

## **Book Review: Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb: A Story of Defiance, Deterrence and Deviance by Hassan Abbas**

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Dr. Hassan Abbas is a Pakistani-American academic whose interest area lies in South and Central Asia. He is presently a Professor and Chair of the Department of Regional and Analytical Studies at National Defense University, Washington, DC. Similar to his previous books, Hassan Abbas has taken up yet another topic that revolves around the statehood of Pakistan.

The book is a nine chapters long comprehensive case around Pakistan's road to becoming a nuclear state. He starts by a focused spot light on Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan. The author has framed his questions around Dr. Khan and his critical role in developing the nuclear weapons programme, links of military and bureaucracy to the nuclear network, strategic and monetary motives surrounding it and finally juggling the blame game among the parties involved. In addition, he bases his arguments around a theoretical understanding to authenticate his claims academically.

The structure of Chapter II assists the reader to contextualize the reasons for Pakistan to become a nuclear state. He invites the reader to visualize the strategic culture that pushed Pakistan towards this option. He establishes a case that starts from the beginning of Pakistan's formation, the induction of religion in state affairs, the pivotal role of Kashmir dispute to exacerbate the conflict between India and Pakistan, showcase of a headstrong military that led Pakistan towards a national security state, and the socio-political challenges that led to the disintegration of East Pakistan.

The author mostly focuses the discussion on Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear weapons technology in Chapter III. He derives reason from the work of *Bhumitra Chakma* and *Willaim Epstein* to explain that security concerns, national prestige, technological boost and domestic politics has pushed the country towards such a critical goal. The writer has subjected Pakistan's nuclear aspirations to be driven by a security dilemma in the region, which is essentially created by India. He narrates that the nuclear programme was first conceived at a civilian research stage during 1954-1965.

Later, from 1965 to 1971, Pakistan went through a 'push' and 'pull' in its nuclear policy and nurtured a Pakistani bomb lobby. However, between 1972 and 1984 marks the critical time when Bhutto reoriented Pakistan's nuclear policy and started the nuclear weapons programme. This chapter not only brings into attention the individual as well as organizational communications but also defines the interplay of United States, Britain and China on the nuclear project.

The series of chapters IV, V and VI explains the relations and linkages of Pakistan with Iran, North Korea and Libya respectively. The writer visibly attempts to

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expose the alleged primary role of Dr. Khan, and covert role of some civil and military officials, in nuclear proliferation by assisting these countries in terms of technical consultancy, manufacturing components and shipment of related equipment. Allegedly this aided the efforts of Iran and North Korea to enrich uranium for their nuclear projects. While the controversy around Pakistan and Libya is hinged upon transnational nuclear technology sales enterprise. The author indicates that it was after the Libyan case, that the wide-range possibility of non-state actors to accrue advantage out of nuclear proliferation came into the limelight around the world.

Chapter VII carries a thorough approach assessment of Dr. Khan and other officials who were involved in nuclear proliferation activities in Pakistan. He has streamlined the driving forces for this attempt in terms of personal interests, religious motivations at the state level and anti-western attitude at the international level. While in the next chapter, the writer states that Pakistan's decision making is affected by civil-military rivalry and protracted political instability. He claims that these prominent factors distracted the government from keeping an eye on the back channels that possibly facilitated nuclear proliferation efforts. He also ascertains that due to poor command and control structures, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, Dr. Khan and his helping hands were protected from any direct government intervention regarding nuclear proliferation activities, since the government's official stance denies any state involvement in the matter.

The concluding chapter IX suggests that nuclear proliferation occurred in three stages and with three different countries. With Iran, Dr. Khan was working on behalf of Pakistan. While with North Korea, Dr. Khan was instrumental as a representative of Pakistan as North Korea was providing ballistic missiles to Pakistan's government in exchange for their nuclear assistance. As for the Libyan case, Dr. Khan was working independently with his close associates and was compelled by his self-fulfilling personal and monetary motives.

