

## **Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: New Technologies and Challenges to Sustainable Peace**

Rizwana Abbasi and Zafar Khan (New York: Routledge, 2020, 227 pages)

**Reviewed by Dr. Attiq ur Rehman\***

The nuclear politics of South Asian region always remained a gravitational point of international academic circles. By examining an unending strategic competition between New Delhi and Islamabad, the academic communities from different parts of the world always tried to maintain their varying arguments on the nuclearized subcontinent. The book under review is an attempt by two Pakistani authors who have tried to provide a fresh overview of the South Asian strategic culture, which is fundamentally reflecting an awful picture of India-Pakistan rivalry under the nuclear shadows. Both authors, Rizwana Abbasi and Zafar Khan, are the renowned figures of Pakistani strategic community parallel to having global recognition through introducing their ideas at various international forums. The current book is a unique joint venture of both writers as they have examined the main challenges to the South Asian versions of sustainable peace and strategic stability in the book.

Apart from a brief introduction and a detailed conclusion, the book is divided into six chapters. The debate in all chapters mainly tried to explore the growth of South Asian security environment under the influence of great power politics. The power politics at the global level primarily shape the strategic behaviours of South Asian nuclear contestants because the decades-long India-Pakistan rivalry cannot be separated from the US-China competition. The writers call it a broader systemic security dilemma in which the

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hostile designs of South Asian politics cannot be divorced from the US-China geopolitical competition in Asia. The debate starts in the first chapter from the systemic security dilemma structured on an exceptional interaction of four nuclear powers, US-China-India-Pakistan. The subsequent chapters continue the debate by examining three different designs of competition between New Delhi and Islamabad, Washington and Beijing, and New Delhi and Beijing. Apart from the US-China competition for global dominance, Pakistan wants to peacefully settle Kashmir issue which disturbs India, and the Indian leaders are determined to hegemonize the region which upsets Pakistani authorities. Thus, the New Delhi's anti-neighbourhood policy has resulted in a hostile framework of foreign relations with the territorially adjoining states, China and Pakistan. In order to keep New Delhi against Beijing, the American state officials are committed to empowering India in the South Asian politics which has resulted in Indian opposition to Pakistan and China. The American quest for preventing the emerging Chinese role in world politics has led Washington to finalize various strategic projects with New Delhi under a broader agenda of bilateral strategic partnership.

After introducing the main idea of the study in the initial two chapters, the writers provide a comprehensive summary of Indian and Pakistani strategic assets and their roles in the national policies of the states. The persistently swelling defensive capabilities of New Delhi with the help of Washington have compelled the Indian policymakers to augment their belligerent role in the regional politics through altering their doctrinal features for managing Indian nuclear weapon status (pp.73-76). In reaction to New Delhi's defence against Beijing, Islamabad feels insecure, and the security experts of Pakistan prefer to take countermeasures for keeping the region strategically stable and balanced. According to Abbasi and Khan, the contemporary strategic arrangements of the Indo-US

bilateralism are mainly hampering the notion of a strategically stable South Asian region because the American officials have ignored the hardcore realities of India-Pakistan conflict while pursuing their geopolitical interests in Asia. Even, the signing of a nuclear deal with a strategic partner from Southern Asia has posed a serious question on the American support to the international non-proliferation regime which encourages the states to subscribe to the NPT before initiating any bilateral strategic venture. The US' support to India has encouraged the New Delhi to stretch its strategic muscles over the territorial and maritime affairs of nuclearized subcontinent through counterbalancing China. Parallel to mentioning the Indian role in global politics, the book explains the Indian aggressive position in the nuclearized subcontinent. In addition to reconsidering its policy of No First Use, the Indian security establishment has introduced a plan for launching a limited war in the form of Cold Start Doctrine (p.137).

The interesting part of the book comes in the last two chapters where authors try to explain the South Asian crisis in the pre and post nuclearization period. The discussion on the Indo-Pak crisis explained the impact of Pulwama episode on the larger South Asian region which was a reflection of Modi's extremist ideology and an attempt by New Delhi for fracturing the notion of regional strategic stability. In the last chapter, both authors summarized the whole debate by articulating a few practical steps from ensuring the role of bilateral measures for appropriately balancing and stabilizing the region. In this way, the book tries to analyse the complex features of South Asian deterrence, and the inclusion of various interviews of leading strategic commentators of Pakistan in the book explains Islamabad's position in the regional arms race. In short, the central theme of the book mainly revolves around the interconnectedness between the South Asian regional sub-system and the international system. Furthermore, the ongoing patterns of power politics

between Washington and Beijing are the main drivers of South Asian nuclear politics. The involvement of extra-regional players in the nuclearized subcontinent needs serious attention.