

Short Reviews of Recent Books

Strategic Stability in South Asia Challenges and Implications for India. *By Zubin Bhatnagar, (New Delhi, Vij Books India, 2017), 201pp, ISBN 978-93-86457-35-36*

This comprehensive study by the author takes into account various geopolitical, economic, social and ideological factors of nation states that impinge upon the stability in South Asian Region, as also the challenges it poses for India to thwart the same. The study is well structured and is carried out in nine chapters. The author has taken a mature approach by discussing the concept of hard power and soft power at the very outset. Painstakingly researched, the author has, in general, analysed the repercussions of international politics exceedingly well. An indisputable fact is that there has been a global power shift.

China and India are the principal players for stability in the region. The three chapters that follow analyse the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region, India-Pakistan relations and the Littoral States of Indian Ocean Region. Subsequently the author deliberates upon the Himalayan Kingdoms and the security environment in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Region remains vulnerable. The 'unpleasant stability' in the area is likely to continue because of a lack of transformational leadership. Of special interest are the China Factor and the role of major powers that are examined at considerable length thereafter. Finally, the author discusses the options for India making some rather unique suggestions. The inter-se relationship between growth and stability, pluralism, democracy, youth unrest, institutional imperatives, transitional dynamics, military and civilian rule as applicable to different nations has to be seen in its correct perspective to make any informed judgment. The author rightly recommends that India increase its presence in Afghanistan. However, even though the author states in the opening chapter itself that "China's foreign and defense policy will continue to be designed to reduce India to the status of a sub-regional power" he recommends India "to offer (China) connectivity to the Bay of Bengal along Nathu La-Kalimpong-Siliguri- Kolkata Corridor"! India has not supported

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and has reservations on OBOR as there are hidden costs with permanent Chinese footprints. Again on Pakistan, the author's suggestion appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand he recommends that India should open doors, interact at NDC level, sports, delink Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Durand line issue, yet he recommends increased hostilities along LC to bleed Pakistan Army including cross border raids!

A commendable effort, the present volume adds to the existing knowledge on the subject and the author deserves to be congratulated on compiling voluminous data and discussing the subject in a precise manner with considerable insight.

Major General Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

The People Next Door: The Curious History of India's Relations with Pakistan. By TCA Raghavan, (Noida: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 348 p., ISBN: 9789352770908

A welcome addition to the USI library is former diplomat and Pakistan-specialist TCA Raghavan's history of relations between India and Pakistan. The author has chosen to focus on the cyclical pattern of dominance between the hawks and doves, which he feels contributes to the "curious history" of India-Pakistan relations.

Written in a crisp style, using broad brush-strokes, the book is extensively referenced. In addition to official documents, the author has woven into his narrative the distilled wisdom of some of the most perceptive interlocutors from both countries who have dealt with India-Pakistan relations, including Badr-ud-din Tyabji, Afzal Iqbal, Rajeshwar Dayal, YK Gundevia, B K Nehru, Abdul Sattar, JN Dixit, Kewal Singh, Iqbal Akhund, Rikhi Jaipal, Jamsheed Marker, PN Dhar, Jagat S Mehta, Shahid Amin, Mani Shankar Aiyar, MK Rasgotra, K Natwar Singh, Sartaz Aziz, Kuldip Nayar, IK Gujral, K Srinivasan and Jaswant Singh. This adds significantly to the authenticity of the narrative, despite the broad approach taken by the author.

The book is written with authority and appreciation of the nuances of controversial issues such as the accessions of Junagadh, Jammu and Kashmir, Kalat and Hyderabad. The

author's use of personal examples (such as the family histories of Azim Husain and Mohammad Yunus) to illustrate the complexities of the Partition of India for individuals and families is a welcome addition to the historiography of India and Pakistan, bringing in a human dimension to the dilemmas caused by the Partition of India. Similarly, Raghavan's portrayal of how pre-Partition relations between Ayub Khan and Rajeshwar Dayal played out when the latter was accredited as India's High Commissioner to Pakistan during Ayub Khan's dictatorship, is fascinating.

The book's significance is due to Raghavan's deft portrayal of the major issues that have confronted India and Pakistan following Partition in 1947, and how the elected political leadership of both countries attempted to resolve these issues. This topic is of special interest during the "pragmatic" period of India-Pakistan relations of the early 1950s.

Raghavan's book provides an interesting insight into the ascendancy of the Pakistani Army in Pakistani politics, which has culminated in military adventurism against India from time to time, including the 1965 and 1971 wars, and Kargil in 2001. The book is very useful for understanding the current state of relations between South Asia's two largest neighbours.

