

Shedding Shibboleths*

Lieutenant General VK Singh, PVSM (Retd)**

Shedding Shibboleths is a collection of articles written by Mr K Subrahmanyam between mid 1980's to 1998. K Subrahmanyam, as Inder Malhotra in his introduction points out, "is the doyen of the Indian strategic community, indeed the originator of strategic discourse in India". Any collection of his writings is, thus, an important addition to the few books on strategic thinking and strategic outlook authored by Indian writers. The book is particularly important as it brings under one cover nearly a decade and a half of Subrahmanyam's writings. There are a total of 43 articles covered in this book grouped under six major headings :- Indian Strategic Perspective; Nuclear Matters; An Epochal Decade (dealing with the 1990's); Changing Equations; Alarm Signals; and Reflections.

In the first chapter, the author laments the fact that there has never been a formal written national strategic paper or any other government document on what are our strategic perspectives and aims. The author attributes this, among other things to the lack of interest in such matters in both the politicians and the bureaucrats. There is a reluctance to interact with think tanks or even encourage such institutions as it appears that the politician or bureaucrat, the moment they occupy a chair, believe that they automatically gain all the knowledge on the subject. The result is that an Indian strategic perspective remains nebulous. The author also points out that we have been unable to evolve a coherent security policy structure in spite of having established a National Security Council.

Subrahmanyam's views on nuclear matters are well known. What is interesting is the chapter on India's Nuclear Quest that gives a succinct account of how India pursued, even if haltingly, a programme to acquire the capability to build and deploy nuclear weapons. He also sets out what should be India's nuclear doctrine, which to a large extent coincides with the draft doctrine. He makes an important point on the size of the arsenal, which he argues depend mainly on the survivability of such an arsenal against the enemy's first strike; the greater the survivability, the less the number needed.

*Shedding Shibboleths : India's Evolving Strategic Outlook. By K Subrahmaniam with Arthur Monteiro (Delhi : Wordsmiths, 2005), 443p, Rs 690.00, ISBN 81-87412-13-5.

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In the 'Epochal Decade', the author discusses the end of the Soviet empire, Saddam's folly in 1991, the lessons of the Vietnam War, the Taliban, China and Deng Xiaoping. He also comments on what he so rightly terms 'the non crisis of 1990'. The Chapter on 'Changing Equations' covers a wide range from the prospect of India-Pakistan CBM's, countervailing China, rethinking India-US relations, the mercurial China-US relations and the Japan-US tango. With reference to China, the author points out that the 1962 Chinese attack was not so much about gaining territory, but was about humiliating India and establishing itself as one of the dominant Asian powers. While advocating repairing India's relations with China, the author cautions that we must make a massive and continuous effort to monitor developments there so as to implement a coherent China policy covering all aspects, political, military, economic, technological and cultural.

Under the heading 'Alarm Signals', the author's views on future threats to security, such as climate change, population movements, international instability, terrorism, jihad, corruption, drugs and maritime perspectives are discussed. In the piece entitled 'Labyrinth of Drugs' he brings out the involvement of Pakistan, including members of the establishment, in the drugs trade and the effects of this on India's security.

The chapter entitled 'Reflections' covers a wide range of topics. Among the important ones are the 1962 and 1971 conflicts, ways of the bureaucracy and Nehru's contribution to strategic thinking. In his articles on the 1962 and 1971 Wars, the author is critical of the Army for not being ready enough and for not reading the signals of what was likely to occur. While it is to an extent justified, but if you go on harping on ideal relations between India and China, it becomes a bit difficult to convince many in power to plan for a war with such a 'friend'. In 1971, it is true that at the outset there was no plan for the takeover of the whole of East Pakistan but it is a tribute to the flexibility of Indian planning that when the opportunity arose, it was fully exploited. The author's contention that India should have also launched a major operation on the western front to reach the Indus in Sind does not seem to have been a feasible proposition given the type and number of forces available and the terrain over which such an offensive would have had to be launched. In the ways of the bureaucracy, the author, himself a distinguished bureaucrat is scathing in his criticism of bureaucrats, particularly their belief that the generalist has the expertise to tackle any subject or any task without any earlier experience of it.

His article on 'Nehru's Contribution to Strategic Thinking' is important because in the climate of Nehru bashing, the author brings out the important

contribution made by Nehru to strategic thinking in the broadest term. The first of these was his vision that helped to consolidate the Indian Nation state and gave it an inherent unity and stability, which lasts to this date. The doctrine of non alignment had elements of National security considerations and it was in fact this that allowed India to receive military aid from both the West and the Soviet Union in 1962. Nehru also postulated an equation of defence in which the defence forces, industrial and technological background, economy and the spirit of the people were the determining factors. If one thinks of it, these really are the determinants of security. He also brings out that contrary to the common belief that the Defence forces were allowed to run down during the Nehru years, the strength of the Armed Forces actually doubled between 1949-50 and 1962; the Air Force expanded from seven to 19 squadrons, the Navy was expanded and the foundations of Defence industry and Defence research and development were laid.

