

THE SECURITY IMPERATIVE: PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR DETERRENCE AND DIPLOMACY

*Review by: Shah Meer**

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The book “The Security Imperative: Pakistan’s Nuclear Deterrence and Diplomacy” is a landmark book by Pakistan’s renowned ambassador Zamir Akram who is currently an advisor to the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) Pakistan. The motive of writing the book, as the author postulates, was to fill the void of literature in the domain of nuclear diplomacy of Pakistan especially left by most of the Pakistani authors, and to exhibit the actual face of Pakistan’s Nuclear Program to the world. The author argues that the book is based on 38 years of experience of the author in the foreign service of Pakistan and deeply relies on declassified official documents, interviews with key players and on secondary and empirical data.

The book deals with a wide array of topics. First, the author brings into consideration the internal and external security issues of Pakistan, especially Islamabad’s vulnerability to New Delhi’s conventional weapon superiority and assertions. Secondly, the work covers Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear technology both for civilian and military purposes, and the nuclear diplomacy in the face of international discrimination and structural constraints. Thirdly, the write up concerns with the evolving nuclear doctrines of South Asian nuclear rivals and strategic stability in South Asia. Finally, author discusses the future challenges to the national security of Pakistan.

The book also intends to explore the geopolitical developments and competing strategic demands of the then great powers such as the US and the USSR and its implications for Pakistan’s Strategic Program. Internal political tussle and lack of unified political stance in Pakistan especially in 1990s on any matter and its effects on strategic program is an integral debate of the book. Author emphasizes the nuclear discrimination, Pakistan faced after the successful nuclear tests and American support to India, the policy widely known as *De-Hyphenation* that led Pakistan to pursue *the Policy of Defiance* aimed at open confrontation to the growing Indo-US strategic

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cooperation on the one hand while building Pakistan's full spectrum deterrence capability on the other.

Given the subject of the book and author's expertise and more than three decades of experience in the field, the book has some strength unique to it. The book is the only account on Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy. Except for Zamir Akram, no Pakistani or international writer concerned with nuclear diplomacy of Pakistan has ever so far published. Moreover, the book is largely based on the author's personal experience spanning over 38 years in the Pakistan Foreign Service especially in nuclear and strategic affairs. This association of the author contributes to the strength of the book by allowing its reader to have first-hand knowledge based on primary data on the subject. Finally, unlike other accounts on Pakistan's nuclear program, the book presents detailed and comprehensive account. As compared to the books of Dr. Naeem Salik (*Learning to Live with the Bomb: Pakistan 1998-2016*) and Abdul Sattar (*Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2019*) to name a few, the work of Ambassador Akram is more detailed, and it covers every nuance of the nuclear program.

Nevertheless, the book has some inherent weaknesses too. The author does not discuss India's nuclear program comprehensively. It only focuses on the status driven aspect of it while significantly ignoring the bureaucratic and security aspects of Smiling Buddha. Besides, the chapter one of the book titled as *The Security Imperative* defines Pakistan's security imperative descriptively, lacking in-depth critical analyses. The chapter basically defines the security issues of Pakistan involving Pakistan's geographical and historical limitations, relations with India, Afghanistan, challenges to strategic stability and terrorism. Finally, the chapter fourteen discusses the future challenges to the national security of Pakistan along with way forward for managing the challenges. However, the way forward given in the chapter for dealing with the challenges to the national security of Pakistan is less comprehensive. The author only identifies the solutions but fails to provide a clear framework for achieving the ends.

To sum up, the book is a significant contribution to the nuclear literature of South Asia in general and Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy in particular. The book has widely filled the void left in the domain of nuclear diplomacy between Pakistan and India. The book, unlike other accounts on Pakistan's nuclear program, is comparatively more detailed and comprehensive. It covers every aspect of Pakistan's nuclear program in strategic, diplomatic, political, and economic realms, and depicts the real face of Pakistan's nuclear program. This book presents a counternarrative against western accounts on Pakistan's nuclear program and international propaganda. I would recommend the book to academics, students, and nuclear experts of South Asia.