

Short Reviews of Recent Books

The Fragility of Order: Essays in Honour of KPS Gill. *Edited by Ajai Sahni, (New Delhi: Institute of Conflict Management, 2019), Pages 345, Price – Rs. 2500/-, ISBN 9789387809734*

This exhaustively researched book is a tribute to KPS Gill spanning his baptism to violence as a 12-year old in Lahore during Partition, his career in police, sterling role in defeating Khalistani terrorism in Punjab, founding the Institute of Conflict Management, contributions towards counter-terrorism, exploitation of human rights legislation environment, facing government paralysis afflicted by obdurate bureaucracy, and multiple crises and conflicts around the world.

The book has contributions from globally acclaimed scholars and specialists with first and last chapters authored by Ajay Sahni, Executive Director of the Institute of Conflict Management. The book highlights the power of unfettered information to subvert or 'weaken' democracies; exploiting grievances and inequities, plus denial of services and dishonesty of governments. Governments need to restore public confidence through authoritative, unimpeachable, credible and timely information to retain legitimacy, also admitting mistakes with speedy corrective action. This requires experts in government.

Counterinsurgency (CI) doctrines of Russia, US and India have been examined in context of 'enemy-centric' or population-centric approaches and balance required between the two. India's CI doctrine contains three pillars of security, political and economic factors, resting on information and bound together by control. Indian doctrine is not flawless, with some insurgencies dragging on but no CI campaign has been lost.

Post-conflict, governments remain central to security but are increasingly seen sharing authority with non-state actors. Weak governments can trigger anarchy where armed non-state actors (ANSA) have sway. This required special focus in security sector reforms and handling ANSA through various

strategies; negotiating political settlement, socialisation, bribery, amnesty, containment and marginalisation, enforcing splits and internal rivalry, coercion and the like. Coercion through the military as the only action could be counter-productive.

Counter terrorism (CT) must address 'method' and 'logic' of terrorists through different approaches; one, terror used in support of larger armed political campaign of counter-state building, and; two, countering logic that has made terror the ends, ways and means. America's war on terror has absence of unity of command or execution resulting in fragmentation and dilution of key components. At the grand strategic level, America has confused national security and fighting terrorism. Iraq is quoted as an example with US confusing CI-CT with politics. This is compared with how successfully KPS Gill restored democratic order in Punjab.

Global reach of the Islamic State (IS)/Daesh and its ideological appeal remains largely undiminished despite military setbacks. The prominent threat remains from new wave of foreign fighters. The demise of IS is not the end of global war on terror or beginning of the end against Islamic extremism, rather it is just an end of the beginning. The Sunni-Shia conflict in Lebanon, *jihadi* networks of each side, fallout of the war in Syria, continuing strife and the challenges have been covered.

The book brings out that the declining Maoists movement in India requires exposing Maoist misdeeds, taking up intensive development and coordinated operations.

Use of internet by *jihadis* has been covered from 1990s to the present as also communications, radicalisation/spreading ideology, funding and bitcoin campaign, disseminating manuals, and operational use—both offensive and defensive. The author also brings out the dilemma and complexities in erasing total *jihadi* accounts and contents from internet is problematic due adaptive approaches of *jihadis*.

Prevention of extremism through community development programs is well covered so is need for early detection and stymieing the radicalisation processes through requisite

intervention strategies and approaches. Examples and models have been discussed, including lack of their application to Muslim extremism. However, focus of West only on what is termed 'violent extremism', ignoring spread of radicalisation, has been missed out.

KPS Gill's dexterity in handling *Khalistani* terrorism in Punjab, including complexities and magnitude of the problem, is explained well; as also CIA's covert plan in conjunction with the ISI post 1971 to encourage separatism in Punjab. ISI's support to militancy in Punjab and Kashmir, and the enemy within (files from PMO taken to Pakistan) find mention. Amidst the most virulent *Khalistani* campaign, ill-advised efforts to seek 'political solution' undermined CT operations. KPS Gill's success in combating terrorism in Punjab led to comprehensive approach in CT covering the philosophical, psychological, political, and operational aspects in dealing with future threats.

The book covers the nationalist insurgency in Balochistan and serious human rights violations by Pakistani security forces because of which the insurgency is unlikely to end. Pakistan's increasing religious radicalisation, rapid population growth, sectarian strife, poverty and unemployment are recipe for greater turmoil. Chapter 14 discusses politicisation of the Indian Army, also narrating that though the BJP government projects a pro-Services image, actual policies, practices and ground realities are contrary, exposing India to multiple threats.

