

Problems and Prospects of the Non-Proliferation Regime: Pakistani Perspectives

Zafar Iqbal Cheema, Editor (Islamabad: Strategic Vision Institute, 2021, 348 pages)

Reviewed by Dr. Rabia Akhtar¹

Pakistan's nuclear program has merited a lot of attention from the academic and policy communities around the world. The country's nuclear weapons and their effects on the state of strategic stability in South Asia have kept nuclear watchers engrossed, not least because they want to apply theoretical models to assess regional nuclear dynamics. The discourse on Pakistan's nuclear program is dominated by studies authored by foreign experts, something that has put Pakistan behind the eight ball. One such study, authored by two ace U.S. scholars, Toby Dalton and Michael Krepon, was entitled 'A Normal Nuclear Pakistan.' The title was and is emblematic of how a nuclearized Pakistan is viewed from the outside. No strangers to Pakistan and the vagaries of South Asian politics, Dalton and Krepon do not deem Pakistan as a normal nuclear state. They outline a series of steps that Islamabad ought to take if it wants to become, according to them, a *normal nuclear state*. Two of their recommendations are noteworthy. One, they urge Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) without waiting for India. Two, they argue that Pakistan must lift its veto on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT). In dealing with these two arrangements, however, Islamabad has to not only take into account the stands and approaches of India but also look at the contours of the global non-proliferation regime. Thus, while Pakistan is outside of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, it certainly cannot dissociate itself from it. For Pakistan, it is important to study, analyze, and critique the sets of challenges and opportunities associated with the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Even though Islamabad has a

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diverse and burgeoning strategic fraternity, scholarly works on the all-important regime are not impactful. This phenomenon pushed one of Pakistan's foremost strategic minds, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, to bring together seasoned and upcoming Pakistani experts for a book project meant to get Pakistani perspectives on various aspects of the regime out for the world to read. The three-year-long effort produced a fourteen-chapter-long book entitled '*Problems and Prospects of the Non-Proliferation Regime: Pakistani Perspectives.*'

Cheema, who, for decades, has prepared scholars and practitioners alike to deal with issues relating to nuclear weapons, non-proliferation, politics, and strategy, rightly argues that Pakistanis not writing enough on the global non-proliferation regime has weakened the country's intellectual response. Indeed, to argue otherwise would be but a disservice to a country that is striving to reset its narrative in relation to its nuclear program. Further, it is reasonable to argue that Pakistan's intellectual capital and response can only be sharpened if young, energetic, and thinking minds are allowed to express themselves. That the book includes chapters from bright young scholars on some of the most critical issues the regime faces is something that adds value and flavor to it. Newcomers writing on nuclear-related topics will not only enrich the debate and break the shackles of intellectual inertia but also strengthen the case for bringing in openness in research inside Pakistan. Besides, Cheema nicely sets the stage for readers by arranging the challenges that the regime has to contend with. He fittingly sheds light on how the nuclear haves continue to eviscerate the pillars of arms control and non-proliferation. He enunciates that, "the existing key imperatives of international politics will remain dominant and none of the Nuclear Weapon States are ready to disarm"(p.18). Cheema is on the money in dubbing this a veritable challenge, simply because, for all the talk of showing commitment to nuclear disarmament, the nuclear club, led by the U.S., is increasing its reliance on nuclear weapons.

The book is organized in no set order, something which allows readers to pick and choose chapters of their interests. The thirteen chapters that follow Cheema's introduction delve into some of the most important Articles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the threat of nuclear terrorism, the politics surrounding the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), CTBT, FMCT, Nuclear Security Summits, nuclear energy security, and nuclear security guarantees. Thus, the book does an excellent job in collecting and collating the views of Pakistani scholars on elements that are critical to shaping the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The chapters are lucidly written and not filled with jargons, something that will enable readers to easily grasp difficult concepts. In fact, the volume should be used as a textbook by students and professionals alike. That said, the book suffers from being more descriptive than analytical, a weakness that could be addressed in the next edition.

However, the authors not only correctly identify the snags in the non-proliferation regime but also recommend steps to bolster it, with a view to improving the global security architecture. Zafar Khan, for instance, in chapter two, brilliantly assesses the subversive role that the recognized nuclear club has played to weaken rather than strengthen the regime. He is quick to point out how the discriminatory nature of the NPT has allowed great powers, like Washington, Moscow, and Beijing to modernize and sharpen their deterrents. He is right to expend time on discussing the extra-regional link factor. Highlighting how great-power nuclear competitions create strategic pressures on South Asian nuclear states, Khan argues that the "successful constitution of the universal arms control regime at the international level, as well as a regional arms control regime at the South Asian level, may require a reduction of strategic pressure that major powers place on these regional powers." (p.52) One cannot agree more with Khan at a time when in a bid to counter China, the U.S. is willing to ignore and even facilitate India's nuclear modernization.

Further, Amb. Zamir Akram's chapter on the politics of the NSG is also extremely useful in enhancing our understanding on how the geopolitical interests of great powers trump their commitments towards nuclear non-proliferation, a theme that I academically explored in my book entitled '*The Blind Eye*'. Given that the chapter has been authored by someone who directly dealt with these issues as a Pakistani diplomat, it will prove to be very useful for readers who want to conduct research on the dynamics of the NSG. Beenish Altaf's chapter on the CTBT and that of Zafar Nawaz Jaspal on Pakistan's position on the FMCT clearly articulate Islamabad's stands on the two arrangements. For those that want to work on Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy, these comprehensive analyses will be really helpful, not least because they rigorously and academically engage with competing views and arguments.

As aforementioned, the international community is fixated on how Pakistan approaches the CTBT and the FMCT. These chapters help dispelling many impressions about Pakistan's refusal to acquiesce to the diktats of global actors.

In sum, this compendium is an important addition to the already existing limited body of work on the nuclear non-proliferation regime from Pakistan. While this book certainly puts together scattered Pakistani perspectives on various strands and dimensions of the regime, it still leaves the need to create new knowledge or give new approaches to looking at old debates. That said, the way the book has been conceived and written augurs well for the future of strategic studies' knowledge-creation in Pakistan, primarily because projects and books like this will encourage others to step up to the challenge and produce research-laden works. The Editor of this book must consider a second volume whereby more analytical and policy-oriented research is presented by Pakistani scholars on the same subject.