

Book Review

Indo-Pak Nuclear Cold War by N. Kunju
Reliance Publishing House (New Delhi)
Price Rs. 225/-

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At the backdrop of massive deployment of Indian and Pakistani troops on their borders, the nuclear stand-off between both nations is causing serious concern. After conducting overt nuclear tests in 1998, they are engaged in building up a nuclear capability adequate to provide security through mutual deterrence. While India came out with a draft nuclear doctrine which is simply a photo-copy of the nuclear strategic posture of the US and the USSR during the cold War years, Pakistan's nuclear doctrine has not been clearly spelt out. What is however known to the strategic analysts is that it is based on a vague concept of offensive defense.

Pakistan has officially announced that its nuclear policy is predicated on the first use of nuclear weapons. It would mean that its nuclear weapons could be used in a pre-emptive or preventive strike against a potential nuclear adversary. India on the other hand, has committed itself to a policy of no-first use of nuclear weapons, like China. What it would really mean is that only after suffering a nuclear attack, it would strike back in a retaliatory second-strike mode. Nuclear weapons would take only 3 to 6 minutes to reach Indian or Pakistani prime targets in a counter-city nuclear war fighting strategy available to both at the present stage.

Hence, India's no-first use of nuclear weapons policy is anything but an offer to be a sitting duck and, therefore, an invitation to certain destruction. History of super power nuclear rivalry shows that it is totally absurd first of all to have gone for nuclear weapons. As the experience of the former Soviet Union and the United States has shown, nuclear weapons could neither prevent the disintegration of the USSR nor provide security to America on September 11, 2001. And then to argue further that nuclear weapons, after having developed, will not be used first is a damned rhetoric. What is more worrying is the past history of India and Pakistan, which is steeped in hatred and mistrust. Recent carnage in Gujarat has proved beyond doubt that Indians and Pakistanis are still looking at each other as Hindus and Muslims, as majority and minority communities.

The right wing Hindu nationalists ruling India now acquired nuclear weapons as an instrument of power to confront the equally fanatical Muslim rulers in Pakistan possessing a similar nuclear capability. It is therefore, a grievous mistake on the part of the people of India and Pakistan and especially of the international community to trust these two nations with nuclear weapons. They may very well destroy each other in a final spasm war with nuclear weapons. Millions and millions of innocent lives will be lost in a fanatical religious encounter as has happened in all religious wars in the past. The author of this timely book is striving hard to promote the idea of peace and survival, instead of the "quick and the dead" in a nuclear holocaust between India and Pakistan, as

he convincingly argues, the core issue between India and Pakistan is not Kashmir or cross-border terrorism. It is the nuclear arms race that could devastate the sub-continent.

Though this is not the first book by the author on nuclear weapons, this is his best book from the point of view of the message it conveys to the general public. Normally one has to wade through a plethora of acronyms and other technical phrases, apart from the bizarre concepts and theories, while reading a book on nuclear weapons.

However, with remarkable clarity and lucidity, he has written a highly readable book, which even the school children can grasp easily. As the government of India is planning to implement the recommendations of the UNESCO for a new course on peace studies at the school level, it is worthwhile to consider this important work as a text-book which would suit the curriculum for peace studies.

The author has succeeded in exposing the selective approach of some of India's top defense experts who try to distort even epics like *Mahabharat* or misinterpret the noble intentions of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in order to defend India's nuclear weapon programme. He has rendered a great service to the younger generation of India by providing them with a truthful account and a proper perspective of India's nuclear policy.

For instance, he quotes from the writings of K. Subramanyam, "India's most vocal nuclear hawk," to prove the extent of the deceptions and stratagems, these writers are indulging in. K. Subramanyam says: "The *Mahabharata* narrates how Arjuna acquired the *Divya Asthras* (the super weapons) for the sake of wisdom but did not use them in war. That needs to be the appropriate strategy for India in this imperfect world with man's boundless inhumanity towards fellow beings". With a straight face, K. Subramanyam distorted the views of Gandhiji, the apostle of peace and non-violence and justified India's nuclear weapon programme. He writes: "Gandhiji decided on resistance and defiance of British Law, as exemplified by the Salt Satyagraha. Today's Indian opposition to the imperialist nuclear regime is in the tradition of our freedom struggle. Our Pokhran test follows the example of Salt Satyagraha... Gandhiji has again become relevant in the struggle against nuclear imperialism" (p. 27).

The author, on the other hand gives us a glimpse of Gandhiji's reaction to atomic weapons: "... the violent men's eyes would be lit up with the prospect of much greater amount of destruction and death which he could now wreak." Similarly, he quoted Nehru saying: "... the use of the atom bomb might well be likened to setting a house on fire in order to rid of some insects and termites".

As the author points out, Nehru also wrote about India's nuclear policy with great moral conviction: "... we shall never use the atomic energy of evil purposes. There is no condition attached to this assurance, because once a condition is attached the value of such an assurance does not go very far". (p 29)

The author takes us through the inception of India's nuclear programme to the revolutionary changes that overtook India's nuclear policy in the 1990s, especially after Pokhran II, in 1998 when the world witnessed the emergence of two nuclear weapon states in South Asia (India and Pakistan). He succinctly describes the disastrous consequences of India and Pakistan, two

historical rivals, going nuclear, making the first decade of the 21st century, the most dangerous decade for South Asia.

He also refers to the contemporary scene in which another section of the international community (p. 32), the abolitionists consisting of retired celebrities like Robert Mac Namara, former US Defence Secretary under President Kennedy; Gen. Lee Butler, former commander of the US Strategic Air Command and 60 other retired Air Marshals and Admirals (including some from India), are campaigning for the total elimination of nuclear weapons and universal disarmament. Those from India are: Gen. V. R. Raghavan, Lt. Gen. Gurbir Mansingh, Air Marshal J. Zaheer and Admiral L. Ramadas.

India under the new dispensation projects the nuclear bomb “as the symbol of national virility and Hindu superiority”. (p35) The irony of this “bomb” according to the author is that it does not “dissuade”, or “deter” any one. Even Pakistan is not afraid of India’s nuclear weapons. Hence, the Kargil war and the increasing cross border terrorism. An attack on the Indian Parliament was inconceivable in the past. Even that has happened on December 13, 2001 after India acquired its nuclear capability. May be, many more devastating attacks might follow. And India, like the heavily nuclear armed US after November 11, 2000, will look helpless with its newly acquired nuclear weapon status.

The author reminds us about a profound observation of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, former President of India which is worth remembering: “We are at the cross roads of history. Man’s greatest enemy is not disease or famine or demographic explosion, but nuclear weapons which in war may completely destroy civilization andinflict grievous and lasting damage on the human race”. This is, indeed, a value-oriented study.

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