

Book Review

by

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Salik, N. (2017). *Learning to Live with the Bomb: Pakistan, 1998-2016*. Oxford University Press.

“Diagnostic, Comprehensive and Gospel (of Pakistan nuclear policy)”

If there are three words which come to my mind after reading this book these are it. Mr. Salik has started the debate which was never heard of in Pakistan, nuclear learning. Chief of army staff retired General Jahangir Karamat said about this book:

“The Book significance lies in the fact that it tackles the little-known subject of nuclear learning most comprehensively in all its dimensions”

If General Karamat says this, you have to nod your head to the claim. It was under his reign that Pakistan had the hot tests of 1998. The book is in a class of its own. this book is a dissection of each and every aspect of Pakistan nuclear policy (operational and intellectual side of it). This book reestablishes the fact how important are nuclear arms for Pakistan for survival because of hostile neighbors. General Zia in a famous interview said “Freedom has no price”, and Pakistan’s freedom lay in its nuclear program. This book states all the problems and hurdles faced by Pakistan on the journey to nuclearization. I personally enjoyed and learned a lot from the book about the nuclear program Pakistan had.

This book discusses all the issues regarding nuclear policy in a wholesome manner and fills the critical gap and assumes the title of probably first such book discussing all these areas in one place. Despite him being an ex-official, Mr. Salik gives a candid and objective perspective on these issues that is different and fresh as compared to Pakistan’s official positions. He has very well talked about the contemporary security challenges. The author divides his books by referring to the major events of 1974 when Indians conducted their first nuclear tests, author and Pakistani establishment knew its implications, they knew Indians have developed the modern day gunpowder all they needed was a gun to deliver it. Author division is based on chronological basis but the book has clear divisions on matters the chapter’s deal with. Throughout the study one theme is consistent of nuclear learning. One thing to remember that the author affirms about the book is that it is a study he has always referred to it as a study like in page 146:

“as pointed out in chapters two and three of this STUDY”

In my view section 1 would constitute of Chapter 1 introduction and chapter 2 Pakistan nuclear programme: a brief history, in both chapters’ author has stated the historical facts about the nuclear project. How the idea was conceived, how the genesis of the bomb programme was initiated. All the hurdles are very profoundly and intensely repeated showing how the ship was shored in the storm, author has the luxury to that maybe due to his background. Author has left

no stone unturned his references makes the book yet more close to being the gospel of Pakistan nuclear history.

The next section which is the most vital and imperative part of the book/study. Chapter 3 Pakistan evolving nuclear doctrine which in itself can become a book on its own. This section of the book is important for students/experts who wants to learn about doctrines of nuclear states. Mr. Naeem Salik has not just discussed Pakistan's doctrine but all the de jure, de facto nuclear states doctrine as well. Author has been very candid in his speech about the nuclear doctrine and its weaknesses but has said Pakistan has come far from where it started. He is very unbiased in saying the following in chapter 3 page 76 that:

“The intellectual aspects of nuclear development lagged far behind the technological progresses”

This clearly indicates where Pakistan lacked in 1998. If ever someone teaches the subject of nuclear doctrine it won't be an astonishment to see this books chapter being the outline for it. This section can be referred to over Pakistan nuclear doctrine.

The section 3 can be named as institutional learning of Pakistan national command authority it constitutes of chapter 4 Nuclear command and control, chapter 5 safety and security, chapter 6 nuclear export control regime and lastly chapter 7 nuclear regulatory regime. This section is so thorough and has outlined dissected framed the whole structure of Pakistan's nuclear command and control. Going through this section I felt that how in depth as he studied for these chapter, I even wondered that how was this even published as it outlines all the structure of Pakistan nuclear setup. One of the main and imperative contributions of the book is to identify the learning of nuclear program, Naeem Salik has listed down all the legislation with dissecting them as well. Author also emphasizes in these chapters that Pakistan nuclear program is:

“safe, secure, reliable and Pakistan is a responsible nuclear state”

He has completely thrown out of the window speculations of nuclear technology or warhead getting into hands of NSA's. reconfirming the high reliability theory. This kind of critical nature of his writing shows his studies depth. It may well be very interesting decoy for the counter parts at Indian side to seduce them into learning this structure and in reality SPD works totally differently, you just never know.

Lastly we have the conclusion which sums up the book or better to call it a study. The book can be exemplary in academics for its use of evidence references and how well many studies are brought and compiled in a form of book. All sections I drew above are studies in its own. Although they overlap but alone as well they make sense. So in a nutshell learning about Pakistan nuclear programmes any aspect this book has to be in the list if not topping the list.

This book easily the single most important one in regard to nuclear program of Pakistan. this book is highly suggested to specialists/experts/academia/journalists in the arena of nuclear

studies and as well as the students. But the students' needs to have some background knowledge of Pakistan history and dynamics of institutions to take full advantage of this astounding book/study. The books references are thorough and can be used by researchers, no fact is without a reference so citing the book or reading its facts where they came from is made easy by the author, in that regard he has done an exemplary job although this topic has rarely been researched or talked about in Pakistan.

This book can easily have an additional edition, and I guess its second edition will be more important in regard to nuclear doctrine as the dynamics of Kashmir has changed after 5th august 2019 as well as, acts such as the surgical strikes or the incidents of 26th 27th February. There be must a shift of nuclear doctrine from both sides which has to be addressed.