According to the author, the Pakistan nuclear web of associates was well camouflaged in the system in which no irregularities could be determined, despite the evidence that suggest any peculiarity. He further touched upon the 'see-saw' nature of a possible Saudi-Pakistan nuclear collaboration. Finally, the writer carefully converged the contents of his book, deliberated on strategic deterrence and nuclear postures of both the countries. He also suggests Pakistan to take concrete steps for the safety and security of its nuclear weapons programme.

In the light of these accounts, this book undoubtedly covers the subject at hand from all its nooks and corners. It indulges in an in-depth analysis of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme and the debate surrounding it. I would commend the author for digging deep into the case, and painting an elaborate picture from a vast array of sources. However, the aims of the book that the author highlights lack novelty (pg. 3). The speculative debate over Pakistan's nuclear program, its legality and proliferation activities was hyped by the West since 2003 disclosures. After fifteen years, a reader expects a book on this matter to bring a new dimension to the existing case. Not only was this aspect unattended, rather the book turns out to be another reinforcement of western view.

The write up also embroils into a repetitive attempt to instill a rogue, deceptive and emotionally aggressive identity of Pakistan. Right from its title, the author has established a perception that the reader should be expecting *defiance, deterrence and deviance* in Pakistan's behavior during its nuclear journey to

destination. In addition, the contents of the book and its arrangement suggest a case of representing Pakistan through internationally frowned upon motivations. The buzzwords used pre-establish what the reader should anticipate in the book, with respect to Pakistan, before giving the reader a chance to develop his/her own assessment and point of view.

This also displays how the discourse in the contemporary day and age works on the demand and supply model. The research grant awarded by a US based foundation and an Indian publishing house would naturally have a demand for Pakistan's anti-military and establishment write up, which the author has provided to them on a platter. Moreover, as *Hussein Alatas* explains the Intellectual Imperialism in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, in order to be acknowledged internationally, one needs to produce a narrative that is in line with what is being produced by countries who dominate knowledge and its circulation around the world. This is why, the writer, being a Pakistani had the advantage of accessing raw data and processed it on the terms of who dominates knowledge in the South Asian region directly and indirectly. As a result, the book was deemed to be tilted towards the Indian narrative of Pakistan's nuclear bomb.

In addition, most of the sources and quotations cited in this book are denting Pakistan's struggle to develop the nuclear bomb. For example, the author cites western scholar Jim Walsh's remark on Pakistan being 'the biggest and most important illicit exporter of nuclear technology in the history of nuclear age'. Such sources are accompanied by Pervez Hoodbhoy, Stephen Waltz, Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins among many others. Therefore, it may also be noted that the for-to-against ratio regarding Pakistan's nuclear bomb in terms of references, is likely to be visibly disproportionate.

In this context, it can be observed that the author very astutely introduces an allegation against Pakistan, hammers it through works of dissident authors and implies the allegation to be virtually true to the reader. The writer has also used theoretical evidence to substantiate his view against the Pakistan's nuclear bomb in Chapter II. He mentions Scott Sagan's (a proliferation pessimist) line of argument that 'Pakistan lacks institutional mechanisms for civilian control over nuclear decision making, and their militaries are also inward looking' (p. 11). He strengthens his theoretical arguments by indicating that 'nuclear nationalism' in nuclear myth makers can pave way for nuclear proliferation and implicitly relating it to induce violence in Pakistan's nationalist behavior.

Later in his book, the author grounds the development of the nuclear bomb under religious motivations. He penetrates this argument in Chapter III by showcasing that Pakistan being developed in the name of Islam is a home ground for religious militant groups and religious political parties who influence politics and policies in Pakistan. Also, in Chapter VIII, the author reiterates the infiltration of religion in state structure by expressing that officials at Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) and Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) were routinely inspired by religious slogans and ideology. He substantiates this by claiming that Ummah Tameer e Nau (UTN) was formed by two senior nuclear engineers who were working at KRL. UTN had maintained links with not only Al-Qaeda, but was also affiliated with Al-Rasheed Trust (which is listed as a terrorist organization by US). In doing so, the author positions Pakistan as a religiously extremist country unable to handle the responsibility of being a nuclear state. However, it is imperative to understand that it

was imminent for Pakistan to preemptively prepare for the forthcoming strategic culture, primarily influenced by nuclear weapons.

