

# **BOOK REVIEW**

## **Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence**

Zafar Khan, *Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence*, (Routledge, 2015), 198 pages.

Reviewed by Adeel Mukhtar Mirza

Since 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan followed a policy of minimum deterrence. The essentials of minimum deterrence elaborate how a nuclear weapon state manages its nuclear force structure at the minimum, non-deployed, operational and declaratory levels. It also comprehends military and political priority of nuclear weapons, requirement of sophisticated technology and reinforced shelters, required framework for a command and control system and the need for arms control and disarmament measures. However, Pakistan could not sustain its policy of minimum deterrence in subsequent years, therefore, "the question remains: Why Pakistan gradually shifted from minimum deterrence it initially conceptualized to a broader policy orientation; that is, minimum credible deterrence."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Zafar Khan, currently teaching at the Strategic Studies Department, National Defence University Islamabad, in his book, "Pakistan's Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence," published by Routledge has provided an in-depth conceptual analysis of the evolution of Pakistan's post-1998 nuclear policy and the rationale for the shift from minimum deterrence to minimum credible deterrence.

The author begins by elaborating the conceptual dimensions of Pakistan's post-1998 nuclear policy in light of the essentials of minimum deterrence, which states:

The Pakistani concept of minimum deterrence includes that it would not indulge in an acute arms competition; it would not respond to its adversary's weapon-to-weapon tests; it would upgrade and maintain the credibility of deterrence forces; and these weapons are security oriented and not for fighting purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Minimum deterrence essentially focuses on the survivability of

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<sup>1</sup>Zafar Khan, *Pakistan Nuclear Policy: A Minimum Credible Deterrence* (London: Routledge, 2015 ),p.1

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.6

nuclear forces wherein even a small number of nuclear forces are sufficient to deter the adversary if survivable; therefore, a large number of nuclear weapons are not required. Moreover, "a triad can be achieved through smaller, survivable nuclear weapons; larger weapon sizes, higher numbers of weapons and complicated command and control systems are not necessary; the minimum emphasizes the political priority or political aspects of nuclear weapons, the mere existence of which would suffice to deter; and the minimum discourages nuclear weapon states from thinking of using nuclear weapons for military purposes."

The author attributes the nuclearization of Pakistan and its subsequent policy shift to its conventional weakness in comparison to India, failure of its alliances to provide security guarantees and India's nuclear test in 1974. In addition, the bloody civil war of 1971 that gave birth to Bangladesh made Pakistan revise its security policy. However, the author goes on to add: "Pakistan was slow in its nuclear development. The reasons were: 1) the Pakistani domestic socio-political environment, compared with India, was not conducive to launching a nuclear programme in its initial years of independence; 2) there was a lack of awareness of the use of nuclear technology in the fields of medicine, agriculture and energy; 3) Pakistan lacked a well-trained scientist and nuclear enthusiast political leader; and 4) Pakistan's rudimentary industrial infrastructure restrained the development of nuclear programme (p.21)". Consequently, realizing the need of nuclear deterrence, Bhutto initiated a clandestine nuclear programme, which was followed by subsequent governments even though Bhutto was ousted from the government.

Right after overt nuclearization, Pakistan followed the policy of minimum deterrence, which was realistic as Pakistan does not consider nuclear weapons for war fighting purposes, but only to deter its adversary, hence, fulfilling Pakistan's security needs. Later, Pakistani elites found that the minimum could not be quantified and sustained as a minimum because of changing South Asian security environment. In a similar vein, Pakistan's NCA, SPD and Foreign Ministry kept on issuing statements on maintaining the credibility of its deterrent forces. The Pakistani ambassador to the UN security Council stated in April 2004 that the country would 'continue to develop its nuclear missiles and related strategic capability to maintain the minimum credible deterrence against our eastern neighbour which has embarked on major programs for nuclear weapons, missiles, anti-missiles, and conventional arms acquisitions

and development'. According to the author, "it can be argued that it is India who triggers the arms race in the South Asian region",<sup>3</sup> that makes minimum unsustainable for Pakistan.

