



**Malcolm M. Craig.** *America, Britain and Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Programme, 1974-1980: A Dream of Nightmare Proportions.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 319 pp. \$109.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-319-51879-4.

**Reviewed by** Jayita Sarkar

**Published on** H-Diplo (April, 2018)

**Commissioned by** Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Malcolm Craig's examination of Anglo-American partnership to stall Pakistan's nuclear weapons program is a significant contribution to the existing scholarship on nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation in South Asia. Spanning six years—three US administrations and three different UK governments—the book accomplishes what very few studies have, namely, demonstrating the volatility in the "special relationship" on the question of nonproliferation. Divided into eight chapters, the book begins with India's 1974 nuclear explosion and concludes with the election of Ronald Reagan and the last months of Jimmy Carter's presidency. Craig's monograph is an astute study of the challenges that the economic instabilities of the 1970s posed to American goals of preventing nuclear proliferation and the internal battles within the United States and the United Kingdom to harmonize the economic goals of seeking financial profit with the political goal of nonproliferation. Like most first academic books, this study is based on Craig's doctoral dissertation at the University of Edinburgh, which he completed in 2014. It is detailed, clear, extremely well researched, and sharply argued.

It is a book that exemplifies the limitations of American global power in the precarious times of the 1970s. The challenges posed by globalization—

specifically, West European and Japanese economic competition—strained the US economy culminating in the 1971 "Nixon shock" that ended the Bretton Woods monetary system of fixed exchange rates. A little over two years later, the OPEC embargo precipitated the 1973 oil price shock, leading to widespread energy shortages in the United States and Western Europe. Washington and its transatlantic allies had major differences over the future of the global economic order and the steps that could stabilize it. The end of the dollar convertibility to gold and the widespread "stagflation" reflected weaknesses in US power and its constrained ability to influence the behavior of its close allies.

India's 1974 nuclear explosion, therefore, came at an inopportune moment for US policymakers. New Delhi's action demonstrated the ability of countries to legally obtain equipment and technologies from the global atomic marketplace to effectively build a nuclear device and thereby foregrounded the need for a concerted nonproliferation effort for policy harmonization. A concerted effort for nonproliferation meant convincing other suppliers not to trade in technologies, equipment, materials, and know-how that could lead to proliferation by the recipient states. In the age of energy crisis, rising inflation and unem-

ployment, and a consequent balance of payments crisis in the largest economies of the Western world, a harmonized set of policies to reduce profitable nuclear exports was easier said than done. It brought Washington in direct conflict with some of its closest West European allies.

Malcolm Craig's study shows that even the "special relationship" between Washington and London was not above these tensions. Craig demonstrates how this brought the Department of Trade and Industry (DoT) in confrontation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) within the UK government. The former found British cooperation with the United States on non-proliferation hurtful to its economic interests while the latter prioritized political benefits of the "special relationship." British economic interests drove UK's offer to sell Jaguars— nuclear-capable light attack aircraft—to India despite concerns that it could threaten Pakistan and thereby push Islamabad further toward developing nuclear weapons.

Apart from Anglo-American tensions on non-proliferation, three takeaways from this book that stood out are the following. First, Craig identifies the correlation between conventional arms exports and nuclear proliferation/nonproliferation. He argues that the UK-India Jaguar deal raised challenges for US nonproliferation efforts toward Pakistan by making Islamabad anxious about an Indian nuclear deterrent, thereby providing impetus to Pakistan's nuclear weapons development. Similarly, the Ford administration decided to offer light attack aircraft to Islamabad in order to address the latter's security concerns, in the hope that this might stop Pakistan's proliferation. Second, the author breaks new ground through his discussion of the "Islamic bomb," which he argues was a "meme" canvassed by the media in Europe and the United States but largely ignored by pragmatic policymakers in both Washington and London. The "Islamic bomb" meme was based on the irrational fear that Pakistan's nuclear weapons

would be shared with other countries of the Islamic world, not as a result of a nuclear domino (or reactive proliferation) but through joint financing of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program by oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and Libya, and Islamabad's sharing of the "final products" (i.e., nuclear bombs) with its funders. Through this examination of the Islamic bomb, Craig masterfully connects the cultural factors with the strategic ones—a rare feat, and rarely well executed in studies on questions of nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation—thereby effectively linking "high politics" with important social factors. Third, although the book foregrounds US-UK cooperation and competition vis-à-vis Pakistan's nuclear weapons development, the study is aware of the challenges to nonproliferation that emerged from continental Europe. Paris, Bonn, and Bern among others were keen to supply technologies, materials, and equipment to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. This suppliers-led challenge to US nonproliferation efforts in the 1970s needs more scholarly attention although this is gradually changing.[1]

