

Bridging Borders: Indo-Nepal Relations in a Changing Landscape

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Bridging Borders: Indo-Nepal Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape' is a new book by Lieutenant General Shokin Chauhan, a military author and a second-generation Gorkha officer, who was also India's Defence Attaché to Nepal from 2004 to 2007. He has also been the Director General Assam Rifles and later was the Chairman of the Ceasefire Monitoring Group in Nagaland.

The author's first-hand experience of Nepal and the Gorkhas takes the reader on a journey through the shared footprints of the history of India and Nepal; on the Indo-Nepal bridging relations and, thereby, bridging borders. The research topic 'Bridging Borders: India-Nepal Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape' for the United Service Institution of India led to this timely book release for the Indian academics and Nepal-China watchers who think of having a friendly nation to its north between its adversary China to its further north, with its Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) under the Chinese control.

'The history of the people is the story of their survival and growth on the land' discovers and traces the centuries-old bonds forged through trade, culture, and interwoven destinies, shaping a relationship critical to the region's stability. The stories of both India and Nepal have undergone tremendous ups and downs with changing relations from time to time.

Kirantis are said to have ruled the valley in the 7th or 8th Century BC. Their famous King Yalumber is even mentioned in the epic, *Mahabharat*. Around 300 AD, the Lichhavis arrived from Northern India and overthrew the Kirantis. One of the legacies of the Lichhavis is the Changu Narayan Temple near Bhaktapur, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Bridging Borders Indo-Nepal Relations in a Changing Landscape by Lieutenant General Shokin Chauhan PVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, PhD (Retd), Pages 191, Price ₹ 995/-, ISBN 978-81-968722-7-4 (HB), Pentagon Press LLP.

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World Heritage Site that dates back to the 5th Century. In the early 7th Century, Amshuvarma, the first Thakuri king took over the throne from his father-in-law who was a Lichhavi. He married off his daughter Bhrikuti to the famous Tibetan King, Tsong Tsen Gampo, thus, establishing good relations with Tibet. The Lichhavis brought art and architecture to the valley, but the golden age of creativity arrived in 1200 AD with the Mallas.

The history of the Gorkha state goes back to 1559 when Dravya Shah established a kingdom in an area chiefly inhabited by Magars. During the 17th and early 18th Centuries, Gorkha continued a slow expansion, conquering various states while forging alliances with others. Prithvi Narayan dedicated himself at an early age to the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley and for more than a century, Nepal remained in isolation.

After many years of struggle when the political parties were banned, they finally mustered enough courage to start a People's Movement in 1990. Paving the way for democracy, the then-King Birendra accepted constitutional reforms and established a multiparty parliament with the King as the Head of State and an executive Prime Minister. In May 1991, Nepal held its first parliamentary elections. In Feb 1996, the Maoist parties declared a People's War against the monarchy and the elected government.

A horrific tragedy (01 Jun 2001) wiped out the entire royal family, including King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya. Only King Birendra's brother, Gyanendra and his family survived. He was crowned the king. King Gyanendra abided by the elected government for some time and then dismissed the elected Parliament to wield absolute power.

In Apr 2006, another People's Movement was launched jointly by the democratic parties focusing most energy on Kathmandu, which led to a 19-day curfew. Eventually, King Gyanendra relinquished his power and reinstated Parliament. On 21 Nov 2006, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2006, committing to democracy and peace for the progress of the country and its people. A Constituent Assembly election was held on 10 Apr 2008. On 28 May 2008, the newly elected Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic, abolishing the 240-year-old monarchy.

The strategic geographical location of Nepal, which lies along the mountains of the central portion of the Himalayas has been well explained with the help of maps. A landlocked country, surrounded by India on three sides and by TAR to the north. However, I wonder if Nepal has really acted as an important bridge linking two ancient civilisations of the Asian continent, China in the north, and India in the south as brought out by the author. Even the Aryan links to the Indian subcontinent have since been debunked and, thereby, to Nepal as well.

