

Learning to live with the Bomb: 1998-2016

Brig. (R) Naeem Salik (Oxford University Press, 2017, 328 pages)

Reviewed by Beenish Altaf*

Brigadier (Retd) Naeem Ahmad Salik is a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Strategic Studies, Islamabad. He holds a PhD from the University of Western Australia. Brig. Salik helped establish Pakistan's Nuclear Command and Control after the May 1998 nuclear tests, and served as Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the Strategic Plans Division. He wrote two important books on Pakistan's nuclear discourse. The first book, titled *Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective*, was published in 2009, and the second book, titled *Learning to Live with the Bomb: Pakistan: 1998-2016*, has been published recently in 2017.

The book comprehensively covers Pakistan's nuclear program its history, doctrines, command and control, nuclear safety and security, and export controls issues. It is a full scope study of how we learned about Pakistan's nuclear history stage by stage and issue by issue. Critically, the book majorly discusses the Post-Nuclearization era. The author remains on the safe side where it was easy for him to provide tangible evidences. The chapters on evolution of nuclear doctrine and command and control are the most important in the book. All other chapters are also important in correcting the suspicions and apprehensions about Pakistan's nuclear program, and about its role as a responsible nuclear weapons state. But the essential point remains that Pakistan has a bomb and now the question: is what purpose does it serve?

On Indian nuclear policies, Dr. Salik points out the BJP stance that India should give up its policy of NFU option, which India subscribed to in the past. He is of the view that India had been challenging the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence through prism of doctrinal as well as technological developments. He discusses Pakistan's learning curve as a nuclear power and says that Indian moves like the recent chatter about transformation from a

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passive NFU to pre-emptive disarming strikes had kept Pakistani strategists on their toes.¹

He has stressed the learning factor, namely that we have not only got to study our side of the game, we also have to watch out what is happening on the other side so that we learn from there also and reform our own processes as well. He endorses Pakistan's accelerated learning process because of continually remaining under international scrutiny but cautions at the same time that though "learning has been substantive, there is no room to be complacent". Since Sept 2001, a lot of literature is coming out on the issues of nuclear safety and security. Pakistan has demonstrated strong learning in the field of nuclear safety and security measures to secure radioactive material, nuclear weapons, fissile materials and nuclear installations from terrorists groups, and illegal use. The author has also touched upon the issues of export of nuclear technology at international level.

There is much that could have been presented from Pakistan's perspective. National narrative could have been explained in a much detailed way. Pakistan discards the victim card and takes pride for the steps it took to develop its nuclear program. Nuclear learning to post-acquisition phase could have been discussed with many other elements, for instance, what necessitated those nuclear developments that Pakistan underwent and what led to the crisis that took place in nuclear South Asia.

The book indirectly narrates issues of physical reliability and robustness, which are not much worked. The author could have gone directly with references as to where the debate of high reliability stood at present. Being nuclear optimistic, Pakistan has a pride to be a nuclear power but from where and how these nuclear technologies are coming, and where Pakistan is heading should also have been discussed. The volume presents a comprehensive picture of learning and problems of the organizational culture; however, the individual perspective and what could interest the international audience is missing.

¹"Disclosure about Indian N-doctrine confirms worst fears," *Dawn*, April 1, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324135>

Nevertheless, the book is an excellent piece of work as there is a lot this book offers while addressing some important questions that have been raised about Pakistan's nuclear program from time to time. The book, *Learning to Live with the Bomb: Pakistan: 1998-2016* provides useful material for research on the subject, and identifies the gap in the backdrop of academic discourse and theoretical framework in Pakistan's nuclear program. For those who want to examine deeply as to how Pakistan handled various facets of its nuclear weapons program, the book is of immense value.