

'I thought you would like to know how wonderfully well the 1st Sikh LI have done in battle. The Div Commander is delighted with them; he says he has never seen better infantry — they have shown tremendous dash and enthusiasm and their spirit is magnificent. Yesterday they killed 264 Japs in a series of difficult village actions. They are rather low in numbers now, both in officers and men. I hope they will be able to be kept up to strength, to carry on the good work they are doing.'

Yours sincerely

Sd/-

C J E Auchinleck

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Short Reviews of Recent Books

Failed States: The Need for a Realistic Transition in Afghanistan. Edited by Musa Khan Jalalzai, (Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, Delhi, March 2020), Page 497, Price Rs. 1650/-, ISBN: 978-93-89620-19-1

Musa Khan Jalalzai is a noted journalist and has written extensively on Afghanistan. This voluminous compendium on Afghanistan though is essentially a compilation of research papers by others. It consists of 13 articles of merit written over the years – some as far back as 2006 – by noted scholars of international fame. This *pot-pourri* of articles on Afghanistan cover the gamut from challenges to be overcome to Taliban, Al-Qaeda, corruption, inefficiency, opium trade, data surveillance, Afghan local police, gender violence, and judicial review to CIA backed night raids by US troops resulting in summary executions. These essays, while illuminating many problems inherent in a land locked, war ravaged nation, also point to the myopic vision of nations intervening in Afghanistan. The introduction itself is an indictment of the US – how it has operated in Afghanistan and how the grip of Taliban/Daesh remains.

A state can be defined as weak or failing when it lacks the capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationship, extract resources and use them for the good of the state. State failure points to a collapse of systems. While the strong states are competent, resourceful and reformed, the weak states have low capacity to deliver the desired goals. Unfortunately, the strong states of the coalition who went in to reform Afghanistan did not fully take into account various parameters of fragile infrastructure like poverty, unemployment, social disobedience, corruption, nepotism etc. As a result, the ruling cadre in Afghanistan have, over the years, increasingly oppressed and harassed the majority of their own compatriots while privileging a narrowly based party or clan (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks or Pashtuns).

Basically, Afghanistan is a warlord state where, traditionally, power is channelised through patronage system. An emaciated and corrupt Afghan government is teetering on the brink. Daesh in

North and East Afghanistan and Taliban's influence in the South imply the government's failure to bring stability. As these well-reasoned articles clearly bring out, institution building is a long and a laborious process. As suggested by some scholars, perhaps hybrid governance – weak state institutions with strong personalities – could be an interim option. On the other hand, the need for grass root democracy vis-à-vis a superficial formal democracy, imposed by the international community, is strongly recommended by other writers. However, the majority of writers opine that ensuring safety of people and providing efficient local administration is critical. Equally, strategic management of international aid is vital else there is a huge mismanagement of resources. Curiously enough, as various writers argue, state building which requires founding modern institutions has been neglected by the international community.

In addition to an Index, the editor has given over eighty pages of copious Notes. An interesting book about a nation that has been in trauma for over 40 years. Sadly, a peaceful end to the Afghan imbroglio still seems elusive in the immediate future.

Maj Gen Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

Trials, Tremors and Hope: The Political Economy of Contemporary Nepal. By Ram Sharan Mahat, (Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, 2020), Page 242, Price Rs. 795/-, ISBN: 978-8187393757

At a time when Nepali Congress is struggling with leadership decay and the ruling Nepal Communist Party is having inner-party tussle due to failed economic policies, Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, who has been the Finance Minister of Nepal many times and was the leading architect of Nepal's economic reforms after 1990s, comes out with this new book. It is a comprehensive account of the historical evolution and development of political economy of Nepal.

In a well-travelled historical time-line, the author engages in the past practices, highlights the problems, and offers future challenges that need to be given due consideration. The book is written in the pre Covid-19 era when the economic growth rate of Nepal was hovering above six per cent. Hence, the author premised the work on a robust economy of Nepal that had potential

and was running with efficient government committed to rule of law. All this seems challenged under the current developments in the political, economic, social, as well as geopolitically changing scenario.

