

Achin Vanik, *After the Bomb*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan. 2015. 213 pages. ₹575.

Ali Ahmed, *India's Doctrine Puzzle—Limiting War in South Asia*. New Delhi: Routledge. 2014. 240 pages. ₹695.

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These two books deal with India's nuclear policy. Both appear sceptical of the security rationale of Indian nuclear weapons. Although both the books look doubtful about the security role of India's nuclear arsenals, the two authors have adopted two different approaches to examine 'Nuclear India'. Vanaik discusses the issue in a broad nuclear disarmament framework while Ahmed wants to resolve the puzzle of the evolving limited conventional war military doctrine. Vanaik has adopted the classical or orthodox anti-nuclear perspective in which a nuclear weapon is an unnecessary evil. Ahmed narrates the issue from a military perspective, and explores how the nuclear arsenal has added complexity to the making of the limited war doctrine.

Vanaik has gone into some of the issues generating curiosity in the global security community in a somewhat incoherent and disjointed way. For example, the existence of India's nuclear weapon is a big conundrum for the community. The author has 'unravelling' the nuclear elite of India; otherwise, the group is referred to as the small but powerful nuclear bomb lobby. The book has also dealt with 10 dilemmas of nuclear deterrence and stability in South Asia. Several writers on nuclear issues have been writing on those dilemmas for years, and Vanaik's book includes some of these discussions. The book touches on nuclear terrorism and has also proposed a plan of action. The plan of action has a number of fascinating unilateral, bilateral (India–Pakistan), multilateral and global measures.

Ahmed's book, somewhat more coherent, deliberates on different facets of the limited war doctrine-making process. The book has a collection of different concepts/theories of limited war, but ironically, it ignores or overlooks the concept of limited nuclear war that was invented immediately after the advent of the nuclear weapon age.

Indeed, both major issues—nuclear disarmament and limited war between two nuclear weapon countries located in South Asia—are dominating the nuclear discourse of India and the world. Vanaik's book has given an overview of the global force structure and doctrinal and other factors that may fulfil the dream of a nuclear weapon-free world. Similarly, limited war between India and Pakistan is considered a possibility in the dominant discourse of the Indian strategic community, but Pakistan and the Western strategic communities appear sceptical that the conventional war may not escalate to the nuclear level.

India's 'Cold Start' doctrine is a much talked about element of India–Pakistan nuclear deterrence. It is not an official doctrine, and this fact has been stated countless times. Yet, it is considered 'official' in some quarters. Ahmed in his book has casually treated the status of the Cold Start doctrine. However, officially, a policy/doctrine exists, which considers that there is scope for fighting a conventional war or conventional wars between two nuclear neighbours. The doctrine is supportive of limited war. Tired of Pakistan's terror strikes, which get a nuclear shield, India wants to punish Pakistan in a conventional war. India enjoys conventional superiority vis-a-vis Pakistan and the duration of such a war could be shorter. Ahmed, in his book, elaborates this aspect when he discusses limited war in South Asia.

Will there be a nuclear war between India and Pakistan? Will Indian doctrine of limited war be rendered useless by the Pakistani posture or policy of First Use and the use of tactical nuclear weapons? Actually, Pakistan's posturing is aimed at deterring possible India's conventional intervention after Pakistan's provocation. The Pakistani regime is aware of India's retaliation. If it is done quickly, Pakistan may suffer massive damage. International public opinion will be in India's favour as no country after Japan has been attacked with nuclear weapons in the last seven decades. However, both books fail to highlight this reality properly. Of course, any war, nuclear or conventional, needs to be avoided.

Unfortunately, both the authors see the Indian nuclear bomb only in the context of the flawed South Asia nuclear paradigm. Although Vanaik has given some room to the nuclear policies of countries outside South Asia, yet India and South Asia dominate the book. In this account, the South Asian region does not have more than two nuclear weapons states. Other countries in the region are not nuclear weapons states. Even the use of the term 'India–Pakistan nuclear relationship' instead of 'South Asian nuclearization' misses the real dynamics of nuclear India because China is overlooked. Nuclear China is a major factor in shaping India's choice for nuclearization. If the term Southern Asia that includes China is used, any regional reference or regional discussion on nuclear issues may acquire some meaning.

What is the role of the civil society in formulating India's nuclear policy in general and the limited war doctrine in particular? Both the books have underlined the role of Indian civil society and even foreign individuals in contributing to India's policy. Ahmed mentions that the origin of the idea of India's limited war with its nuclear adversary may be traced to the seminar at the New Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Recently civil society is debating revising the nuclear doctrine. Some are arguing even to change 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons, the much cherished component of India's nuclear doctrine.

Ahmed has described various forces shaping the limited war doctrine. The book assumes significance in the light of the new voices for change in the doctrine. Both books allude to the Bharatiya Janata Party government's contribution to introducing a new nuclear age. Ahmed uses 'cultural nationalism' to refer to aggressive nationalism indirectly. In fact, both the authors speak of changes either introduced in the nuclear policy or expected to come in it. Actually, the strong demand for the revision of nuclear doctrine comes from the strategic community and the organizations directly involved in India's security management. A political party like the Bharatiya Janata Party has to balance and accommodate these demands and interests.

Somehow discussions on strategic culture have also downplayed the strong support nuclear disarmament has in the Indian strategic community and in India's strategic culture. Nuclear India has to accommodate global and universal nuclear disarmament. When the Conference on Disarmament concludes a Nuclear Weapons Convention, India will not surprise the world by staying away from it. Already, India had shown its strong support to disarmament treaties of two other weapons of mass destruction. India will not go for any regional disarmament measure like South Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, as Vanaik has explicitly stated that he is against unilateral disarmament of India or Pakistan. And for India, a regional disarmament means unilateral disarmament.

As the world has stopped even paying lip service to nuclear disarmament, Vanaik's book may give some idea of the global security scenario after the bomb. In addition to it, discussions on the Indian nuclear elite provide a different perspective on the nuclear decision-making process of India. Needless to add, a strong counter-perspective to his understanding exists in the Indian strategic community. Similarly, Ahmed's work may provide an insight into the puzzle of India's nuclear and conventional war doctrines. He has used a number of documents and papers on India's limited war otherwise not known to scholars. A nuclear war is a remote possibility. The nuclear world is stable, but of course, a world without nuclear weapons will be more secure and stable.

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