The chapter on hybrid warfare describes hypocrisy of nations sponsoring and supporting terrorists. The main discussion is on Russian actions in Crimea-Ukraine but mention has also been made of hybrid warfare in South Asia - British East India Company in India, Indian intervention in East Pakistan (1971) and Pakistan's hybrid war. Two subsequent chapters discuss Hezbollah's military engagement in Syria and Sri Lanka's CI strategy against the LTTE.

The concluding chapter talks of China's demonstrated "intent and will" to use force to secure dominance. Terrorism, proxy wars and diverse patterns of conflict, including weaponization of ideas, are here to stay. For India, prevailing

political-administrative dysfunction must be addressed for reconstructing our capacities and capabilities.

This book is an excellent tribute to KPS Gill and a must read by all, especially those interested in the spread of jihadism, terrorism, countering radicalisation, CI-CT, and hybrid warfare with its sub-conventional content, and need for India to reverse politicisation in the military and establish credible deterrence to sub-conventional threats.

Lt Gen PC Katoch, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SC (Retd)

Missing in Action: The Prisoners Who Never Came Back.

By Chander Suta Dogra, (New Delhi HarperCollins India, 13 January 2020), Hardcover Page 392, Price Rs. 468/-, ISBN-13: 978-9353572853

After a long hiatus we have a book on the issue of India's soldiers Missing in Action (MIA). The Indian government believes that 83 Indian soldiers are still in Pakistan's captivity, mostly since 1965 and 1971 wars. The book is a masterpiece of investigative journalism based on the primary source material such as WikiLeaks, de-classified records, minutes of high level meetings, interviews with senior officers who dealt with the issue and families and colleagues of the MIA. Being a military daughter and spouse of a soldier, Chander Suta Dogra has narrated the stories of the MIAs in a touching manner; she deals with circumstances related to their disappearance, the sadness, struggle, hope and frustration of their loved ones.

Dogra's examination offers startling insights into the geopolitical game and acts of omission and commission on part of political leadership, diplomats and military hierarchy. India returned 93000 odd prisoners of war (POWs) after the 1971 war, without ensuring return of all Indian POWs. Ironically, the matter of MIA was neither discussed during the Shimla dialogue nor did any military officer participate in the negotiations. Many of those who were believed to be in captivity of Pakistan were subsequently categorised as Killed in Action (KIA) by the Indian government, for the sake of administrative need mandatory for disbursing pensionary and other benefits to the Next of Kin

(NOK). These procedural lacunae caused deep emotional scars in the hearts and minds of the NOK.

Her investigation establishes that some KIA designated personnel were alive in Pakistan's detention centres. One such evidence is two hand-written notes by Major AK Suri, of 5 Assam Regiment, written from Karachi in 1974 and 1975. Once the government verified the handwriting to be that of Major Suri in 1976, it finally informed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that the officer was erroneously declared as KIA whereas he should be treated as MIA. Dogra's book is studded with similar heartrending stories of soldiers wrongly presumed dead when there was credible proof that they are in Pakistan or moved to Islamic nations in Gulf.

The book captures the emotional trauma faced by the families of the MIA as some of them were forced to accept 'posthumous' bravery awards and see the names of their loved ones on war memorials as martyrs. The author brings out that Pakistan held MIAs as bargaining chips to prevent India from handing over 195 Pakistani POWs to Bangladesh for war crimes trials. India relented by handing over 195 POW's to Pakistan without doing enough to get back its own MIA. The author opines, "Their poor mental and physical condition, possibly as a result of years of torture and injuries, made it difficult for Pakistan to admit their presence and return them". Dogra asserts that the soldiers were likely 'sacrificed at the shrine of bilateralism'. The government of India eschewed from approaching United Nations (UN) or the International Court of Justice (ICJ), maintaining that bilateral dialogue and not third party intervention should be exercised. This allowed Pakistan off the hook of any international pressure. Pakistan cunningly held back some of the MIA by designating them as Indian spies that enabled Pakistan to circumvent the provisions of the Geneva Conventions.

The book also addresses the uncomfortable question about how many of our soldiers are actually in Pakistan's custody; there are 54 names on the list of soldiers missing from 1965 and 1971 wars; the remaining 29 are of those who went

missing afterwards while operating on the Line of Control (LoC) or the international border (IB). She points out that some of the names on the government held list should perhaps not be there as there is conclusive evidence of their martyrdom in action. Her observation stands vindicated as the government also admitted to the Gujarat High Court that at least 15 names on the list are 'confirmed dead'. This shows the sordid manner in which the government agencies investigated the matter and maintained records. In this remarkably well written book, she makes a fundamental observation, "POWs war is a war behind the scenes, a war that is not constrained by rules or conventions, laws or treaties....where prisoners are not seen as human beings with emotions and familial ties but as pawns in never ending game blighted by hate and revenge". The book ends on the poignant note: 'There can never be any last word for any story about missing soldiers. Not until they are found dead or alive'. It is time we re-dedicate ourselves to accounting for every man after a situation of conflict and war. This is the hallmark of all self-respecting militaries the world over.

