

Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb: A Story of Defiance, Deterrence and Deviance, Abbas, Hassan. New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2018, 339.

*Ghazala Yasmin Jalil**

Hassan Abbas, in *Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb*, looks at how Pakistan acquired its nuclear weapons capability. However, the title is misleading since his major focus is on Abdul Qadeer Khan's proliferation activities. He delves into the motivations and proliferation activities of the Khan network and his dealing with Iran, North Korea and Libya. Essentially, he tries to decipher whether it was a rogue operation orchestrated by one person or was it a more complicated one involving other entities and persons. He asks contentious questions like what caused the proliferation from Pakistan through Khan's network.

Abbas uses the bureaucratic politics model, introduced by Graham Allison, to explain the acquisition of Pakistan's nuclear weapons technology and insights into network's proliferation activities. "The theory explains how Khan, along with some other players in the military and civilian bureaucracy, was able to manipulate the system and transfer nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya" (p. 12). He also takes a multitude of theories to make his arguments. He takes Peter Lavoy's theory of myth-makers i.e., individuals in prominent positions who promote and execute certain ideas. He also takes Samuel Huntington thesis of Clash of Civilisations and applies it to justify his argument.

The author argues that scholarly work on this issue has failed to look at the larger picture surrounding Khan's proliferation network. Besides the personality of Khan, he argues, Pakistan's political and security arena and as well as regional and international security dynamics were at play. Arguably, he asserts that it was a multitude of factors that were responsible. It included the civil-military relations in Pakistan; weak and unstable institution and structures; flawed decision-making processes; the impact of the Afghan war on Pakistan; threat perceptions from India and an unstable Pak-US

* *The reviewer is Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.*

relationship (p. 4). He, thus, contextualises the proliferation activities of individuals within a larger picture and argues that more complex dynamics were at play.

Chapter two essentially delves into India-Pakistan rivalry to make the argument that this relationship and the threat perceptions, thus, formulated Pakistan's strategic culture and made it a 'national security state' whereby security was the primary concern and the military penetrated into all aspects of the running of the country as well as decision-making at the highest level. It was this insecurity that led Pakistan to pursue nuclear deterrence. In chapter three, Abbas talks about Pakistan's journey to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Here, he emphasises the threat perceptions from India and how it affected the Pakistani psyche. He also talks about the Pakistani leaders like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and President General Zia-ul-Haq as well as Khan and other top scientists that worked as myth-makers to make it happen but acquired enough flexibility to reorient the policies and goals when needed.

Chapters four, five and six trace Pakistan's proliferation links with Iran, North Korea and Libya. Chapter seven delves into Khan's motivations which included monetary gains, his desire to be recognised as the father of the nuclear bomb, his rivalry with Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), his anti-India stance and the overall anti-US sentiments, according to Pakistan's nuclear myth-makers, were all factors that played a role in nuclear proliferation. Chapter eight argues that the periods of political instability and civil-military tussle provided fertile ground for the proliferation activities. He suggests that, although there were suspicions on the activities of Khan, they were overlooked because of his status as a national hero as well as his importance to the national security of the country.

The book makes dangerous assertions that point fingers at the elements within Pakistan and their possible involvement in the proliferation activities. This reeks of a Western-influenced perspective that makes assertions that are against Pakistan's security and interests. Therefore, the book must be read with a grain of salt. It is also noteworthy that the book was published by an Indian publishing house. The book was welcomed in the Indian academic circles and given prominence in the Indian media. The author quotes an interview in the book that, besides making the point of lax controls over Khan's activities, brings about another very important point.

The interviewee said: “Remember the real target was and still is, Pakistan and its nuclear programme, and not A Q Khan” (p. 197).

Once the reader reads the book with this Western view in mind where India’s nuclear weapon programme is being accepted and brought into the mainstream by making it part of all elite export control regimes. While Pakistan’s nuclear programme is dubbed at times as the “Islamic bomb,” at others as the “fastest-growing nuclear weapons programme” and in this book not so candidly, as a proliferation risk. It becomes apparent that, although done with an academic flair and delicately with convincing arguments, the book also follows this line of argument that Pakistan’s nuclear programme and the civil and military controls surrounding it are lax and problematic. This is a dangerous assertion that makes one suspicious of the intentions behind writing this book and the arguments that Abbas has used. Therefore, while the book has some useful information, it offers a certain Western perspective, that serves to endorse the line of thinking that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programme is problematic and a proliferation risk. One must, thus, keep the author’s potential biases in mind while reading the book.