The absence of an Arms Control Regime (ACR), Dr. Khan argues, is another reason for Pakistan to shift its policy from minimum deterrence to minimum credible deterrence. New Delhi's rapid up-gradation of its deterrence forces coupled with Indo-U.S nuclear deal, the development of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) - a limited war-fighting doctrine, pursuit of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and increasing fissile material stockpiles lure Pakistan to vibrantly maintain its credible minimum deterrence. Similarly the absence of robust confidence building measures (CBMs) between these two nuclear adversaries augments mistrust and subsequently fuels arms race. Moreover, the author says, "the absence of an ACR and regular nuclear and military CBMs indicate that both the South Asian nuclear rivals are in the formative phase of a nuclear force build-up. Unless they are pulled out of this phase of arms competition, both Pakistan and India will continue to build their deterrent forces, even if they opt for a triad in order to achieve second-strike capability."<sup>4</sup>

Explaining the external factor wherein chain reaction of modernization of nuclear weapons by nuclear weapon states affects Pakistan's nuclear policy and becomes a cause for the up-gradation of its deterrent forces, the author moves on to the development and modernization of missile and delivery systems by Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan aims at ensuring its second-strike capability even if it has to develop a triad of deterrence forces or development of nuclear submarines.

Nonetheless, Pakistan retains a defensive approach to its nuclear weapons use, but rejects New Delhi's offer of a No First Use (NFU) owing to conventionally weak position in comparison to India. In the subsequent chapter, Dr. Khan examines as to where, when, how and why Pakistan would use its nuclear weapons under 'extreme positions' including the situations when: a large part of Pakistan is occupied, its enemy strangled and a large portion of its land and air forces destroyed. However, the author critiques the discussion

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.36

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 137

between Pakistan's policy of 'FU' as well as 'a last resort' because these variables keep on changing and are subject to different interpretations. In addition, both counter-value and counter-force targeting options are on the table for Pakistan. Dr. Khan further explains "how the use of TNWs increases the Cold-War style worries of pre-delegation, command and control, and force protection. Besides, the use of TNWs against the adversary's armed forces could also hit nearly populated cities. The limited war could escalate to the nuclear level and might blur the distinctions between the two targeting options."<sup>5</sup>

Last but not the least; the author is of the view that it is unlikely that Pakistan would lift its non-adherence policy approaches to the NPT, the CTBT and the FMCT. Pakistan demands that it should be acknowledged and given the status of recognized nuclear state and be subjected to similar treatment by U.S and NSG as the one extended to India.

Dr. Khan's book hopefully will initiate an earnest debate on the future direction of Pakistan's nuclear policy. He also puts forward some open-ended questions for the readers to explore further. Those research questions include: What challenges Pakistan might confront in shaping an expansive deterrent policy and how would it impact the deterrence stability of South Asia? What would be the impact of the changing contours of Pakistan's deterrent policy on its command and control system? What could be the economic repercussions be of sufficient deterrent capability, and how could Islamabad ensure the safety and security of sufficient deterrent forces given the worldwide concerns of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan? What possible part Islamabad could play in wider multilateral disarmament process towards Global Zero, given its contemporary defiance of non-proliferation regimes? However, the literature largely lags at predicting the future contours of minimum credible deterrence for Pakistan and its implications on the strategic stability in South Asia. Overall, the book is one of the best research studies on Pakistan's nuclear policy and is very beneficial for those who closely monitor the debate about South Asian nuclear politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

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## STRATEGIC VISION INSTITUTE ISLAMABAD

E-mail: [info@thesvi.org](mailto:info@thesvi.org)

Web: [www.thesvi.org](http://www.thesvi.org)

Tel: +92-51-8434973

Fax: +92-51-8431583

Address: Please see the SVI website