The book is divided into 12 chapters ranging from broader global discourses on socialism, linked to Nepal's internal debates and the geopolitical situation, to the economic policies of the past and present, and future suggestions. Mahat specifically devotes a lot of space to the flaws of civil war, and the economic consequences of it. He dwells on 'socialism' as the key element of discussion, precisely because it is directly relevant to the 2015 new constitution's declaration of 'socialism based on democratic norms and values'. He opines that communism and democracy are two dominant strands of socialism: democrat and revolutionary. Nepal is now facing the biggest challenge to choose between the two global political ideological tussle with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects. Mahat derives the conclusion that there is convergence of socialist and capitalist systems based on the social and economic imperatives in the world and Nepal should walk this middle path.

Mahat's narration is an elaboration of communist model of China that he regards as market-oriented. In his view, it is only the nature of market that is the decisive force defining the future path, the path where market does not dominate but orients. He stresses on having abundance of production before distribution, which he thinks is essential for Nepal. Mahat advocates a pragmatic approach to economic policies, which is an amalgamation of Stalin style centralised planning and free market economy. In that sense, Mahat propels a neo-reformist approach. Much of his argument proposes Deng Xiaoping's 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics', which feeds on pragmatism and market in a cage of state-orientation. Mahat reverberates Deng's notion that 'poverty is not socialism'; and proposes strengthening of governance, rule of law, strong institution building, merit-based, rather than politically affiliated, bureaucracy, and rational thinking.

Mahat stresses that BP Koirala's socialism meant bringing in equality, but shies away from elaborating on the new contradiction between equality and equity. Hence, his vision is to spread the

cake of prosperity to all areas through inclusive approach and rural modernisation, but is unable to suggest how the principle contradictions of capitalism and socialism be negotiated.

Mahat also gives due emphasis to Nepal's hydro-energy projects with a word of caution, as he believes that delay can make it less competitive. Mahat also factors the challenges of two big neighbours - India and China - and cautions of distancing from India. A chapter is also devoted to remittance economy which Mahat believe helps Nepal. His suggestions conclude with greater industrialisation and privatisation of state-controlled sectors in moderate manner, however, the challenges in the post-Covid world may be different.

The book is an interesting read and suggested for researchers to have comprehensive knowledge of Nepal's economic and political changes; yet it lacks proper references to statistical information and offers analytical statements without acknowledgement. However, the coverage of the knowledge base is exhaustive and it offers a vision for economic orientation of Nepal.

Dr Geeta Kochhar

One Mountain Two Tigers: India, China and the High Himalayas. *Edited by Shakti Sinha, (Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2020), Page 201, Price Rs. 795/-, ISBN: 978-93-900951-00*

The spectre of an aggressive China has always loomed large in New Delhi's foreign policy and strategic calculus. While the turbulent nature of India's ties with China ensures that this relationship always stays in the limelight, it also makes it all too easy to focus on the details and miss the big picture. On the heels of the latest standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies in Ladakh, Shakti Sinha's book attempts to provide a panoramic view of this bilateral relationship, situating the boundary dispute in history and current geopolitics. The book is an edited volume of long essays which, taken together, seek to explore why China has chosen a path of hostility and provocation. While there are some overlaps among the chapters, the book roughly explores four broad aspects.

The first is history. In chapters 1 to 6, the authors cover a wide period of time from the ancient to the modern. The first three chapters trace the political, economic and cultural history of engagement among the civilisations that have straddled the Himalayan boundary between modern India and China, with a focus on Ladakh and surrounding regions including Tibet, Kashmir and Xinjiang. In doing so, the authors trace the roots of the modern boundary dispute to historical competition between Ladakh and Tibet for territory.

