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An Overview of the Nuclear and Military Programs of Israel and Pakistan and the Role of Global Powers

Preface within a Historical Framework

Following the end of the Second World War, the Middle East and South Asia entered a new phase of geopolitical transformation. Changes in the structure of the international order, coupled with the decline of traditional colonial powers and the emergence of new global actors, created the conditions for the formation of new states in these regions. Among them, two newly established countries—Israel and Pakistan—rapidly assumed key roles in regional political and security dynamics.

The nuclear and military programs of these two states evolved within a broader context characterized by support, tolerance, and, in certain instances, indirect guidance from global powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom.

1. Historical and Political Foundations of the Formation of Israel and Pakistan

To better understand the development of the military and nuclear programs of these two countries, it is essential to examine the historical and political contexts surrounding their creation.

Israel was established in 1948 in the aftermath of developments stemming from the Balfour Declaration, with the support of the United Kingdom and the United States. From its inception, the state faced serious challenges, including a crisis of regional legitimacy, internal tensions, and persistent conflicts with Palestinians—conflicts that were accompanied by the continued occupation of their territories—as well as reactions from neighbouring Arab states.

These conditions, from the very beginning, directed Israel's security and military orientation toward the strengthening of its deterrence capabilities. However, what was presented as deterrence took shape in a covert manner and, at certain stages, even without the full awareness of the United States, particularly during the period associated with the leadership of John F. Kennedy.

In contrast, Pakistan was established in 1947 because of the partition of British India. The country was profoundly influenced by British colonial policies in their late phase in the subcontinent. Pakistan's security and intelligence structures, including its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), developed and were strengthened in close interaction with British intelligence models, particularly the United Kingdom's MI6.

Subsequently, Pakistan emerged as a significant actor within regional rivalries—especially in its confrontation with India—and within broader geopolitical competitions, thereby asserting its role in the regional and international arena.

2. The Role of Global Powers

Global powers, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, from the very outset of the emerging regional order, sought to preserve and consolidate their geopolitical and economic interests in the Middle East and South Asia. Within this framework, the creation and support of political and security structures in countries such as Israel and Pakistan were perceived as part of a broader strategic design aimed at managing regional crises and ensuring access to vital energy resources, especially oil.

As previously noted, the military and security programs of these two countries were, in many instances, developed in secrecy and outside the scope of international public oversight. Israel's nuclear program remained shrouded in ambiguity for decades and, at certain points, was not fully subject even to the formal oversight of its Western allies.

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This situation reflects the complex interaction between strategic autonomy on the one hand and indirect support from major powers on the other.

3. Regional and International Context

In the post–Second World War era, the Middle East and South Asia became arenas of competition among global powers. In this environment, newly established states, nationalist ideologies, and the interests of external powers interacted dynamically, shaping the political and security architecture of the region.

The simultaneous emergence of Israel and Pakistan with the onset of the Cold War—and the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union—significantly enhanced their strategic importance. Under such conditions, their nuclear and military programs evolved into critical instruments within frameworks of deterrence, balance of power, and geopolitical competition.

At the same time, this notion of deterrence itself can be understood as aligned with the broader objectives of the very powers involved in their creation, particularly within the context of regional and global geopolitical rivalries.

Research Objectives

This article adopts an analytical and academic approach to pursue the following objectives:

1. To examine the historical evolution of the nuclear and military programs of Israel and Pakistan.
2. To analyse the role of global powers in shaping, directing, or facilitating these programs.
3. To articulate the regional and international consequences of these developments within a structured and evidence-based framework.

Political and Security Background

The historical development of the nuclear and military programs of Israel and Pakistan cannot be properly understood without examining the broader political and security context of the region, as well as the interventions of global powers. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, its legitimacy and objectives in the Middle East have been subject to persistent challenges. These challenges were accompanied by continuous expansionist policies and the occupation of Palestinian territories, whose inhabitants constitute the original population of the land. Tensions were often perceived as emanating from neighbouring Arab states.

The wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 demonstrated that Israel consistently sought to preserve, sustain, and expand its existence through the strengthening of its military superiority. Although Israel's security was continuously supported by the United States and the United Kingdom, regional pressures led it to develop its military and nuclear programs in a highly secretive manner, at times even beyond the full visibility of certain allies.

On the other hand, Pakistan, following its independence in 1947, faced internal challenges as well as an enduring security rivalry with India, particularly over the issue of Kashmir. Relying on its security institutions, including the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and benefiting from British training and institutional frameworks, Pakistan steadily enhanced its military capabilities. Its nuclear program likewise emerged within the context of this strategic rivalry with India.

In this process, global powers played a decisive role. The United Kingdom, in pursuit of its geopolitical and energy interests, contributed to the formation and strengthening of both states. Likewise, from the 1950s onward, the United States expanded its military and intelligence support, although significant aspects of Israel's nuclear program remained concealed even from it. Within the framework of Cold War competition, both countries evolved into key actors in regional dynamics, a development that carried long-term political and security consequences.

