

Book Review

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Nuclear Politics in South Asia, by Suresh Dhanda, New Delhi, Regal Publications, 2010, 356pp., ISBN 978-81-8484-064-3.

This book is an exhaustive historical account of the nuclear security of India and Pakistan which has brought the South Asian region at the peril of a nuclear holocaust. The author draws the theme of his book from four 'prerequisites' required for the success of a nuclear deterrence. He pin points that there are four assumptions required for a successful nuclear deterrence in a region which include "prevention of conventional war, second strike capability, avoidance of accidental nuclear wars and safety of nuclear weapons" (pp 267,268). He then concludes that all four are "missing in the context of South Asia" (p.268) due to the ambiguity surrounding their nuclear programs, fear of past hostilities, allurements of preemptive strike, lack of effective command and control mechanisms and the prevalent social and political turmoil in the region. He discusses all these issues at length in his book.

Dhanda's has divided his monograph into five distinctive sections. The first section explains the various developmental phases of the two states' nuclear discourses. The main attribute of Indian nuclear program is its indigenous nature. The Indian program was started in 1949 by the Indian civilian elites right after its independence in 1947. In comparison to this, the characteristics of Pakistani nuclear program include its clandestine nature, foreign fundedness as well as its reactionary nature to the Indian 'peaceful' nuclear explosion of 1974. The author then explains the 'two camps' of deterrence theorists in terms of nuclear pessimists who argue that there is no stable expectation or guarantee of peace between nuclear states while the other camp argues that more nuclear weapon states brings more stability in the region. The author positions his arguments in nuclear pessimists' camp. He assumes that the success of a nuclear power state depends upon her second strike capability. The stability of a nuclear power state is linked to the 'development of [its] second strike capability' (p.31). He further explains that this assumption is critically undermined in the case of India and Pakistan nuclear rivalry due to the ambiguous nature of their nuclear programs as well lack of any effective oversight. Various prospects of accidental nuclear war were also discussed in this section. The section also narrates the dichotomous nature of nuclear control in both states, whereby, in India there

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is civilian control over her nuclear program while Pakistani nuclear assets are firmly guarded by its military elites.

The third and fourth sections explain the Indian and Pakistani missile programs in detail. This explains the range and capabilities of the two states' nuclear capable missiles. The Indian missile program starts with the establishment of the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) in 1958. A detail account of the range, nuclear payload capability of Prithvi, Agni, Akash, Nag, Astra, Trishul, Brahmos and Sagarika is explained. While in the case of Pakistan, there are two parallel organizations responsible for the missile development program. One was the Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) established in 1976 while the other was the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) established in late 1950s. The explanation of the Pakistani missiles includes Hatf, Ghouri, Shaheen and Ghaznavi. A comparative analysis of the strength and weaknesses of these missiles is drawn at section five and six. The author again highlights the relative independent and indigenous nature of Indian missile program in comparison to the foreign funded nature of Pakistani missile development program in lieu of Chinese and North Korean help.

The vast scope of this book does make an excellent narrative of the two states nuclear discourses but it is not without some pitfalls. First, there is no central argument in the book which is understandable considering the historical and explanatory style of the book. But still to critically engage a strategic nuclear comparison between these two arch rival states there must be a core argument which should be carried forward from the beginning till the end. Second, there is also lack of any theoretical framework which means that the argument is not built forward from the existing theoretical literature encompassing nuclear rivalries, especially the nuclear stability/instability paradox. This paradox explains that nuclear stability brings conventional power instability whereby there is added incentive for a state to go for short conventional war considering the fact that the other will not go for nuclear push button. Similarly, Dhanda was of the opinion that "deterrence will not work in the region" (p.5). On the other hand the reality on the ground explains that the two states have not gone for all out war since 1971. Both were close to war in 1990 (Kashmir crises), 1997 (Kargil episode) and in 2001-2002 (military stand off at the borders) but still possession of nuclear capability has played an effective deterrent role between these two states. Dhanda discusses these episodes albeit shortly, and did not critically engage with the existing theoretical explanations.

In a nutshell this book provides an interesting historical account of the nuclear discourses of India and Pakistan but it fell far short of exploring new theoretical insights of the explanation of their nuclear rivalry.