
Cheema’s purpose is to understand the “inspirational base” for India’s nuclear weapons strategy: he doubts that it was the conflict with China in September 1962, followed by the first Chinese atomic bomb test in October 1964, which led to decisions in late 1964 to prepare a bomb for testing in India. He offers evidence that Indian ideas about a bomb option were formed in the mid-1950s, he says, between the “realist” Jawaharlal Nehru and physicist-institution-builder Homi Bhabha. He then shows that India’s clarity contrasts strongly with Pakistan’s bomb program, which was suggested in 1965 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (and surely discussed within Pakistan’s smaller nuclear community), but not given powerful or sufficient impetus until after the military defeat in the 1971 war with India. More pointedly, a Pakistani plan was only fully and secretly accelerated after the surprising May 1974 Indian test in the Rajasthan desert, carried out not by military officers, but by scientists. Moreover, India’s continuous refusal to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty of 1968-70 was always explained as being due to its being discriminatory (which it was and is) but, says Cheema, through this principled refusal to sign India was keeping its nuclear bomb test option open, right through to the end of the century. This Indian refusal was probably an inspirational basis for Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, too.

Cheema worked with this premise: “Since independence, both countries have tried their best to maintain military forces beyond what their levels of economic development would permit, by inducting most modern conventional weapon systems supplemented by the acquisition of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles” (531). He charts the lengthy stages of acceleration and pausing of the nuclear programs, from about 1950 to 2008. The original research for this book, including interviews in India in 1989, was presented in his doctoral dissertation at the University of London in 1991. He then revisited and refreshed that research following the 1998 nuclear tests in South Asia, working for ten years in Pakistan, the UK and the US prior to its publication, this length of time accounting for its thoroughness. Many dissertations become books; some (including mine) await this moment for many years. Cheema is to be congratulated for persevering with what was, prior to 1998, thought to be a rather obscure subject. He is now, in 2011, the head of the department of strategic and nuclear studies at the National Defence University in Islamabad. Consequently he has been in regular contact with strategic concepts and thinkers in Pakistan, and irregularly in India, for two decades.
Stressing his desire for balance and dispassion, Cheema says that most post-1998 literature on Indian nuclear policy is “overwritten” from political or proliferation perspectives, so he decided to stress and test the concepts and strategies of deterrence, and their effects in South Asia, including the now-famous stability-instability paradox. His treatment of the 1999, and 2001-02 military confrontations between the two countries, with small nuclear arsenals and missiles ready in the background, is most astute and, like the rest of the book, should interest all international readers. He is writing for a special audience in Pakistan too, closing the manuscript just before the end of the Pervez Musharraf military government, reasoning with them to adopt a more balanced and informed view of India’s conventional force superiority and to understand that although Pakistan’s nuclear capability does provide considerable deterrence against India, it is not sufficient on its own, and there are still risks and dangers (even from accidents and mistakes) on both sides. He cites a senior general saying that Pakistan could but should not become complacent just because it has a nuclear arsenal. Cheema refers to a “deterrent optimists’ lobby” (8), but we must imagine their disagreement with the “deterrent pessimists” in the “anti-nuclear lobbies” (382-88); much more could be said from his vantage point about that disagreement. In the end I conclude that Cheema is probably a “deterrence optimist with caution,” though he seems balanced enough not to overly commit himself to either or any of the lobbies.

As always, when the writing ends the manuscript disappears into the jaws of time. Thus Cheema did not see the book edited by Scott Sagan on the stability-instability paradox (Inside Nuclear South Asia, Stanford University Press, 2010, for a review see Pacific Affairs 84, no. 2 [2011]: 380-382) in time to include it here. And there are some omissions; neither Haider Nizamani’s The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan (2000) nor Itty Abraham’s The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb (1998) are mentioned, though both give excellent historical grounding in the reasoning and practices which were essential to the “inspirational base” of India’s (and Pakistan’s) nuclear programs. Cheema’s important work is all-embracing, and so packed with useful details, lists, footnotes, texts of treaties and policies for researchers that it is difficult to summarize; not only are the targets and weapons listed but also all types of missiles, jet fighters and bombers, which provide the delivery of the weapons, plus the command and control systems.

Historic irony spares no author (including this reviewer), so while Cheema’s analysis of nuclear deterrence doctrines was coming out from the press, a surprise flood, not a surprise military attack, washed away 40 percent of Pakistan’s GDP in 2010, and citizen-enemies of the state within Pakistan skillfully and successfully attacked its key institutions, “undeterred” by formidable police and military surveillance. Just to safeguard its own nuclear installations had already become, within a few
years of Pakistan’s first nuclear tests, that state’s most costly, continuous and demanding challenge.

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This ambitious book explains why India and Pakistan have had different experiences of democracy since they gained independence from Britain in 1947. Philip Oldenburg argues that at the heart of democratic government are elected politicians able to control the bureaucratic and military wings of the state. The dominance of Indian politicians has not seriously been questioned whereas in Pakistan the military have escaped civilian control. While this is a central theme of the book Oldenburg considers carefully how democracy might be defined and conceptualised. Also, he explores how democracy is understood and supported (or not) by ordinary citizens in each country.

The book is organised in a roughly chronological fashion with the first part of the book covering the period 1947 to 1977 and the second part covering the period 1977 to 2009. This division is used because Oldenburg argues that in 1977 there was a possibility that Pakistan might deepen its democratic development and India might continue its authoritarian experiment. Instead, the opposite happened and the two paths diverged in important ways. The military has become further entrenched in Pakistan, while India moved away from authoritarian rule. This two-part structure also includes discussions of important explanatory factors that might have an impact on democratic development, including colonial legacies, political leadership, institutional arrangements, social structure, religious allegiances and external influences. Oldenburg argues that religious factors have been unimportant, if not politically, then certainly with regard to democratic development. On external factors Oldenburg concludes that India has been little affected by outside powers, given its more favourable security position. In contrast, Pakistan has been much less secure and turned to the United States (US) for support. Oldenburg judges that military aid and political support from the US strengthened the armed forces in Pakistan. In doing so he considers the US reinforced a set of institutions already hostile to democracy but did not inspire the turn towards authoritarianism. On the issue of social structure Oldenburg does not find evidence that would convince him that democratic development is driven by social forces. In each case he concludes that economic and social classes are highly fragmented. The results are states that are largely autonomous.