The author, in Chapter VII, has also linked Dr. Khan's nuclear proliferation activities as means to assist the Muslim World in developing the bomb and personal financial motivations. In this manner, Chapter VIII indicates loose control and monitoring of the state over nuclear sites. The writer makes a point in signifying Dr. Khan's personal motivations that led towards nuclear proliferation, since he needed the financial aid to maintain his public relations exercise and fuel his intent to become the next President, which overshadowed his responsibility ethic. But this certainly does not give the author a free pass to allege against the statehood of Pakistan and direct the reader to question Pakistan as a responsible nuclear weapon state.

Even when religion is taken out of the equation, the writer makes his case through the words of Pervez Hoodbhoy (one of the opponents of Pakistan's nuclear bomb), who believes that Pakistan's nuclear bomb was driven by its aspiration for pride and confidence. In explaining so, he blames the state failures to work as a push towards developing nuclear weapons, since according to Hoodbhoy that was the only 'sense of achievement' Pakistan had. In this way, the author has instrumentally used word play to define the identity of Pakistan. He has crafted a low capacity building, subjugated policy making and institutionally corrupt expression of Pakistan that lacks an indigenous ability to be virtuous. The author has represented Pakistan's preemptive efforts to be Indian obsessed and concurred that Pakistan's policies are shaped to counter India alone.

The anti-western lens of Pakistan has also been brought under the limelight. The author working in America and acknowledging the support of universities and centers based in US for his research work, naturally positions Pakistan as the 'other' to establish a better stature of United States in the process. He has depicted it as a responsibility of US to manage the strategic environment of South Asian region in Chapter II. While the writer drafts a case that displays a nuisance that may emerge due to nuclear weapons in the region, Chapter III gives evidence that US herself introduced the nuclear option to Pakistan in 1954 at Bahawalpur. But when Pakistan built up her nuclear weapons program, and refused to adhere to United States domestic anti-proliferation laws, it was again US who imposed sanctions on Pakistan. Even though later in 2008, the author writes that US had financially and technologically assisted Pakistan to secure its nuclear arsenal and declared it protected. These contradictory plays of practices by US, mentioned in the book, must put the spot light on her, rather than asserting Pakistan's worldview to be anti-western and reflecting deceit in Pakistan's international behavior.

The above samples that take shape of a discourse movement where the author has implicitly and explicitly played with the language expression to construct a frivolous and radical identity of Pakistan. This book, therefore, may be considered as a set of textual representational practice to define the social reality of Pakistan; its military, incompetent decision making power, wavering institutional controls, and a state image as a whole. Religious motivations, anti-western view, Indian inspired actions and reactions, indifferent state management etc. are the key words that highlight the nature of the book. Although the writer quotes Amartya Sen, who says that the divisive power of classification places people in separate unique boxes and therefore must not be adopted as a scale, but still the author himself indulges in a practice of labeling and identity construction through language manipulation. As a

scholar, one must realize the importance of neutrality in discourse and honor his responsibility as an academic to develop a discourse that does not confine an identity to a state. It is advised to the reader that his exemplified piece must not be mistaken as factual since it is an amalgamation of opinions and statements, and not the official version. The bent of mind that the author displays is strengthened with such scholarly evidence, which shows how history can be articulated and represented according to the eyes of the beholder.

This book is a must read for Pakistani nuclear strategists and thinkers to examine different point of views that may be against national interest. This book may create inspiration for nuclear experts and policy makers in Pakistan to respond on the veracity of the contents and their reservations.

