

2001

A Nuclear Strategy for India

Thomas G. Mahnken

Raja Menon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Mahnken, Thomas G. and Menon, Raja (2001) "A Nuclear Strategy for India," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 54 : No. 4 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol54/iss4/19>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

international in nature, piracy, if left unchecked, will eventually provide the catalyst for future international crises and conflicts. This is a worthwhile read for anyone who is interested in or responsible for maritime security.

JAMES F. MURRAY
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Naval War College



Menon, Raja. *A Nuclear Strategy for India*. New Delhi: Sage, 2000. 316pp. \$45

Indian officers have written remarkably little about nuclear strategy in the more than quarter-century since India first demonstrated its ability to produce nuclear weapons. The cloak of secrecy that has traditionally surrounded India's nuclear program, New Delhi's declared policy of maintaining a nonweaponized nuclear stockpile, and a lack of interest in nuclear issues on the part of the Indian officer corps stifled discussion of nuclear issues. It is notable that the two most comprehensive accounts of India's nuclear and missile programs written to date—George Perkovich's *India's Nuclear Bomb* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999) and Raj Chengappa's *Weapons of Peace* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2000)—were written by an American scholar and an Indian journalist, respectively. India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear weapon tests changed all that, bringing New Delhi's nuclear program into the open and triggering a new wave of thinking and writing about nuclear strategy. Raja Menon's *A Nuclear Strategy for India* represents one of the first serious attempts by an Indian officer to address the doctrinal and force posture issues arising from India's decision to go nuclear. The

author, a naval officer who retired in 1994 as Assistant Chief of the Indian Naval Staff for Operations, is well qualified to write on this subject.

Menon begins by reviewing the history of New Delhi's nuclear program and the development, such as it is, of Indian nuclear strategy. He is sharply critical of the Indian government and armed forces' traditional approach toward nuclear weapons. He argues that decisions on nuclear weapons have been fueled by a mixture of political rhetoric and organizational politics but have occurred in a strategic vacuum. The secrecy that has always surrounded the Indian nuclear weapon program has prevented a dialogue between the political leadership, the military, and defense scientists on strategy and force posture issues. He argues that rational analysis, not emotion, should guide Indian nuclear policy.

The remainder of the book offers just such an analysis. Menon begins by giving the reader a primer on nuclear strategy, one that borrows heavily from U.S. literature on nuclear deterrence of the 1970s and 1980s. One wonders just how applicable this literature was to the problems the United States faced during the Cold War, let alone those India may face in the twenty-first century. Clearly, Indian thinking about nuclear weapons is still in its infancy.

Menon's prescriptions for India make up the most interesting part of the book. While commentators in the United States have tended to focus on the Indo-Pakistani nuclear rivalry, the author makes it clear that it is China's nuclear and missile programs that drive New Delhi's force posture. He is particularly concerned that a modernized Chinese nuclear arsenal carried atop highly accurate missiles will render fixed targets in

India increasingly vulnerable. He therefore argues for a nuclear force that relies upon mobility to ensure its survivability.

The final section of Menon's book is a thorough discussion of the nuclear options open to India. He recommends that India adopt a rail-garrison, land-based missile force until it can shift to reliance upon ballistic missile-carrying submarines by 2020 (a date that seems extremely optimistic, given the troubled history of India's indigenous submarine programs). He also argues that India should field cruise missiles for both conventional and nuclear missions.

Menon is skeptical of the contention that nuclear weapons themselves offer an effective deterrent. He argues that a state's force posture and command and control arrangements are also important. Menon calls for extensive changes in Indian military decision making, suggesting arrangements that draw heavily upon those of the United States. He believes, for example, that India needs to adopt its own version of the national command authority and Joint Chiefs of Staff to command and control its nuclear forces. He also argues that India needs to codify its targeting policy in its own version of the Single Integrated Operational Plan.

A Nuclear Strategy for India is likely only the first of many efforts to think through the implications of India's decision to go nuclear. While but a first step, it provides the groundwork upon which others will doubtless build.

THOMAS G. MAHNKEN
Naval War College



Wickham, John A. *Korea on the Brink: From the "12/12 Incident" to the Kwangju Uprising, 1979-1980*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ. Press, 1999. 240pp. \$20

For some reason, Korea is a major blind spot in U.S. thinking about world affairs. Public commemoration of the Korean War's fiftieth anniversary is almost nonexistent compared to the attention paid to the Second World War in the first half of the 1990s. Today, the Cold War lingers on in East Asia with the continuing division of the peninsula, which remains one of the locations in which the United States is most likely to go to war in the immediate future. Yet the American interaction with Korea is in many ways a success story in U.S. foreign policy, at least in the southern half of the country. The Republic of Korea has become an industrial, market-driven economy with a civilian-led democratic government that enjoys grassroots support among its citizenry. The road to this state, however, was fraught with extreme danger. From the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, there was a nearly continuous real possibility of war on the peninsula again. One of the periods of maximum danger was between 1979 and 1981, in the wake of the assassination of President Park Chung-hee and a military coup that toppled the civilian successor government.

General John A. Wickham was the commander of U.S. forces in Korea during this period, and this book is a memoir of his efforts to keep the United States and South Korea focused on their combat missions despite the turmoil of the time. Even though Wickham was a military commander, he could not turn a blind eye to politics. The South Korean army had become thoroughly politicized after