The Formation of Israel's Nuclear Program

From the very outset of its establishment in 1948, Israel placed the issue of national survival and security at the forefront of its strategic priorities, using this justification to initiate a nuclear program that was both secretive and strategic in nature. Under specific political conditions, and in the context of repeated

confrontations linked to the consolidation and expansion of its territorial control, Israel pursued the acquisition of nuclear capability, apparently under the pretext of serving as a deterrent instrument to ensure its survival against regional threats.

This program was largely developed covertly and, at times, independently of certain Western allies, including the United States. Although the United States provided limited technical and intelligence assistance from the 1950s onward, significant components of the program remained hidden from its view for a period. Even after certain aspects became known, reactions emerged in response to this lack of transparency.

In its early phases, Israel advanced its activities under the cover of classified projects, seeking to minimize international pressure while simultaneously building its nuclear and research infrastructure, in part through cooperation with certain European countries.

As a result, Israel's nuclear capability evolved into a significant deterrent factor in the region, strengthening its military position. Israel consistently paid limited heed to resolutions of the United Nations and was often characterized as acting in a manner akin to a rogue state. The policy of secrecy also enabled the country to preserve its strategic autonomy and to assume a distinctive role in regional dynamics. At the same time, this trajectory served as a model for other states—particularly Pakistan—in their pursuit of nuclear capability.

The Formation and Development of Pakistan's Nuclear Program

Pakistan's nuclear program emerged within the context of its strategic rivalry with India and in response to evolving regional security dynamics. Following repeated conflicts between the two countries—most notably Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 war and the subsequent secession of Bangladesh—the necessity of establishing a strong deterrent capability became a central concern at both the political and military leadership levels. India's nuclear test in 1974 further intensified these concerns and accelerated Pakistan's pursuit of a nuclear program. Within this framework, the acquisition of nuclear capability was regarded as a means of preserving the balance of power and preventing India's complete strategic dominance.

To achieve this objective, Pakistan relied on both domestic capacities and external cooperation. Its security and intelligence institutions, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), played a crucial role in guiding and safeguarding the

program. In addition, certain forms of scientific and technical cooperation from foreign states—whether direct or indirect—contributed to its advancement. This process was managed in such a way that Pakistan’s nuclear program, like that of Israel, developed largely under conditions of secrecy, thereby remaining relatively insulated from international pressure.

Ultimately, with the conduct of nuclear tests in 1998, Pakistan was formally recognized as a nuclear power. This development not only altered the balance of power in South Asia but also elevated Pakistan’s position in regional and international affairs. At the same time, however, it contributed to heightened security concerns and intensified arms competition in the region.

Strategic Implications and Regional Comparison

The acquisition of nuclear capability by Israel and Pakistan has had profound implications for the security structures of their respective regions. In the case of Israel, such capability has functioned as a strategic deterrent, consolidating its military superiority vis-à-vis neighbouring Arab states and enabling it, in many instances, to pursue its security policies with a greater degree of autonomy.

In contrast, Pakistan, by relying on its nuclear capability, succeeded in establishing a balance of power with India and in preventing the emergence of unilateral dominance by its rival. It can therefore be argued that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is perceived not only as an instrument of deterrence but also as a factor that may facilitate strategic leverage and pose potential threats to non-nuclear states.

Despite geographical and political differences, both Israel and Pakistan exhibit notable similarities in their reliance on “*nuclear ambiguity*” and the gradual development of deterrent capabilities. At the same time, both states have, in various ways, operated within broader frameworks of global and regional competition, assuming roles that extend beyond their purely national capacities. While this condition has contributed to deterrence, it has also increasingly generated the risk of arms proliferation and growing instability.

In sum, the experiences of Israel and Pakistan demonstrate that nuclear programs, although capable of functioning as instruments of deterrence, may simultaneously contribute to the increasing complexity of security dynamics and the intensification of regional rivalries—a reality that continues to cast a long shadow over the security structures of the Middle East and South Asia.

The Role of Security Structures and the United Kingdom in Pakistan's Nuclear Program

Following Pakistan's independence in 1947, the country faced internal security crises and persistent tensions with India, particularly over the issue of Kashmir. This situation elevated the need for a strong defence structure to a vital national priority. Under such conditions, the pursuit of nuclear capability was framed not only as a deterrent instrument but also as a guarantee of political survival and the consolidation of the country's geopolitical position.

At the same time, internal challenges—including ethnic and sectarian divisions—further underscored the perceived need to strengthen central authority and security institutions. However, an important question arises here: *what connection exists between internal divisions within a state and the possession of nuclear weapons?* The answer is evident—there is no direct correlation.

Within this broader context, the role of the United Kingdom and its intelligence institutions in shaping Pakistan's security infrastructure is noteworthy. British intelligence organizations contributed to the early training, organization, and orientation of Pakistan's security apparatus. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), as one of the most significant of these institutions, emerged from this background to become the backbone of Pakistan's national security. It played a central role in the protection, direction, and control of strategic programs—including the nuclear program.