The book covers a wide range of topics and on all of these the author's comments and observations are thought provoking and valuable. However, the very nature of the book, a compilation of articles written at various times tends to make it discursive and at times disjointed. The author himself acknowledges this in his preface. It would have helped to be able to understand the development of the author's strategic vision if the period in which each of these pieces was written was indicated. The book also has an exhaustive introduction by Inder Malhotra who puts much of the book into a perspective.

K Subrahmanyam titles the book 'Shedding Shibboleths', which is apt, as he has always given short shrift shibboleths. However, unless the book is read and studied by those who today wield power, whether political, bureaucratic or military, one is not sure that existing shibboleths will really be shed. That would be a tragedy. The book is a 'must read'.

South Asia's Nuclear Security Imbroglio*

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This is an excellent treatise on a current issue that could have serious security implications in the foreseeable future for the South Asian region comprising India, Pakistan and China. Lowell Dittmer has shown perspicacity in structuring the dissertation in two parts to discuss the nuances of the political economy of minimal deterrence as well as the power structure of the region. The contributors of these extremely well researched articles – Lawrence Saez, Sumit Ganguly, Hasan Askari Rizvi, Samina Ahmad and Timothy Hoyt to name a few – have impeccable credentials. The format of the book and the readable style adopted by the authors make for absorbed reading. Each essay has a vast amount of relevant information pertaining to the subject but the conclusions drawn on occasions appear biased.

Post India's nuclear tests of May 1998 and the Pakistani riposte, the fragile regional balance was made more precarious by the American intervention in Afghanistan and later in Iraq. There is of course another view, which holds that a nuclear balance is more compelling than a conventional balance of power. Currently a probe is on in Pakistan against their one-time nuclear hero Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan who is accused of having sold nuclear secrets to North Korea, Libya and Iran. Dittmer and his group rightly hold that nuclear power must be viewed as being embedded in a larger political and economic reality. Again their view that greater cognisance needs to be given to international structural variables – specially the number of strategic actors and their geographical positions is valid. The command and control arrangements of nuclear India and Pakistan are flawed but for different reasons. While in our case, political control is so complete that military inputs are minimised, in case of Pakistan the nuclear button is with the military and civilian politicians are excluded entirely! The Pakistani bias obviously is for an offensive pre-emptive war. Unlike India, Pakistan is a theocratic state and Pakistani misadventure of 1999 in Kargil underscores the reliability factor. Given Pakistan's lack of strategic depth, Pakistan will be tempted to launch a

*South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma- India, Pakistan & China. By Lowell Dittmer (London : ME Sharpe Inc, 2005), 274p, \$ 69.00, ISBN 0-7656-14197.

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nuclear first strike if its conventional forces are imbalanced on the ground. Some authors have rightly argued that having been defeated in all of the previous engagements, Pakistan might be more easily tempted to use nuclear weapons. It needs to be reiterated that unlike India, Pakistan is unwilling to give a 'no first use' pledge. Hence the 'crisis stability' of the region is low.

The Indian first leg of the triad is stated to be fully operational and work is in progress as regards missile and SLBM system. Modernisation of Ormara, Gwadar and Ketī Bandar seaports in Pakistan point towards a sub-surface approach. However, an SLBM system is a long-term undertaking and as such other means of delivery have not been given the go by. Hasan Askari Rizvi's hypothesis that Pakistan went nuclear merely to deter India cuts little ice. Pakistan had sown the seeds of its clandestine nuclear programme much earlier by utilising Chinese nuclear aid for enriched uranium and by sending its scientists to Holland (heavy water) and Italy (centrifuge rods). The foregoing together with the ranting of Bhutto (Pakistanis will eat grass to get a bomb) was shown in graphic detail in a BBC film titled "The Islamic Bomb". Dittmer's book confirms that Pakistan had a covert operational bomb by 1987! As Hoyt points out, Pakistan does not have a published nuclear doctrine and Pakistan's priority is to always ensure nuclear readiness vis-a-vis nuclear safeguards to avoid accidental launch. Pakistan's policy makers were satisfied with nuclear ambiguity in South Asia – the intellectuals, the media, political forums and the government all wanted Pakistan to continue with its policy of nuclear ambiguity. Sarnina Ahmad suggests that Pakistani nuclear programme was "based on calculated ambiguity". A better choice of word would perhaps be duplicity. Both writers are, however, of the opinion that India was the sole cause why Pakistan went nuclear. As is well known the motives for Pakistan to go nuclear are far too complex and include Pakistani ambitions for leadership of the Islamic nations. Equally, Pakistan's reliance on coercive diplomacy is strongly linked to the deterrent value of nuclear weapons.