Shri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd)

Strategic Balance in the Indo-Pacific Region, Challenges and Prospects. *Edited by Commander MH Rajesh and Dr Raj Kumar Sharma, (Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, Delhi, 2017), pp.158, Price- Rs 850, ISBN 978-93-86457*

The book is a record of one and a half day international seminar on the above topic organised by United Service Institution of India (USI), New Delhi, in 2016.

The aim of the seminar was "To identify reasons for the world powers to dominate the area and seas between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Oceans". Specifically, strategic and economic importance of the two oceans (spreading from Straits of Hormus to East China Sea) for the countries of the region as well as world powers were analysed. The existing and potential threats to the Indian Ocean Region, the existing organisations and grouping to

meet the threat were examined. Suggestions for creating new structures, for facing the “security threats” were also made.

In his Welcome Address, Lieutenant General PK Singh, Director, USI, highlighted the importance of Indian and Pacific Oceans as vital sea routes, which impact security, economy and trade. Vice Admiral S Soni gave the Keynote Address, and emphasised the need to maintain freedom of navigation for international shipping through the Oceans. Hereafter, the seminar was conducted in three sessions over two days. A total of 15 papers were presented by experts from China, Russia, South Korea, Singapore, Germany, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India.

In the first session six papers were presented on Security Challenges and Prospects in the Indo-Pacific Region. The speakers highlighted the traditional and non-traditional threats faced by the littoral states, specially the threat posed by recent Chinese unilateral actions (militarisation of a few islands in South China Sea and East China Sea). However, the speaker from China stated that his country has not violated any international law, always followed the rule of law and, wants to resolve the disputes peacefully.

Part II of the conference discussed Economic Challenges and Prospects. All the five speakers highlighted the need to ensure freedom of navigation and security of ships, to ensure free flow of energy (Oil) and trade, between countries of West Asia and Asia Pacific. Importance of Blue Economy, challenges of sea bed mining and its impact on coastal economy were highlighted.

The last session was devoted to ‘Emerging Architecture in the Indo-Pacific Region – the Way Ahead’. Presenters brought out the existing trade and economic arrangements and groupings made by countries of the Pacific and Asia Region (like ASEAN, SAARC, TTP). They pointed out that while such bi-lateral and tri-lateral arrangements cover a few threats, they do not have resilience or power to ensure strict compliance of the rules (like SLOC). The need for an international law to enforce such laws was pointed out by all the four speakers.

In his Valedictory Address, Director USI highlighted the interest of big powers in the Indo-Pacific Region, which has

resulted in USA shifting her strategic balance from West Asia and Europe, to the Asia-Pacific. This needs to be realised by the countries of the region, that must create new regional architects for meeting the changing security scenario.

Lieutenant General YM Bammi, PhD

The Bravest of the Brave: The Extraordinary Story of Indian VCs of WW1. *By Maj Gen Ian Cardozo, (Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt Ltd, N Delhi), pp..109, First Published 2016, Price Rs 499, ISBN 978 93-85936-24-1.*

The book tells the extraordinary stories of Indian soldiers who won Victoria Cross during the First World War while fighting for the British Indian Army.

Spread over 109 pages in 15 chapters, the author has exclusively covered the “bravest of the brave” Indian soldiers who participated in the battlefields of France, Mesopotamia, Persia, the Middle East, East Africa and China. They fought in these different theatres against the Germans, Turks and their Allies, as part of eleven expeditionary forces sent from India. Though initially, neither equipped nor trained to fight in the varied terrain and climate, they proved that their fighting capabilities were no less than that of the other forces.

In Chapter One, the author has given brief history of Victoria Cross, and points out that though it was instituted in 1855, the India soldiers were not entitled to receive it until 1911. However, pre-1911, acts of bravery and valour were recognised by the award of Indian Order of Merit. Out of the eleven VCs won by the Indian soldiers, five were by those units which went over to Pakistan in 1947.

A brief account of WW1 and the participation of the Imperial Indian Army has been given in Chapter Two, which will enable even a non-military reader to follow the events of the War scene and the gallant actions of each soldier.

Individual stories of all the VC awardees have been covered in a separate chapter. Besides giving details of the acts of valour and the impact of the gallantry award on the sub-unit, the author has also highlighted his post war retirement initiatives.

Photographs of the individual awardees and battlefields add an enormous value to the book. For ease of following the events, a few maps have also been included.

The author needs to be complimented on having carried out detailed research, and presenting an important part of the military history of the Indian Army's contribution during the WW1. The author has not only included the Citations and extracts from London Gazette, but also brief life and record of service have been given, which shows author's commitment to his research.

The book provides a condensed and very well researched account of bravery shown by our soldiers during WW 1 and is recommended for all schools and college libraries too. Its translation in Hindi is recommended, as it would enable a wider readership by Indian youth.

Lieutenant General YM Bammi, PhD (Retd)