

NUCLEARIZATION OF SOUTH ASIA - CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL PEACE AND STABILITY

**(To Commemorate Youm e Takbir)
A series of four webinars from 13th May to 30th May 2024**

1ST WEBINAR

Indian Nuclear Program and Tests of May 1998 - Challenges to National Security of Pakistan

Press Release

On May 11, 1998, India claimed to have conducted three nuclear tests at the Pokhran testing range. The Indian tests sent shockwaves across the world given the fact that there wasn't any impending security challenge that could have acted as a stimulus for India to test its nuclear devices. In fact, it was the newly-installed BJP government's aggressive foreign policy orientation driven by the urge for domestic political mileage, which was first reflected in its election campaign wherein it vowed induction of nuclear weapons if elected and ultimately culminated in the nuclear tests. Two days later, on May 13th, India claimed to have conducted two more tests thus bringing the total number of explosions to five. India had already carried out a nuclear explosion in 1974.

Given the significance of May for strategic stability in South Asia, Strategic Vision Institute Islamabad is organizing a series of webinars under the broader theme of the "Nuclearization of South Asia: Challenges to Regional Peace and Stability" to deliberate upon the various aspects of the nuclearization of South Asia.

The first webinar was held on May 13th, 2024 on the subject "India's Nuclear Program and Tests of May 1998 – Challenges to National Security of Pakistan". The webinar was moderated by Mr. Khalid Banuri while the speaker's panel featured Advisor National Command Authority (NCA) and former Director General Strategic Plans Division (SPD) Lt. Gen. (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai and Executive Director (ED) Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) Dr. Naeem Salik and attended by a large number of experts and young researchers both in-person and online.

During his remarks, Lt. Gen. (R) Kidwai argued that India's nuclear program was driven by the ambitions of regional hegemony and global status – evidence of which can be found in the fact that India's nuclear program started in 1945, even before the country's independence. He added that India's nuclear tests of 1974 and 1998 worked to Pakistan's advantage as they induced Islamabad to first acquire and then demonstrate its nuclear capability respectively. He continued that Pakistan's nuclear capability restored the strategic balance in the region and offset India's overwhelming conventional advantage.

While highlighting the role of Pakistan's nuclear capability as a "great equalizer", Lt. Gen. (R) Kidwai stated that Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) capability within the ambit of Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD) has restored deterrence at strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Dr. Naeem Salik referred to the statement of Pakistan's Foreign Ministry that labeled nuclear testing as "Pakistan's Finest Hour". He subsequently highlighted the aggressive verbal posturing by India's political leadership and senior officials following India's nuclear tests. He argued that top BJP leadership at that time was signaling that India would now force Pakistan to resolve Kashmir at its terms. He added that Pakistan waited for the international community to act, which, considered India's nuclear tests as a *fait accompli* and came up with a "spineless" and rather lackluster response. Dr. Salik stated that the international community's attention was now focused on stopping Pakistan from nuclear testing.

While highlighting the discriminatory approach adopted by the US, Dr. Salik stated that following the nuclear tests, the US imposed sanctions on both India and Pakistan. But after a while, the sanctions were eased for India while Pakistan remained subject to sanctions until after 9/11. While underscoring the role of Pakistan's nuclear capability as an equalizer, Dr. Salik argued that owing to Pakistan's nuclear weapons, India, despite having 1.2 million soldiers, feels helpless and irritated.

The second webinar of the series is scheduled for May 22nd, which will deliberate on "Evolution of Pakistan's Nuclear Program".