The Indian defeat in the 1962 war against China marked significant geopolitical shifts and a change in the attitude of Nepal towards India. Also, if India could not protect itself, how could they expect India to protect Nepal? The main concern in Kathmandu was that a powerful China posed, possibly, a much larger threat to Nepal than India could militarily. The entry of China as a key strategic player in Nepal and working with the communist parties of that country has now created a better zone of influence with its economic power and is on its way to spreading its wing of eco-colonialism in Nepal. China has ultimately emerged as an important strategic player in Nepal's affairs.

Existing fault lines especially the border disputes, political tensions, and other sensitive issues, are well addressed with clarity, offering crucial context for understanding the past and present complexities. However, some of these disputes are the legacy of the British colonisation. Kalapani salient boundary dispute along its southern and south-eastern borders mainly due to shifting riverbeds and the origin of the Mahakali River around Dharchula are the reasons given for the dispute.

The Madhesi issue has also been discussed in great detail. The Madhesi protestors in Nepal, who were dissatisfied with the newly adopted Constitution of Nepal, caused the blockade. However, the Government of India and the ruling party at that time held multiple meetings with Madhesi leaders and were believed to have provoked them which was naturally not to Nepal's liking.

Towards a way forward for better and friendly relations with Nepal measures from the Indian side, the Nepalese side and joint measures have been discussed by the author. Reasons for Nepal trying to remain equidistant from India and China have been adequately elaborated by the author duly analysed. Former Prime

Minister BP Koirala's statement sums up the Catch-22 situation for India-Nepal relations: "Our ties shouldn't be interpreted only on the basis of ancient history and culture. Look at Europe; it may be one culturally, but they were always fighting and killing each other. Distrust does not disappear just because there is cultural affinity. Relationships are dependent upon differing perspectives on society and differing expectations of the future".

The author, being a second-generation Gorkha officer strongly feels that the "Presence of thousands of Indian Gurkha ex-servicemen in Nepal who have served in the Indian Army can help shape ideas and opinions in favour of India". The author has travelled extensively the length and breadth of Nepal while posted as India's Defence Attaché to Nepal. He continues to maintain close contacts with the Nepal-domiciled Indian Gurkha ex-servicemen with whom he has served over the years, through the changing political scenario of Nepal.

Wish the author had thrown light on the palace massacre of 01 Jun 2001, the tragedy that wiped out the entire royal family, including King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya with many of their closest relatives.

The quality of maps could have been better to be decipherable. Maybe the maps were retrieved from some very old historical archives. 'Uncertainty is Uncomfortable' so need to engage with the nuances even if uncomfortable which will lead to respective trust between the two Hindu nations India and Nepal. This timely researched book titled 'Bridging Borders: India-Nepal Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape', for those seeking an insight into the India-Nepal strategic relationship will be a valuable possession, especially to the serving Gorkha officers and India-Nepal-China watchers.

Colonel RC Patial, SM, FRGS, PhD

War Transformed: The Future of Twenty-First-Century Great Power Competition and Conflict by Mick Ryan, pages: 298, Price: ₹ 3060, ISBN: 9781682477410, Naval Institute Press.

Introduction: Setting the Scene

The book explores strategies for predicting and adapting to the changes in future warfare. It reviews necessary institutional adjustments, military concepts and Human Resource (HR) development, concluding with the principal themes for applying military power in the 21st Century. Surprisingly, the book's introductory section begins by referencing the Galwan clash to highlight the fusion of outdated and the most modern technologies in future wars, the propensity of minor incidents to quickly escalate and embedded surprises in conflict, technology and natural events.

Mick Ryan, the author, retired as a Major General from the Australian Army after heading the Australian Defence College, Canberra. He draws his experiences from Brigade level command appointments, leadership of the strategic planning organisations in the Australian Army and Australia's first reconstruction task force in Afghanistan. The book 'War Transformed' was published on 15 Feb 2022 by the United States (US) Naval Institute Books. 'Futura Doctrina' is a recently established Substack page by the author where he writes about contemporary war and competition and the technological and human dimensions in these areas. 'White Sun War' is the latest book by the author that is a fictional account of the China-Taiwan conflict.

