. Right from the Manhattan project, no single country has harnessed the energy of the atom on its own. This truism, which the author is quick to point out, however, loses its argumentative power soon. Rather than looking at why states need to domesticate technology when it is impossible to do so in a globalised world, the author seems to use it as an apology for Pakistan's nuclear programme.

Here, the military man wins over the political scientist. He even goes on to suggest that since proliferation has always been a practice for states to acquire nuclear

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The sections dealing with Pakistan's decision to test nuclear devices, after the May 11 1998 explosions conducted by India, are interesting. The author has reflected on the debates within Pakistan over its response to the Indian tests. He is correct, in my assessment, to point out that India forced Pakistan to overtly declare its nuclear capabilities. However, he also suggests that nuclear weapons were always a natural choice for Pakistan to counter a conventional behemoth like India and, therefore, were always a part of Pakistan's defensive response (page 74). This is intriguing because Pakistan's nuclear capability has been historically understood as an obvious reaction to India's nuclear ambitions. However, the author has missed out on something very interesting for the readers: What if Pakistan had not followed India and tested nuclear weapons in 1998? What would have been the consequences of this restraint on the position of Pakistan in the international community? May be, in this light the game in Kargil would have been advantageous to Pakistan. Amitabh Mattoo has done a counterfactual study of this kind, where he delves on the strategic benefits and costs of India's 1998 nuclear weapon tests. To the surprise of many, he has argued that it would have been better for India to have maintained ambiguity regarding its nuclear capabilities. Such an analysis on the part of strategic community of Pakistan is wanting.

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The author, having tried to make the reader accept the nuclear reality in South Asian region- a semantic tool to suggest the irreversibility of the process- subsequently raises some important questions on various arms control treaties and the emerging non-proliferation regime. He discusses the various bilateral arms control issues between India and Pakistan. When it comes to the CTBT, one important assertion which the author seems to be making is that Pakistan

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was close to signing the treaty in September 1998, just before Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif addressed the UN General Assembly. The rationalisation by sections in Pakistan who supported the signature was: Pakistan could always opt out of the treaty whenever India chose to conduct more tests. However, the debate was cut short due to massive domestic opposition. On FMCT, the author tries to resurrect the dispute regarding the fissile material inventories. The threat to strategic stability comes

from India's mass acquisition of fissile material. However the latest reports of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and the Federation of American Scientists have estimated that in both actual weapons and fissile material inventories, Pakistan is ahead of India. This alacrity on the part of Pakistan may be a consequence of the Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Agreement. This alacrity is diffused throughout the narrative.

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The author's take on nuclear doctrines is worth reading. Delineating on the nuclear doctrines of India and Pakistan, he is of the opinion that Pakistan's nuclear doctrine is more comprehensive in nature: the reason being the influence which Pakistan's army has over nuclear matters in the country as compared to the miniscule involvement of military in India's nuclear decision-making (page 220). This may lead to discrepancies in political decision-making and operational decision-making in the fog of war. Rather than looking at the ill-effects of the control of military over nuclear matters the author seems to eulogise such a situation. This may partly emanate from the military culture which envelops domestic politics in Pakistan and a general reluctance to cede authority to civil leadership. The chapter on A. Q. Khan though interesting is insubstantial. It even appears to be appreciating the revolutionary character of A Q Khan who, against all odds, got Pakistan a place under the sun by experimenting

with novel technological routes of proliferation. This may be the only indigenous component in Pakistan's nuclear programme.

For any keen observer of South Asian politics, especially the nuclear politics in the region, the book is an apt example of how perceptions and misperceptions play a crucial role in formulating knowledge, both of the 'self' and the 'other'. The most important facet of the book is that it brings to light the chronic mistrust which infects Pakistan's elite and particularly the military elite when it comes to India's ambitions in the region. This may be a crucial insight for the Indian policy-makers sitting in the South Block.

