

BOOK REVIEW

Seeking the Bomb: Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation,
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(Princeton University Press, 2021), 493

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The book under review addresses two core questions. First, how states pursue nuclear weapons and why they select a particular strategy of proliferation over the alternatives. Second, how their choices of strategy affect nuclear proliferation and conflict dynamics. The theoretical framework developed by the author to address these questions is called Proliferation Strategy Theory. This theory hypothesizes that nuclear aspirants consider three variables while pursuing a nuclear program. These variables include external security constraints and opportunities, domestic context, and international non-proliferation constraints and opportunities. The author has identified four strategies that states pursue to become a nuclear weapon state. These strategies are described as hedging, sprinting, sheltered pursuit, and hiding. He has further divided hedging strategy into technical hedging, insurance hedging, and hard hedging.

The author explains hedging as a strategy in which a state intentionally refrains from actively developing nuclear weapons while simultaneously putting various pieces in place for a future nuclear weapon program, so that it will be easier to weaponize if it becomes necessary. Technical hedging is when a state lays the groundwork for a nuclear program. He uses the case studies of Argentina and Brazil as technical hedgers. Insurance hedging is taking steps to reduce the time for making the bomb, should a state need to develop nuclear weapons. The author puts Japan, and erstwhile West Germany in this category. Hard hedging is the attempt to become a threshold nuclear state with many pieces in place for a functional weapons program. An example of hard

hedger is India.

Sprinting has been defined by the author as an open and determined march to develop nuclear weapons capability as quickly as possible. The cases of US, USSR, UK, China, and France are put under the category of sprinters. Sheltered pursuit strategy is described in the book as one in which the state building nuclear weapons is shielded by tolerance and protection of a major superpower. Vipin put Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan in the category of sheltered pursuers. Hiding is a strategy in which a state prioritizes secrecy over speed fearing threat of prevention. South Africa, Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Taiwan are categorized as hiders.

The author places Pakistan in the category of sheltered pursuers alongside Israel. This categorization is factually incorrect. Israel's nuclear program was never put under sanctions, whereas, even before the onset of its nuclear program, Pakistan was hit by harsh sanctions by the US. In fact, after the Indian so-called Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) in 1974, the brunt was faced by Pakistan. Israel's nuclear program may have been a case of sheltered pursuit because of umbrella provided to it by the US. However, Pakistan's case is a different story. For instance, despite being under the IAEA safeguards, Canada cut off all its supplies and assistance to KANUPP power reactor. Also, despite a deal, France withheld the reprocessing facility to Pakistan under US pressure. On French insistence, Pakistan had even agreed to put the reprocessing plant under the IAEA safeguards.

In 1979, Pakistan was sanctioned by the US under Glenn and Symington Amendments. Economic and military aid to Pakistan was stopped completely. Interestingly, India was not put under Glenn and Symington sanctions despite testing a nuclear device and not signing the NPT. However, these sanctions were not able to stop Pakistan from pursuing nuclear technology. Islamabad had decided that come what may, if India gets a nuclear bomb Pakistan will have it. This resolve was due to existential threat faced by Pakistan at the hands of India. These measures against Pakistan by the US point to two essential contradictions in the author's argument. First, putting Pakistan and Israel in the same

category. Second, sanctions could have worked to stop Pakistan's nuclear program.

The author posits that before the invasion of Afghanistan by erstwhile USSR, Pakistan had been under the axe for pursuing a nuclear program. He argues that after the 25 December 1979 invasion, the US provided shelter to Pakistan's nuclear program to pursue its interests in Afghanistan. Washington eased sanctions on Pakistan for pursuing its own interests. However, a whole argument cannot be built on the basis of this one single point that Pakistan was provided a shelter by the US.

The US banked on the assumption that Islamabad will not be able to indigenously fabricate a nuclear fuel cycle and nuclear bomb. The US believed that it could achieve its objectives in Afghanistan well before Pakistan developed nuclear weapons capability and then Washington – after achieving its objectives in Afghanistan – can put pressure on Pakistan's nuclear program. Pressler amendments in 1985 and subsequent sanctions on Pakistan in 1990 – a year after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan – back this argument. US believed that a third-world country like Pakistan could not develop nuclear capability on its own and sanctioning Pakistan would only hurt US interests and not Pakistan's determination. Sanctions or no sanctions, Pakistan was not going to stop its nuclear program. However, if India had scrapped its nuclear program, then Pakistan would not have developed nuclear weapons. Islamabad's proposal of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) in South Asia supports this argument.

The author also claims that US tipping Pakistan of an impending strike by India or Israel was an active shelter. There has been no proof that India or Israel was going to attack Kahuta. Nevertheless, even if they were thinking about that, it was near to impossible to attack Pakistan's nuclear facilities without risking a response from Pakistan. India may have used every tool in its closet to hinder Pakistan's nuclear program. Basing arguments on events that did not take place takes the credibility out of the argument. The author wrote, "It is reasonable to believe that Pakistan would not have been able to attain a nuclear weapons capability

as easily or as quickly as it did without American shelter” [Page 220]. It shows that even he believes that Pakistan could have eventually achieved nuclear weapon capability and India could not have stopped Pakistan without risking an all-out war. Putting Pakistan in the category of sheltered pursuers is exaggeration and thus, is a disingenuous effort by the author.

While discussing the Indian nuclear weapon program, the author gives the title, “India: The reluctant Nuclear Weapons Power.” There has been no evidence, reason, or truth to this assumption that India had been a reluctant nuclear armed state. Contrarily, there is sufficient evidence available that suggests that India was not a reluctant nuclear power but was quite ambitious for achieving the nuclear power status. For instance, Dr George Perkovich writes in his book titled *India’s Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* that India developed nuclear weapons for prestige and to revise global order in its favor.

The author Narang argues that Nehru was both an idealist and a realist at the same time about the idea of nuclear weapons. He fails to mention that Nehru was an idealist only in his speeches and not in actions – he was a realist who provided the base for Indian nuclear weapons program. Indian nuclear weapon program started right at its inception and the motivation for that was Nehru’s quest for Indian role as a great power.

It was a major part of Indian strategy to lie about the reality of its nuclear program. India became a nuclear armed state in 1974. No sanctions were imposed on India in the aftermath of PNE or any even before that by the US. The point to ponder upon is that if India was not a nuclear weapon state, why did it not sign NPT or acquiesced to the NWFZ proposal of Pakistan? The author also points out that Indira Gandhi was one of the original proponents of NPT regime. Jawaharlal Nehru was also the proponent of a stand-still agreement on nuclear testing but, at the time of ratification, India refused to sign the CTBT. India’s dubious behavior has introduced nuclear weapons in South Asia.

The author, at various places, mentions that Indian Prime Minis-

ters – Jawaharlal Nehru, Indra Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi – abhorred nuclear weapons, however, he fails to mention that they did not take any concrete steps to keep nuclear weapons out of the region. India always wanted to become a nuclear weapon state at any cost despite the non-existence of any kind of an existential threat.

The categorization of Pakistan as a sheltered pursuer and downplaying of the Indian pursuit of nuclear weapons from its inception casts doubts on analysis of the author and reflects his bias. For example, in conclusion, the author has designated Pakistan's nuclear behavior risky that is provoking India and has a forward-leaning nuclear strategy because of its Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs). However, in his work, *India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrines, and Capabilities*, Vipin Narang describes Pakistan's TNWs as a response to Indian Cold Start Doctrine (CSD). Thus, in his own words Pakistan's nuclear strategy is not a forward-leaning strategy, rather, a defensive and reactive strategy and points at the contradictory claims in this book.

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