

Report

**Book Launch
and
Public Talk
on
*“Overcoming Pakistan’s Nuclear Dangers”***

May 8, 2014



**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

Overcoming Pakistan's Nuclear Dangers

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) recently organized a public talk and book launch of "Overcoming Pakistan's Nuclear Dangers," by Mark Fitzpatrick, Director of the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Programme, International Institute of Strategic Studies, UK (IISS).

Ambassador (R) Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI, opened the event with his welcome remarks and underlined Pakistan's security compulsion vis-à-vis India in pursuing a nuclear weapons programme when all avenues to keep South Asia a nuclear free zone were exhausted.

Mark Fitzpatrick presented a perspective on dangers associated with Pakistan's nuclear weapons that was a refreshing break from most Western perspectives. He presented a balanced view on Pakistan's nuclear weapons – recognizing the legitimate dangers but at the same time conceding that the Western media tends to exaggerate them. Among the major concerns that he highlighted was the potential for an escalation of South Asia's strategic arms race, and the subsequent increased potential for theft, sabotage and especially nuclear terrorism; nuclear accidents; as well as concerns that Pakistan's nuclear-weapons technology might again be transferred to nuclear aspirants. Of serious concern was also the potential for a nuclear war, possibly triggered by terrorist activities such as in the case of the 2008 Mumbai attack. Fitzpatrick identified that while the danger of extremist groups getting hold of nuclear weapons was theoretically possible, the threat was exaggerated in Western media. Similarly, he did highlight the case of proliferation by the A. Q. Khan network but at the same time pointed out that Pakistan has established stringent export control measures and taken precautions to ensure that an incident like this did not happen again. For this reason, he argued, that more than a decade after the A.Q. Khan network was dismantled it was time to relieve Pakistan of the burden of the stigma that came with the proliferation scandal.

Fitzpatrick argued that the gravest of all nuclear dangers in South Asia is the intensifying nuclear arms competition and its potential for use. However, India and Pakistan have not taken steps to control the nuclear and missile arms race. Their competition is less about numbers than about competing capabilities. He termed the security competition as unidirectional in a triangular relationship between Pakistan, India and China whereby India's security concerns and arms competition were fueled by China, and Pakistan's by India. Consequently, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal presently estimated to be around 120 warheads is projected to be over 200 by year 2020, prompting great concern for major powers around the world. Fitzpatrick also opined that the region's perceived nonchalance towards the dangers of nuclear war were particularly troublesome for the international community. Among other factors he cited the doctrinal asymmetry whereby India threatened massive retaliation in response to even a Tactical Nuclear Weapon (TNW). Pakistan for its part, threatened the use of TNWs in response to a conventional attack by India. Latest developments such as India's limited war doctrine 'Cold Start' and the introduction of TNW 'Nasr' by Pakistan make South Asia a highly dangerous environment for an escalation into nuclear war. This danger is compounded by misperception and miscalculation in crises, a lack of adequate crisis resolution mechanisms in South Asia and the absence of dialogue on the factors behind nuclear risks.

Fitzpatrick gave three recommendations for overcoming Pakistan's nuclear dangers. First the government of Pakistan must attempt to suppress extremist groups in order to reduce the dangers of seizure of nuclear assets. His second recommendation was both innovative and controversial in the Western world. He recommended that Pakistan be offered a path to nuclear normalcy in the same way that India was de facto accepted into the nuclear club when it

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negotiated a civil nuclear deal with the US and was brought into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). However, at the same time he suggested that Pakistan should negotiate the Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty (FMCT) and sign the Comprehensive Cut Off Treaty (CTBT) to gain diplomatic high ground and freeze India's nuclear weapon potential which, if developed, would far exceed Pakistan's potential. In response to this suggestion, Pakistani audience as well as the chairman of ISSI voiced their reservations. Thirdly, the author recommended a path towards negotiation for India and Pakistan to address issues that may spark a nuclear war as well as exercise conflict management mechanisms.

Overall, Mark Fitzpatrick provided a very well informed, comprehensive and balanced picture of the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme and the dangers associated with it. The talk was followed by a question and answer session which raised issues like Pakistan's nuclear proliferation, path to nuclear normalcy and nuclear accidents and generated a vigorous debate. A question was asked about Mr. Fitzpatrick's controversial suggestion that Pakistan may provide a nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia to which he responded that at present Pakistan's strategic compulsions made it unlikely that this would happen but did suggest that dangers of proliferation exist since retired Pakistani nuclear scientists may be appropriated by countries seeking nuclear know how. Another comment from the audience refuted Mr. Fitzpatrick's hint that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are vulnerable to accidental detonation if hit by hostile elements during transit, assuring everyone that the extremely complex detonation mechanisms made this a zero possibility. To this the speaker responded that although the chances of nuclear detonation were unlikely, it was a possibility. Another comment from the audience expressed scepticism over the suggested steps for Pakistan's path to nuclear normalcy, arguing that Pakistan had done a lot in the past to meet the proposed goals for de facto entry into the nuclear club but the goals were changed so that Pakistan always fell short of the requirements. To this Mr. Fitzpatrick responded that his goal was that the Pakistan's path to normalcy should be discussed in the relevant forums in the West.

Chairman ISSI concluded the talk by thanking Mr. Mark Fitzpatrick for a comprehensive and insightful presentation on Pakistan's nuclear programme and the associated potential nuclear dangers.

- *Prepared by*

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