

Short Reviews of Recent Books

Strategic Vision-2030: Security and Development of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. *By Air Marshal PK Roy, PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd) and Commodore Aspi Cawasji, NM, VSM (Retd) (New Delhi, Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2017), pp 177, Price Rs 850.00, ISBN 978-93-86457-18-9 (Hardback) and 978-93-86457-19-6 (e-book)*

In an era where the geoeconomic and geopolitic centre of gravity has shifted from the North Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, the Indian Ocean is fast evolving as a geostrategic frontier. This is not to say that the Ocean has not been an important source of civilisational exchanges in the past but with the shipping lanes through the Ocean witnessing the transshipment of nearly 50 per cent of trade and 70 per cent of energy flow, its importance to the littoral and extra regional powers, especially China is increasing manifold.

China, with its insecurities related to the choke points in the Indian Ocean, is increasingly making forays into the region with its 'String of Pearls' by development of ports and facilities all along the littoral, and is a source of concern to India. This is likely to result in a future permanent presence of the People's Liberation Army (Navy) in the Indian Ocean. The Andaman and Nicobar group of islands, with their north-south configuration spread of nearly 750 kms and domination over the six degree channel which is traversed by bulk of the traffic between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, are ideally situated to supplement the already dominant location of India in the region.

This book provides a very lucid account of the importance of the Islands and the legacy of their neglect by the past and the current governments. Commencing with an environmental scan, legislating the strategic importance of the region in the emerging global dispensation, the book highlights the fact that security is a holistic concept encompassing physical, economic and human security aspects. Beleaguered by the general apathy towards the Islands, the book makes a compelling case for a fast paced, synergised and holistic development of the Islands which are located far from the Indian landmass and have limited habitation (only 37 of the 572 islands are inhabited). These are susceptible to myriad threats ranging from the conventional to the non-traditional; such as poaching of marine and forest resources, illegal migration, arms smuggling and natural disasters.

Easy to read, the book provides a global environment scan, geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean Region, an overview of the A&N Islands, their natural, industrial and economic potential and their strengths and weaknesses and the way ahead. The book also highlights the dismal growth of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, an experiment in jointness mired in the bureaucratic apathy within the largely mainland centric Services Headquarters. The measures and initiatives (economic and strategic) required to be taken are well-researched and beg synergetic institutionalisation to harvest the full potential of these islands and intensify our physical claim.

A good read to get a comprehensive view on the status and potential of these islands, the book could have delved a little more on the benefits accruing in the security domain. Lauding the initiative of the present dispensation in Delhi towards recognition of these islands, the authors make a compelling case for comprehensive development not being held hostage to the environmental lobby within the country.

Major General Vivek Sehgal, VSM (Retd)

The Great Game in Afghanistan – Rajiv Gandhi, General Zia and the Unending War. By Kalol Bhattacharjee, (Harper Collins Publishers, India), pp-300, Price- Rs-599/- , ISBN: 978-93-5264-439-1

The book deals with the events that followed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan on 25 Dec 1979 – the Christmas Day to install a Pro-Soviet government under Babrak Karmal of the PDPA and how this had posed a direct threat to Pakistan as well as endangered the stability of South Asia. It also uncovers the plans of Pakistan providing support to the Afghan Mujahedeen through financial aid from Saudi Arabia and supply of weapons by the CIA.

The book covers in detail the developing situation wherein there was a stalemate in Afghanistan and how the fighting had led to unbearable human and economic cost to the Soviet Union necessitating a peace plan that could ensure the honourable exit of the Soviets. While making a mention of the peace efforts made by the UN through its special representative, Diego Cordovez, the author unveils the vital role played by Rajiv Gandhi as the facilitator on the request of President Reagan of the US. Unveiling a series of meetings/conferences at Geneva that finally resulted in the signing of the mutually agreed upon Peace Accord by all the major stakeholders i.e. USA, USSR, Pakistan and Afghanistan; thus, setting the stage for the Soviet withdrawal, contingent to the US commitment of not supplying weapons to the Mujahedeen through Pakistan and forging a government of National Unity under Najibullah in Afghanistan. India also expected the US to terminate the military aid to Pakistan.

The author gives deep insight into how the convergence of interests brought the US and Pakistan together wherein the US continued to supply weapons to the Mujahedeen and rendering military aid to Pakistan despite its pursuing a covert nuclear programme. It also uncovers the plan of their betrayal that undermined Rajiv Gandhi's bid to end the unending war in Afghanistan leading to a serious erosion of relations between the US and India. While it was no surprise that Zia-ul-Haq continued providing support and weapons to the Mujahedeen in violation of the Geneva Peace Accord, April 1988; but the betrayal by the US was considered by India a "stab in the back".

Besides the main subject of the Soviet intervention, reaching of the Peace Accord and how it was violated, the book contains details of General Zia-ul-Haq emerging as the military dictator in Pakistan and the politics he played that finally led to his sudden death in an air crash. It also covers two other important subjects; Rajiv Gandhi taking over as the young Prime Minister of India, his vision of modernising the country, role as the facilitator of the Peace Accord and his disappointment on being spurned by the Reagan administration as also the contribution of John Gunther Dean in forging close relations between the US and India. The author makes it clear that India was against any intervention or interference in the affairs of another country.

In writing the book, the author relies on the declassified papers of Dean, the US Ambassador to India and the conversations with Ronen Sen, Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic aide. The book details the account how Dean felt betrayed by his own country and was removed unceremoniously certifying him as mentally deranged.