The subsequent three chapters examine the modern history of the boundary dispute and military conflict between India and China. Chapter 4 serves as primer on Chinese and Indian perceptions of their border, with a focus on the colonial legacy of the undemarcated Ladakh-Tibet boundary and India's historical claims over Aksai Chin, Shaksgam Valley, and Minsar, now under Chinese control. Concluding that it would be difficult for India to wrest back control of these territories, the chapter, nevertheless, emphasises India's historical and legal position on the boundary dispute. Chapter 5 and 6 turn to more tense moments in the recent history of the boundary dispute, mainly India-China war of 1962 and subsequent military conflicts. By revisiting the causes and trajectory of each conflict, the chapters provide the reader with food for thought - how are circumstances today different from the past?

The second aspect the book examines is the question of military preparedness. With today's India being different from that of 1962, how should the country prepare to meet China's military challenge? In chapter 7 and 8, identifying the clashes in the Galwan Valley as a point of no return for India-China relations, the authors explore what explains China's recent aggressive behaviour? They also recommend measures that will help India navigate this new normal. They touch upon various issues from border management and infrastructure to India's military and diplomatic options. While these complex issues merit further discussion, these chapters will help the interested reader appreciate the sheer number of questions that must be considered while thinking about the future.

The third aspect is the role of external powers, including the United States, Pakistan, Taiwan, and others, in the Indo-Pacific

Region. Chapter 9, 12 and 13 take a step back from the India-China relationship to explore this larger geopolitical context since the Cold War.

The final aspect that the book addresses is the non-military bases of the India-China relationship. Chapter 10, 11 and 14 examine the influence of their respective leadership styles, economic and power asymmetry, and differing approaches towards soft power. The book concludes with a summary of the key domestic and strategic challenges in China that help explain its aggressive actions.

Despite its comprehensive approach, this book could have benefitted from a more in-depth study of the economic relationship between India and China, specifically how it limits or expands India's options. In addition, including extensive bibliographies and reference lists for the chapters on the historical linkages between Xinjiang and India, India's military preparedness and the Indo-Pacific would have added value to the book. While analysing what factors could explain Chinese behaviour and how India should respond, the book emphasises that there are no easy answers.

Ms Sharanya Rajiv

Democracy and Authoritarianism in Pakistan: The Role of The Military and Political Parties. *By Dr Shiraz Sheikh, (KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2020), Page 393, Price Rs. 1460/-, ISBN: 978-9389137248*

The book is a product of exhaustive research on the elements and nature of democratic and authoritarian regimes in Pakistan and the role of military. There is an abundance of books that have discussed in detail about the role of military in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan, purely in terms of strategic and security angle; this book, however, has overwhelmingly concentrated on the shifts in the landscape through a more unique interdisciplinary perspective.

The author has given a comprehensive conceptual framework, and correlation of the theoretical and empirical aspects of authoritarianism and democracy, before placing his arguments. The concepts and theories provide conceptual understanding and

interlinkages regarding its definition and context, which have received relatively little treatment in the past. As the author himself claims that the book is analytical and descriptive in nature, it helps him to transcend the common practice of generalisation or giving general broad sweeping arguments.

The book is divided into 7 chapters including conclusion. The flow of the chapters appears natural and collaborative. Despite some shortcoming, each chapter has been able to do justice to the topic discussed. Chapter 5-Political Parties and the Two Civilian Interludes, is an excellent read as it has been able to capture, identify and describe trends, variations, factors and arguments behind political transition in Pakistan.

At times, the strength of the book — the theoretical and expository nature — becomes its weakness. The reader, particularly with non-academic bent of mind, might find itself momentarily disconcerted, e.g. many models of civil military relations. Secondly, at places, the author could have avoided going in detail considered at the periphery of the subject-centred perspective like demographic account of Pakistan and its provinces.

Students of security and strategic affairs would have liked to read more in detail about the Pakistan Army's obsession with India, and often reiterated prism of existential threat from India. What is considered as 'the normative underpinnings of Pakistan's Military', Pakistan Army's pathological obsession with India and how it shapes the civil military relations could have been a chapter in itself. Of course, books by various other authors have touched the topic, but the author of this book could have given his perspective to add a crucial dimension to his excellent book.

Finally, the book is an insightful read for all with a literary taste of political science and international affairs.

Shri Gaurav Kumar