China as an 'all weather friend' of Pakistan fully supports Pakistan's nuclear tests but categorically rejects the Indian assertion that direct Chinese threats and China's continued nuclear and missile assistance to Pakistan prompted India to go nuclear. This is strange logic. A CIA report quoted in the book confirms that every major Indian city is within the range of Chinese missiles deployed in Tibet while the same cannot be said of the Chinese cities. In the Chinese perception, India's nuclear tests are a serious setback for international arms control, the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and regional security. Jing-dong Yuan feels that *India has always aspired to become*

a power of global influence! In Yuan's perception, India's past cultural greatness, richness in natural and human resources, advancement in IT and a large modern army make India eminently suitable for such a vision.

However, Yuan conveniently omits to mention that China is better qualified for the very same reasons that he advances. The Chinese have viewed the Indo-Vietnamese Defence cooperation, India's improved relations with Myanmar, and Indo-ASEAN Naval cooperation with suspicion. The Chinese perception is that India-US strategic dialogue may point to its potential as a counterforce against China or to contain China. Jingdong Yuan, however, goes ballistic when he suggests that India would adopt a strategy of 'regional deterrence' – gain greater control over the Indian Ocean, consolidate predominance over South Asia, develop nuclear and missile capabilities to deter China and suppress Pakistan and, finally, discourage any US interference in sub-continent's affairs! In fact, the foregoing to some degree is what China has been attempting with success in South and South East Asia.

Leadership in The Indian Army*

Lieutenant General V K Kapoor, PVSM, (Retd)**

Leadership in the Indian Army is neither studied nor researched with the seriousness it deserves. In fact there is no institution for teaching leadership excellence at higher levels and it is assumed that an officer imbibes the requisite qualities and talent as he goes along in service through various courses of instruction and through his own experiences. I remember recommending to the Army Commander Army Training Command, for establishing a cell at the Army War College in 2005 for exploring methods of imbibing leadership excellence at higher tactical operational and strategic levels. Later I heard that a Centre for Leadership Excellence had been accepted for gentlemen cadets at the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun! The military mind and military bureaucracy work in astonishing ways.

The above backdrop is necessary to bring out the importance of the work done by Major General V K Singh of the Corps of Signals in writing biographies of 12 soldiers (Generals), worthy sons of India, whose contribution to nation building and whose inspiration to their subordinates set the tone for moulding an Army, which till date, continues to be a pillar of strength for the nation, both in peace and in war. The book is interesting and absorbing and, most of all, it enables a reader in understanding why certain actions and events occurred in the way they did. A case in point is the rift between Krishna Menon and General Thimayya, which culminated in the latter's resignation and the subsequent efforts of Nehru to play upon the emotions of the General to withdraw his resignation, which he did and thereafter lost respect of his own Army. Perhaps the General was not well versed in the strategic art of dealing with politicians as indeed was the case with many senior Generals of post independence era, leading to the erosion of the prestige of Service rank and status.

Reading the biographies of these luminaries was indeed a pleasure and particularly so about General Hanut under whose tutelage I grew up in the Poona Horse titled "Fakhr-e-Hind" by the Pakistan Army because of the severe casualties inflicted by this Regiment in both 1965 and 1971 Wars, in tank versus tank battles. The General truly epitomised courage, integrity, a high standard of morality, discipline and superior professionalism.

***Leadership in the Indian Army : Biographies of Twelve Soldiers.** By Major General V K Singh (New Delhi : Sage Publications, 2005), 417p, Rs. 450.00, ISBN 81-7829-452-4.

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I have not come across a senior officer of his calibre in my 40 years of service in the Army. He was not only a good tactician, as stated by the author but he was the only Indian General in that period who understood and practiced "Operational Art", which the Armed Forces are trying to imbibe currently. By this I mean to convey that both in planning and execution he would look for ways of maximising strategic gains with least amount of tactical effort. A deeply spiritual man; he motivated and energised his units and formations by the sheer strength of character and with his spiritual faith, and the subordinates, both men and officers, loved him. But those who were weak professionally or had a weak moral character, and there were many with such failings, tried to defame him. He was finally prevented from rising further in rank and status due to personal prejudice and envy of a few.

Each biography is worth reading carefully as they all contain a wealth of information. It would certainly inspire our younger generation and our senior officers alike, in the Services and more so in civilian life where due to lack of high quality leaders, the younger generation does not know whom they should emulate. It is a sad reflection of the decadence of the society in general.

I recommend that having made an excellent start the author should continue writing on leadership and focus now on strategic and operational level skills of officers. In fact in the case of General Sagat Singh, I would have liked to know more about his approach to operational situations. This would require a deeper look at their military careers and their military thought processes.

I recommend that this book be made compulsory reading for promotion examinations and the entrance examination for Defence Services Staff College course.