These forms of cooperation included the transfer of experience, technical training, and the shaping of strategic approaches, all of which collectively contributed to strengthening Pakistan's defence capabilities.

Development of the Nuclear Program and Strategic Consequences

Pakistan's nuclear program developed gradually within the framework of its rivalry with India, drawing upon both domestic capabilities and external cooperation. Like the Israeli model, the program was advanced in a controlled and highly secretive manner to mitigate international pressure and avoid sanctions.

Over time, cooperation with certain countries—notably China, and at certain stages France—facilitated access to advanced nuclear and missile technologies.

Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capability altered the balance of power in South Asia and contributed to the establishment of deterrence vis-à-vis India. At the same time, the role of security institutions and external support enabled the country to emerge as a significant actor in regional strategic dynamics.

However, this process produced dual consequences: on the one hand, it consolidated Pakistan's strategic position; on the other, it intensified arms competition and heightened security sensitivities in the region. Furthermore, Pakistan's experience—alongside that of Israel—served as a model for other states seeking to develop independent deterrent capabilities. The growing pursuit of nuclear weapons as instruments of deterrence has, in turn, contributed to increasing risks to global security.

Global Power Interventions in Nuclear Programs

The nuclear and military programs of Israel and Pakistan cannot be properly analysed without considering the role of intervention and support from global powers. Throughout the formation and development of their military capabilities, both countries were significantly influenced by the strategic policies and rivalries of major powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

From the 1950s onward, the United States, while providing limited military and economic assistance, sought to maintain a degree of oversight over Israel's nuclear program. Nevertheless, substantial aspects of the program remained concealed even from the United States. Washington's primary objective was to preserve Israel as a deterrent force and a key factor in safeguarding its broader security interests, including the management and control of energy resources—particularly oil and gas—in the Middle East.

In the case of Pakistan, U.S. policy exhibited a dual character. While limited assistance was provided in the early stages, increasing pressure and sanctions were imposed as the nuclear program advanced—particularly following the nuclear tests of the 1990s—to contain its development.

Alongside the United States, the United Kingdom also played a significant role in shaping and strengthening Pakistan's security structures. This support included technical training, intelligence cooperation, and strategic orientation aimed at countering India and maintaining influence in South Asia. Israel, too, in its early

years, benefited from indirect British support, particularly in political and diplomatic spheres.

The Role of Other Powers and Geopolitical Consequences

Other powers also contributed to the development of these programs over time. Countries such as France and China, at different stages, facilitated progress in nuclear and missile capabilities through technological transfers and military cooperation.

Moreover, the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War indirectly enhanced the strategic importance and military capabilities of both Israel and Pakistan, elevating them to key actors in global strategic equations.

The cumulative effect of these interventions placed Israel and Pakistan in a position where, on the one hand, they remained dependent on external support, and on the other, functioned as key actors within the strategic frameworks of major powers.

While this dynamic contributed to the advancement of their nuclear and military programs, it also led to increasing complexity in regional geopolitical equations. Ultimately, the combination of external interventions and internal security motivations produced a structure characterized by competition, deterrence, and relative instability—one that continues to shape the Middle East and South Asia.

Critical Analysis and Conclusion

The nuclear and military programs of Israel and Pakistan can be understood as illustrative cases of the complex interaction between national security, external interventions, and regional rivalries. An examination of these trajectories indicates that Israel, by relying on secrecy and operational independence, was able to maintain its nuclear program beyond the visibility of even some of its principal allies, including the United States. This reflects the significance of autonomous decision-making under conditions of persistent threat.

In contrast, Pakistan developed its nuclear program through a combination of external support and strategic guidance—particularly from the United Kingdom and within the broader framework of engagement with global powers. This situation generated a form of proxy dependence which, while facilitating access

to training and technology, also entailed constraints such as international pressure and the potential for external influence or control.

From a regional perspective, the emergence of nuclear capability in both countries contributed to the formation of a form of balance of power and prompted other actors to strengthen their own defensive and deterrent capacities. At the international level, the covert nature of these programs posed significant challenges to monitoring systems and arms control regimes, demonstrating that even states with limited resources can, through gradual planning and the utilization of external support, attain a notable geopolitical position.

Overall, both Israel and Pakistan have pursued their nuclear development under the justification of regional threats and in the context of great power interventions—a trajectory that has contributed to deterrence, while simultaneously intensifying arms competition and further complicating geopolitical dynamics.

In conclusion, the formation of the nuclear and military programs of Israel and Pakistan can be attributed to the interaction of domestic factors, regional pressures, and interventions by global powers. This experience demonstrates that the combination of operational independence and the utilization of external support can, to a certain extent, result in the establishment of effective deterrence. However, it also entails consequences such as relative dependency, intensified arms competition, and the persistence of instability.

Furthermore, these developments indicate that nuclear capability—even in developing states—can alter the balance of power and compel major powers to recalibrate their strategic approaches in response to emerging regional realities. These findings hold significant relevance for analysts and scholars in the field of international security, particularly within Middle Eastern and South Asian studies.

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