

Inside the Nuclear Labyrinth: Science, Secrecy, and Dissent in Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program

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Scholars have debated at length the external consequences of Pakistan's decision to embark on a program of nuclear weapons development in shifting the balance of power in South Asia. However, this debate has not adequately addressed the internal effects of nuclear weapons development in Pakistan. Using government records, the private papers of Pakistani nuclear scientists and officials, and interviews with nuclear scientists in Pakistan, this paper examines the impact of the decision to build the bomb on the scientific culture of Pakistan's nuclear program. Focusing on the way in which Pakistani scientists experienced their leaders' desire to obtain nuclear weapons, this paper reveals far-reaching changes in the nuclear program's approach to scientific research after the Multan meeting in January of 1972. In particular, an increasingly pervasive culture of secrecy led to the abandonment of rigorous adherence to the scientific method in favor of quick results and a "just get to the bomb" approach. Over the next two and a half decades, this shift inspired feelings of discontentment and rumblings of dissent among the nuclear program's scientists. I argue that a changed scientific culture within the nuclear program had a spillover effect, bringing about equally consequential changes within the broader scientific culture of Pakistan.