

BOOK REVIEW

Learning to Live with the Bomb

Pakistan 1998-2016

Naeem Salik

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Brig. (R) Naeem Salik's latest book is an exploration of the country's "experience as a nuclear weapons-capable state since the demonstration of its nuclear capability." It is divided into eight comprehensive chapters detailing different aspects of the country's nuclear capability including the evolution of its nuclear doctrine, its command and control structure, its nuclear safety and security framework, its export control regime and also its nuclear regulatory regime. Even as the book highlights these features, its major emphasis remains on the process of learning that occurred both during and after acquiring nuclear weapons capability. In the words of the author, "This study not only adds to the literature on nuclear learning, but also adds a new dimension to the literature related to Pakistan's evolution as a nuclear weapons capable state."

Currently a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Salik has previously taught at the National Defence University and the Quaid-i-Azam University. He holds a PhD from University of Western Australia. Salik served as Director Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) at the Strategic Plans Division. His tenure as Director ACDA placed Salik in a unique position thereby allowing him to offer not only a "practitioner's experience and learning" but also profound academic analysis.

The book provides an overview of the history of Pakistan's nuclear programme and how the country's collective national memory of being victimised and treated unfairly with regard to its nuclear programme ultimately shaped the nature and direction of its nuclear learning process. According to the author the learning process that occurred through the formative years of its nuclear programme remained inhibited. This can be attributed to the fact that Pakistan's nuclear programme enjoyed immense public support thus putting "pressure on policy makers, constraining their ability to bring any flexibility or change in nuclear policy."

In the subsequent chapter titled Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine, Salik asserts that although the country does not have a formal nuclear doctrine, it does not mean the country has "no doctrine." Salik asserts that Pakistan's nuclear doctrine has evolved surely from "being non-existent to a fairly mature understanding" of the various aspects of doctrinal choices. The covert nature of the nuclear programme meant there could be no public debate either, over the nature and type of its nuclear doctrine. The author acknowledges that the "intellectual aspects of nuclear development lagged far behind the technological progress." It was only in the aftermath of the May 1998 nuclear tests that Pakistan first sought to fill this gap. Although it identified its doctrinal objectives within a short period, Pakistan chose the path of doctrinal opacity, preferring ambiguity over a clearly articulated doctrine.

According to Salik thus, both the evolution of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine and the process of nuclear learning are gradual processes and non-linear in nature. They continue to evolve slowly but surely in response to the changing strategic environment. The learning has ultimately resulted in changing not only the country's

approach towards nuclear security but also other aspects related to nuclear weapon technology including but not limited to nuclear command and control.

In the next chapter, Salik acknowledges that due to the peculiar nature of its nuclear programme, Pakistan paid little attention to Command and Control in the initial phase of its nuclear weapon development. It was during the late 1990s that the author was tasked with writing a concept paper on a proposed command and control system for Pakistan. The author highlights that although it is possible to learn from the examples of other states, it is impossible to entirely replicate the command and control systems of other countries. Salik then goes on to describe in detail how the National Command Authority came into existence and how the command and control structure actually evolved over time. However he also points out how the process of nuclear learning during this stage was also accompanied by instances of “unlearning” including its decision to develop tactical nuclear weapons and also the recent recourse to discourage dialogue with outsiders by “insulating the organizations from alternative viewpoints.”

On Nuclear Safety and Security, the author asserts that Pakistan boasts strong learning in the field of nuclear safety and security including arrangements to secure its weapons, fissile and radioactive material and nuclear installations from terrorists groups and unauthorized or miscalculated use. The confusion according to Salik occurs when the terms nuclear safety and security are used interchangeably and also because there exists a gap in Pakistan’s efforts to disseminate information about its efforts in the field of nuclear safety and security. The chapter provides an objective assessment of the country’s nuclear safety and security apparatus, providing arguments from both its critics and supporters.

Salik then goes on to provide a comprehensive analysis of these arguments before concluding that the country's nuclear learning in this field has been substantial.

The chapter on nuclear export controls highlights the various aspects of the global export control regime before providing an overview of Pakistan's export control framework. The discussion also includes an account of the creation of the country's Strategic Export Control Division (SECDIV) and its various functions. Salik acknowledges that Pakistan strengthened its export control framework in the aftermath of the AQ Khan incident.

Pakistan also introduced nuclear regulatory arrangements by changing existing laws, institutional arrangements and institutional processes and introducing new ones. The author highlights the role of Pakistan's nuclear regulatory authority and its various achievements. The learning in this field was a consequence of both necessity owing to Pakistan's expanding nuclear energy programme as well as its international obligations.

The conclusion asserts that a considerable amount of learning has occurred in Pakistan at various levels of analyses. He is however quick to point out that the learning has remained simple rather than complex and that there is ample room for a comprehensive policy overhaul. There is no indication either that there has been a rethinking of existing policies or even modifying them. In his concluding analysis however, Salik concedes that due to the uncertain political and security environment in and around Pakistan, it would be "unrealistic to expect any significant advance along the complex learning curve in the near future."

Salik's book offers a comprehensive and lucid overview of developments related to Pakistan's nuclear capability in the post 1998 era, especially those related to its nuclear doctrine, command and control, safety and security as well export controls. In doing so it helps fill gaps in our understanding of these important developments. The book is an important and timely addition to the existing, scanty literature on Pakistan's nuclear developments. It also raises important questions related to the process of nuclear learning in the country even as it strives to answer some of them. Not only is the book easy to read, it is also a rich source of information about Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability for anyone interested in the subject.

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