Chapter I: 'Revolutions and Military Change'

In Chapter I, the author examines the impacts of the industrial and information revolutions on society and warfare while identifying upcoming disruptors such as great power competition, demographic trends, disruptive technologies and climate and natural threats.

Chapter II: 'Future Wars'

In Chapter II, the author examines how the disruptors identified in the first chapter will reshape warfare and identifies various continuities with the war itself as the first continuity. He challenges the proponents of 'Declining War Theory' and emphasises that deterrence will remain the cornerstone of international security studies. He critiques the use of buzzwords and fads like 'Gray Zone' and advocates 'Plain English' in military discourse for better

clarity. Additionally, the chapter delves into surprise as a continuity factor. The author opines that generating surprise should extend beyond the military domain, given the broader context of national security. He further discusses the trends in 21st Century warfare that include compressed adaptation cycles, signature management, man-unmanned teaming alongside conventional forces, narrative war and greater sovereign resilience to cater for protracted wars. The chapter concludes that militaries must evolve with new ideas, institutions and personnel.

Chapter III: 'Institutions, Ideas and Future Military Effectiveness'

The highlight of Chapter III is the analytical framework that the author postulates as metrics to gauge the military effectiveness at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare. He cites the US multi-domain operations and the institutional innovation in creating the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force by China as organisational and operational innovations that have emerged as a result of both continuity and transformative changes in warfare. The chapter concludes with a cursory account of the counter-adaptation strategy to degrade adversary adaptive mechanisms.

Chapter IV

In Chapter IV, the author focuses on the HR management aspects of the military. Driving home the point, he concludes that due to the transformation in war, there is an urgent necessity to continually invest in the intellectual edge both at the individual capacity to out-think and out-plan the adversary and the institutional capacity to solve complex problems of future force design and operational concepts. He also lays out a strategic design for Professional Military Education (PME), from tactical mastery to training operational artists and nurturing strategists and national security leaders. The author also outlines a 'Think Tank and Idea Incubators' role for the premier military training institutes. While concluding the book, Ryan gives out propositions to assist military institutions to successfully wade through the challenges of the 21st Century.

Critique

Stamping his professional authority, the author has crafted a well-researched book that is palatable, especially to military practitioners. Despite addressing multiple themes, the author presents a coherent

and structured book. The book revisits familiar themes and narratives yet stands out through unique viewpoints on traditional aspects, presented with historical analysis and logical arguments. It delves into granular details, such as advocating against the 'Zero Error Syndrome' and critiquing the excessive use of military jargon like 'Grey Zone', which resonates with military practitioners.

The author introduces novel concepts like identifying the 'Notion of Victory' in expanding domains of warfare, counter-adaptation strategy to offset adversaries' adaptive mechanism and promotions linked to intellectual curiosity, which are radical departures from the traditional approach to warfare and human capital development. However, the counter-adaptation strategies lack detailed analysis, occasionally leading to recommendations that appear impractical. The emphasis laid on building the 'Intellectual Edge' in the human capital appears to be drawn from his seasoned experience as head of the Australian Defence College. The strategic design outlined in PME reinforces this aspect, although its applicability may vary based on the specific contexts of different countries.

Although the book was written with western militaries and coalition forces in mind, it offers excellent insights and policy recommendations for militaries worldwide. Overall, the author's work provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the evolving nature of warfare and its implications for military strategy and training. The author's book is a must-read for military practitioners and national security planners worldwide.

Colonel R Abhilash

Geopolitical Shifts and Opportunities, New Horizons in India-Southeast Asia Relations, ICWA-Delhi by *Prabir De and Temjenmeren Ao*, Pages:278, Price: ₹ 1680/-ISBN: 978-93-94915-80-0, KW Publishers Pvt Ltd.

