



India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation

By George Perkovich

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In May 1998, India shocked the world—and many of its own citizens—by detonating five nuclear weapons in the Rajasthan desert. Why did India bid for nuclear weapon status at a time when 149 nations had signed a ban on nuclear testing? What drove India's new Hindu nationalist government to depart from decades of nuclear restraint, a control that no other nation with similar capacities had displayed? How has U.S. nonproliferation policy affected India's decision making?

India's Nuclear Bomb is the definitive, comprehensive history of how the world's largest democracy, has grappled with the twin desires to have and to renounce the bomb. Each chapter contains significant historical revelations drawn from scores of interviews with India's key scientists, military leaders, diplomats and politicians, and from declassified U.S. government documents and interviews with U.S. officials. Perkovich teases out the cultural and ethical concerns and vestiges of colonialism that underlie India's seemingly paradoxical stance.

India's nuclear history challenges leading theories of why nations pursue and hang onto nuclear weapons, raising important questions for international relations theory and security studies. So, too, the blasts in Rajasthan have shaken the foundations of the international nonproliferation system. With the end of the Cold War and an even more chaotic international scene, Perkovich's analysis of an alternative model is timely, sobering, and vital.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Nobody expected India--the country that produced pacifist leader Mahatma Gandhi--to go nuclear so soon or so suddenly. But that's what it did in May 1998, detonating five nuclear weapons, to the world's astonishment. George Perkovich offers a comprehensive survey of how India got the bomb, starting with early technical efforts dating back 50 years and concluding with a full treatment of exactly what India did in the Rajasthan desert and why. He challenges the conventional wisdom holding that countries pursue nuclear power mainly for security reasons. Perkovich says the motives, at least in India's case (and, he believes, in the case of other developing countries), were much more complex. An overwhelming desire for global recognition and national pride trumped everything else. He suggests the United States might have done more to head off recent events had the nation not lacked a coherent policy toward South Asia thanks to cold-war politics. India's rivalry with Pakistan didn't help, either; it's extremely difficult to be on very good terms with both nations at once. The footnotes are extensive and the details sometimes can seem overwhelming, but the book's topic may be one of the most important issues of the 21st century. In short, George Perkovich and *India's Nuclear Bomb* are to India what Richard Rhodes and *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* are to the United States. --John J. Miller

From Library Journal

Perkovich (W. Alton Jones Foundation) painstakingly describes the evolution of India's nuclear arsenal from 1947 to 1998. The stockpile resulted not from military need but rather from the efforts of India's scientific community and an extremely small number of politicians. Opposition groups, including several prime ministers, lambasted the diversion of funds from education, health, sanitation, and welfare programs to building bombs. Perkovich interweaves the complex relationships among India, the United States, Pakistan, and China regarding nuclear bombs, pointing out that none remained steadfast to principles. The work concludes with sets of principles that are then applied to other nuclear programs. Essential for any library concerned with nuclear issues. A Donald Johnson, Univ. of Minnesota Lib., Minneapolis
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From Kirkus Reviews

A detailed narrative and assessment of India's 50-year debate over nuclear weapons development. In May 1998 India joined the ranks of the world's nuclear powers when it detonated five atomic weapons. In this penetrating and extremely well-researched and -documented study, Perkovich, Director of the Secure World Program of the W. Alton Jones Foundation, analyzes the complex and conflicting domestic interests and viewpoints that continue to fuel India's nuclear debate. While the Western-oriented "Realist" school maintains that states act purely in their national interest and defense in an anarchic international setting, Perkovich dissents, claiming this assumption ignores the specifics of India's case. Why did it act when it did, why not sooner? Most of India's history has been typified by nuclear restraint, however labored. On the one hand, India has striven to be a stronger moral force than the West and the former communist world have been. Thus it long resisted the testing of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, India has pursued a quest to join the superpowers ranks. If superpowers have nuclear weapons, then India should have nuclear weapons. These contradictory poles have determined India's nuclear policy. Pressured by an influential domestic scientific community and often incensed by the West's arrogant demands for non-proliferation in the developing world while maintaining its own arsenal, India's leaders from Nehru on, each of them ambivalent about nuclear weaponry, have allowed research but never actual testing until May 1998. Perkovich takes the reader inside this long history, revealing personalities, institutions, events, and processes generally little

known in the West but vital to understanding India's nuclear policy. He arrives at conclusions that are often startling and controversial like his suggestion that India's democracy may have been a stumbling block to nuclear restraint. An excellent study, showing a subtle and balanced understanding of the nuclear predicament of both India and of the developing world in general. (23 b&w photos) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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