The author does not offer some key answers, which can befuddle the readers. First, why did the United Kingdom largely cooperate with the United States on nonproliferation, even though there were clear economic reasons not to? Was it the outcome of several series of internal battles between the FCO and the DoT that were repeatedly won by the former? Or was there an economic logic that drove British willingness to cooperate with the United States to prevent proliferation? The DoT was concerned that if London did not provide materials to Pakistan, then the West Germans or another supplier would, and the British would lose out. By the reverse logic then, British cooperation with the United States on nonproliferation that included multilateral export controls of the Nuclear Suppliers Group to prevent other suppliers from providing assistance to Pakistan and other recipient states might have a strong economic rationale. This rationale could have

strengthened the FCO's position vis-à-vis the DoT in those internal battles. The book seems to largely push forward the argument that London was in favor of nonproliferation (except when it was not for economic reasons). But we do not get a picture of whether UK's overall affinity for this particular policy choice was driven most by political, strategic, and/or economic factors.

Second, Craig does not distinguish between sensitive and dual-use nuclear assistance. Sensitive nuclear assistance involves technologies, equipment, and materials that are *direct* pathways to the bomb, like uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, while dual-use assistance comprises those that have both military and civilian uses, for example industrial spare parts useful across various sectors. This is particularly evident in the discussion of Swiss nuclear assistance to Pakistan. Bern was abiding by the "minimum conditions" under the Nuclear Suppliers Group guidelines in 1980 and thereby providing dual-use assistance to the centrifuge program of Pakistan led by A. Q. Khan. Readers would benefit from a discussion on sensitive nuclear assistance (based on the nature of the exports) and nuclear assistance to "sensitive" countries (based on real or perceived end use of the exports by the recipient at times irrespective of the nature of exports). Since the latter is a political decision—namely, the determination of end use on the basis of the intent of the recipient state—not all supplier states agreed with the attributions made by US policymakers, like the Swiss. This is an important part of the nonproliferation puzzle that needs to be explained.

Third, the meme of the "Islamic bomb" is not merely reflective of the culture of Islamophobia in the Western media but also of the conflictual politics between the global North and the global South at the time. The 1973 oil price shock, when a handful of oil-rich Muslim countries of the Middle East collectively placed an embargo on oil exports, precipitated an energy crisis and massive

economic turmoil in the West. The calls for economic redistribution by the G-77 through a New International Economic Order underlined the tense relations between the West and the Rest, and the "Third World's new insurgency."<sup>[2]</sup> The media-led popular fear of the Islamic bomb developed by Pakistan and shared with the *umma* was restricted to Middle Eastern states with an abundance of oil. The neglect of the centrality of oil politics and its influence in creating the cultural imaginary of the Islamic bomb is a missed opportunity in this book.

Nevertheless, the intellectual contributions of this book outweigh its flaws. Future scholarly works by the author and others in the field will hopefully address some of the above issues. It is an important book for scholars of twentieth-century international history, post-1947 South Asia, the history of foreign relations, transatlantic relations, and those passionate about politics of nuclear weapons and nuclear technologies. On a topic like Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, where primary sources are scarce and secondary sources are dominated by insider accounts with their usual biases, Craig's meticulously researched monograph fills an important lacuna in the extant scholarship.

#### Notes

[1]. William Burr, "A Scheme of 'Control': The United States and the Origins of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, 1974–1976," *The International History Review* 36, no. 2 (2014): 252-76; Or Rabinowitz and Jayita Sarkar, "It Isn't Over Until the Fuel Cell Sings': A Reassessment of US and French Pledges of Nuclear Assistance in the 1970s," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, nos. 1-2 (2018): 275-300; and Jayita Sarkar, "Whack-a-Mole: American Policy to Curb West European Nuclear Exports, 1974-1978," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, forthcoming.

[2]. Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Rela-*

tions in the 1970s (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 176.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

**Citation:** Jayita Sarkar. Review of Craig, Malcolm M. *America, Britain and Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Programme, 1974-1980: A Dream of Nightmare Proportions*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. April, 2018.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=51141>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.