India and Southeast Asian countries have transformed their diplomatic relationship into a strategic-level partnership. Apart from having a shared cultural and historical relationship, both India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) continue to pave their way for a world that values and accepts the active participation of the Global South countries at a strategic level. With ASEAN countries, India has registered a bilateral trade of USD 131.5 bn in 2022-23. The trade with ASEAN accounted for

11.3 per cent of India's global trade in 2022-23. A true multifaceted partnership with Southeast Asia has opened a gateway of opportunities for both in the form of enhanced cooperation, not only bilaterally, with each Southeast Asian country but also at regional forums.

India recognises the unique identity of each nation and their centrality in constructing an equity-based structure that tackles the challenges of a growing Indo-Pacific issue. The Indo-Pacific theatre laden with a host of political, economic, environmental and security-related opportunities and challenges, requires ASEAN to be at the front. This is evident from the establishment of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific initiative ascertains the confluence between Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean with a view to enhance partnership, equality, open dialogue and not push for hard power rivalry, which is also endorsed by the Indian side.

This book serves to be a pedestal for understanding the ASEAN and India relations from a comprehensive perspective. It also gives a detailed account of epigraphical and palaeographical records of similarities between the scriptures of Southeast Asia and Indic scripts and languages. Underscoring how Sanskrit became a popular 'Courtly' language after 4 CE, followed by the use of Pali which eventually became more common due to the spread of Buddhism. The subsequent chapters include a detailed account of ASEAN-India relations which have been exhaustively and factually described by contributors. These include a critical analysis of the maritime challenges in the South China Sea and other evolving security dimensions. The role of multilateral mechanisms in dealing with a volatile geopolitical situation, especially at the time of heightened US-China powerplay. How does India see these complex geopolitical realities and turn the tide towards its side by not only 'Looking East' but 'Acting East' is a long-drawn game to be followed. Readers also get the opportunity to read the proceedings of the conference out of which the book was carved out.

Ms Surbhi Chakraborty

India's Historic Battles: Imphal-Kohima, 1944, by Hemant Singh Katoch, Pages: 228, Price: ₹ 310/-, ISBN: 978-9354899126, HarperCollins India.

The book – 'Imphal Kohima 1944' is the first battlefield guide for Imphal and Kohima. It looks at what the present-day states of

Manipur and Nagaland have to offer about the two battles and the Second World War, including battlefields, memorials, airfields, cemeteries and museums. In the process, it describes the forces that clashed at the time, their strategies and the bitter fighting that ensued.

The book gives a very detailed overview of the clash between the British Fourteenth Army and the Japanese Fifteenth Army at Imphal in Manipur and at Kohima in the Naga Hills of what was then Assam in 1944, which was the turning point of the Japanese invasion of India and march through Asia was later stopped, with the Allies subsequently driving them out of Burma in 1945. The Japanese lost some 30,000 men, with another 23,000 injured, in what is considered one of their greatest-ever defeats on land. In Apr 2013, Imphal-Kohima was named 'Britain's Greatest Battle' by the United Kingdom's National Army Museum. Indians fought on both sides as part of the Fourteenth Army and, albeit, in much smaller numbers, alongside the Japanese as soldiers of the Indian National Army.

The book is divided into three main chapters, which are Imphal, Kohima, Ledo Road and the Hump, in which the battles of Kohima and Imphal are described in great detail for the reader to understand the intricacies of jungle warfare as faced in the thick and dense fields of Northeast.

A battlefield guide has been given along with the book to assist in the mapping of relics of war and contribute to increasing awareness about this chapter of history. The guide also briefly presents sites that describe the forces that clashed at the time, their strategies and the bitter fighting that ensued. The guide also briefly presents sites of interest in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh that are linked to the war-era Ledo/Stillwell Road and fights over the 'Hump'. The book gives practical information for visitors in terms of security situations, permits, transport links, accommodation, season to visit, tour operators, etc.

The author has taken a number of photographs of the present-day sites, war memorials and historical places that are suitably placed in the book, along with maps, to give a better description of the battle and correlation between the two.

Colonel Ravinder Kumar Sharma (Retd)