A brilliantly written book that is seminal in nature and will have lasting value as an authentic reference material for posterity. A must for libraries and for serious reading and reflection.

Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd)

Kashmir: Beyond Article 370. By Bashir Assad, (New Delhi: Pentagon Press LLP, 2020), Page 177, Price Rs. 595/-, ISBN 978-81-942837-9-9

The book, spread over fourteen chapters, covers a wide range of complex issues to include history, sociology, religion, economy, governance and, above all, venal politics that coalesce together seamlessly to create the conundrum of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) . Hailing from Srinagar itself, Assad possesses excellent credentials and he has kept his ear to the ground. An independent thinker he apparently writes from his heart without caring for the consequences. He must be sure of his facts for a few of his statements can be termed scurrilous.

As Assad brings out, the propensity of leaders of various ilks in Kashmir was totally parochial. The weak-kneed policies and discourse adopted by the centre and state alike resulted in hybridism, ethnic and religious aggressiveness. The governments at Srinagar and Delhi chose to be subsumed by structural factors like Article 370 & 35 A. The easy way out was to firefight using ad hoc measures. Elections were rigged as a matter of course; governance was in shambles and corruption remained rampant. The idea of religion (*Wahhabi*) as a basis of separate identity was allowed to be propagated which provided the catalyst for the “*azadi*” sentiment to find root. The author posits that *Wahhabis* and *Maududis* can exploit a narrative that the objective behind abrogation of Article 370 is to change the demography. While previous central governments cowered at the very idea of doing away with the Articles in question, the Modi government had no such qualms. This was undoubtedly an act of courage with far reaching repercussions. The bluff of doomsayers had been called and there was no blood bath. The government’s idea of Empowerment, Investment and Development (EID) has got some traction with the people.

As the author brings out, it was the wily politicians who made Article 370 synonymous with the air, water, mountain, flora and fauna of Kashmir. They drilled this into the psyche of the populace through inflammatory speeches. The author exposes that only politicians and separatists gained from Article 370. Asking for greater autonomy resulted in increased separatism and radicalisation. Article 370 literally was the goose laying golden eggs. Dynastic politics, cronyism and large-scale corruption flourished. Subsequently, mainstream parties strategically surrendered their space to the separatists. Post Burhan Wani — a terrorist allowed to be made into a martyr by the state — ISIS and Pakistan’s flags began to be displayed openly. At one time or another, Mehbooba, Omar and Farooq — all Chief Ministers — voiced threats of secession. As Assad brings out, separatists had been rejecting talks with the government since 1990 but hobnobbing openly with Pakistan. The Abrogation and its aftermath were handled with aplomb by the government. The high-flying politicians and separatists were

cut to size. The dressing down of Omar Abdullah by the Prime Minister, as narrated by the author, is quite illustrative.

To help marginalised sections in Kashmir, Assad recommends relocation of power politics from urban areas to rural Kashmir. However, radical Islam, abetted by clarion calls from mosques, has firmly established itself and would remain a major obstacle. The author reminds us that Kashmir always had a syncretic *Sufi* culture with belief in pluralism; therefore, it is strange that people forgot their heritage of centuries and blindly submitted to the diktat of *Wahhabi* Islam. Again, amongst Muslims, Kashmiri language has been replaced by Urdu and now only the Hindus speak Kashmiri. Incidentally, Assad perceives *Pandits* to be divided on all issues and opines that post abrogation of Article 370, return of the *Pandits* will be adversely impacted. The author does not spare the central government either, who at various stages added to the misery of J&K by a lack of clear understanding in handling the twin issues of terrorism and radical Islam. Assad explains well the nexus of politicians, separatists, academics, bureaucrats, businessmen and media houses that combined to siphon off public money, diaspora remittances, humanitarian aid and trade in conflict commodities for over decades in J&K. The author speaks highly of the Army and military leadership. It is, however, curious for him to say that 'the buck now stops with the Army' as Army has little role in transformation of J&K.

A major fault line identified by Assad in the new establishment is the all-powerful bureaucrat who keeps holding meetings but remains disconnected from ground realities. Citing specific examples at apex level itself, Bashir feels that their stranglehold in administrative matters only breeds inertia. Assad is equally dismissive of interlocutors who offer armchair advice. The author ends on a sombre note that the government must act with a sense of urgency to generate employment, investment and development else the gains of 05 August 2019 may be lost. In Assad's perception, and perhaps rightly so, the Kashmiri society is very complex with many facets and features. If the urban elites continue to drive the narrative the gains will be slow in coming.

The author deserves to be congratulated in giving his point of view of complex issues in a forthright manner. An eminently readable book, it gives a fresh insight into many issues relating to Kashmir.

Maj Gen Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison. By Ahmet T. Kuru (Cambridge University Press, 05 September, 2019) Pages 316, Rs. 2398/-, ISBN-13: 978-1108419093.

In recent times the question as to why Muslim societies have problems of authoritarianism and socio-economic underdevelopment which has led to their decline has vexed scholars. Ahmet. T. Kuru, a Turkish American who is a professor of political science at San Diego State University, attempts to answer this question.

His book is laid out in two parts. Part I deals with the present and has three chapters dealing with Violence and Peace; Authoritarianism and Democracy and; Socio-Economic Underdevelopment and Development. Part II, with four chapters, is the history of Islam from the time it swept the known world to its collapse under Western colonialism and Muslim reformists.

Ahmet Kuru undertakes a sweeping and detailed analysis of the ills of the authoritarianism, economic backwardness and religious violence that plague almost all Muslim-majority states. He rejects the common narrative that the fault for the ills of these states lies in Islamic doctrine. Concurrently, he does not blame these ills to Western colonialism too which is the reason given by many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.

He traces a longer period of the decline of Islamic states. He describes a period of Islamic scientific and cultural brilliance, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, in which a dynamic trading community lived — under which scientific knowledge and the arts flourished. His thesis is that this community declined due to the rise of a conservative and anti-intellectual alliance of religious scholars (the ulema) and state officials,

each of whom had their own benefits in mind. Kuru makes a convincing case as to how Muslim societies inherited the model of the powerful military-theocratic state — composed of warrior-rulers, religious authorities, and their subjects — from Persian tradition, and not the Koran. His study continues to contemporary politics showing that to this day, the ulema-state alliance still prevents creativity and competition in Muslim countries.

The book provides a useful reflection on the present trend of violence and terrorism which is more prevalent in Islamic states. The book also gives a valuable comparison in studying Islamic societies when seen in the 'clash of civilisations' context propounded by Samuel Huntington. A must read for civilian and military scholars.

Lt Gen Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Allahu Akbar: Understanding the Great Mughal in Today's India. By Manimugdha Sharma, (New Delhi: Bloomsbury India, 2019), Page 330, Price – Rs. 599/- (Hardback), ISBN: 978-93-86950-53-6.

The Mughal rule lasted in India from 1526 until its final eclipse in the Great Uprising of 1857, which saw the last scion of the dynasty banished to Rangoon for his alleged role in support of the rebellion. The reins of government were then taken over by the British Crown, which realised that in order to effectively rule over the people of the land, *Divide et Impera* or 'Divide and Rule' must be the cornerstone of its colonial policy. However, unlike the British who supplanted them, the Mughals had laid down their roots in the soil of this country and had made immense contributions to the culture and polity of India. Under their rule, a fusion of Indian and Islamic cultures brought about the development of a distinct Indo-Islamic style, which found its expression in art, architecture, poetry and literature. Contrary to popular belief, fusion, rather than division, was the guiding policy of Mughal rule, with some notable exceptions.

Arguably, the foremost amongst the Mughal rulers was the king who not only expanded and consolidated the empire, but

also foregrounded an important socio-political consensus that laid the foundations for a secular polity in modern India. Akbar was the first Timurid ruler to be born and brought up in India. Having welded his empire into a single geographical entity, he then went on to try to integrate the diverse people who inhabited it into a Unitarian whole.

This well researched book provides the reader with an interesting insight into the life and times of, arguably, one of India's greatest monarchs. The author adopts a narrative style that is easy to read and assimilate. He, however, goes beyond a mere biographical account of his subject and places it in broader historical and social contexts. While the book is extensively referenced, it is not a standard academic text. The author argues that the syncretic, secular and rational values espoused by Akbar, during his reign, are of particular relevance today. He decries the attempts in certain quarters to rewrite history, and to erase Akbar's legacy from it. He intersperses his narrative with often detailed descriptions of similar acts or events, both in a historical and contemporary context, and often uses this as a polemic against the policies of the current government.

Akbar was a unique monarch by the standards of his time. His contribution to the history of India deserves to be better known and understood, particularly his attempts to promote rationalism and his development of the doctrine of *Sulh-i-Kul* to further India's civilizational ethos of tolerance. It was not without reason that he was known to history as 'Akbar the Great'.

Sqn Ldr Rana TS Chhina, MBE (Retd)