The language of the book is simple and the author has done extensive research. However, Dean's claim of Israel being involved in the killing of Zia has not been substantiated by any evidence. The book is silent on the reaction of India to the Soviet intervention; probably Mrs Indira Gandhi was caught by surprise. Whatever be the truth, the fact remains that the majority of the Afghans believed that Mrs Indira Gandhi was supportive of the Soviet intervention.

The book offers a new look at the dynamics of the Afghan issue and details the active role of diplomacy during Rajiv Gandhi's years. The book, therefore, is of immense value to those in diplomatic assignments.

Major General Samay Ram, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Prison Narratives. By Akhtar Baloch (Compiled and Translated by Asad Palijo) (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2017), pp 178, Pakistan Rupees 995/-.

History of Pakistan during General Yahya Khan's military regime inevitably focusses on the growing gulf between East and West Pakistan leading finally to the secession of East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh. The drama of that political divide overshadows other conflicts in West Pakistan at the time and in particular in Sindh. Here a nascent Sindhi nationalist movement driven in part by a linguistic nationalism also had its own share of struggles and resistance to a military regime unable to understand such regional aspirations. In this background, Akhtar Baloch's *Prison Narratives* is an unassuming but riveting and most unusual book. As a young 17 year old undergraduate Akhtar Baloch was jailed for starting a hunger strike. This was part of a general student's movement against the military regime but had also a specific demand that electoral lists for the forthcoming general elections be published not just in Urdu (and Bengali for East Pakistan) but also in Sindhi for Sindh. Akhtar was to spend about a year from November 1969 in Hyderabad central jail. *Prison Narratives* is the diary she kept during her imprisonment and is an account of the monotony, the petty tyrannies and exploitation but also the friendship and comradeship she encountered. This is a simple but sincere record of a young woman activist deeply committed to the revolutionary transformation of Sindh and in general against military rule and feudal domination. The book's great merit is that it does not try to overdramatise the author's experiences and reactions and its simplicity and directness underwrites the author's commitment and passion. It has nevertheless interesting sidelights in terms of Sindhi attitudes towards Urdu and Punjabi speakers, the extent to which developments in China, Vietnam and Cuba etc. influenced the Pakistani student's movement of the time, the rigid gender hierarchies that prevailed and how, notwithstanding these, a young girl could be so politicised as Akhtar Baloch was even as a teenager. Endearing also are the brief sketches of the other inmates of the prison. For readers interested in Pakistan's deeply contested domestic politics and modern Sindh history, this little book would be of great interest.

Shri TCA Raghavan, IFS (Retd)

The Arts and Crafts of the Hunza Valley in Pakistan: Living Traditions in the Karakoram. By Jurgen Wasim Frembgen (Oxford University Press, Karachi in collaboration with the Museum Funf Kontinente in Munich, 2017). pp 110, Pakistan Rupees 1425/-.

The Arts and Crafts of the Hunza Valley in Pakistan is an ethnographic study of the material culture of the Hunza Valley in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. In administrative terms in Pakistan the former princely kingdom of Hunza stands incorporated in the Gilgit Baltistan region whose undefined constitutional status remains a matter of discussion and disputation both in Pakistan and India as also elsewhere. This book, however, addresses other issues- in particular the traditional crafts and other living traditions of the Hunza Valley and is, therefore, far removed from all these contestations. It is based primarily on contextualising the collection of objects gathered during field trips and now preserved in a museum in Munich, Germany. The analysis of a cross section of crafts ranging from textile, iron and stoneware, carpentry etc. is an insight into the traditional world of Hunza which is gradually disappearing. It is also a reminder of the cross civilisational links of this region connected as it was to China, Central Asia and India.

Shri TCA Raghavan, IFS (Retd)

China's Emerging Cyber Operations: Capabilities and Implications for India. *By Colonel Rohit Mehrotra (New Delhi: GB Books, 2017), Price Rs 995, pp..302, ISBN 9789383930647*

This book, in six chapters, is a holistic study on China's emergence as a cyber power. It carries out an in-depth analysis of the structures which China has put in place for carrying out cyber operations, the supporting doctrinal thought and the present day capabilities. It is well known that cyberspace has emerged as the new domain of warfare. This type of war can be waged even during peacetime and for multifarious tasks such as surveillance, espionage and even economic espionage. Enemy's information networks can be disrupted with plausible deniability. Therefore, the study of China's capability enhancement has certain valuable lessons for India also. These have been succinctly brought out by the author.

The first chapter has traced the physical and virtual dimensions of the cyberspace. It has attempted to study the cyberspace in its entirety. Concepts of cyberwarfare, cyber strategy, cyber terrorism the possible threats to national security have been explained in this chapter. In the next chapter the author has focussed on the chronology of the evolution of Chinese warfare capabilities. The role of the government, role of CMC as also PLA has been examined in this regard. The author has correctly established that a determined impetus from the very top has been the key driver of China's growth in the cyber domain.

The third and the fourth chapters have been devoted to the doctrinal thought with respect to waging of cyber war as also the organisational structures and capabilities. It is noteworthy that China has recently reorganised its armed forces and created a strategic support force. Cyber organisations will be part of this force and will aid and assist the operational commander. The control of this force has been kept centralised, and need based allocation will be done to the Theatre commands.

In the last two chapters, further steps in China's cyber capability building as also implications for India have been traced. While China's trajectory in this field remains steady, India can ignore this emerging arena of warfare only at its own peril. India has become increasingly networked in all spheres. Even the armed forces are progressing towards net centric warfare. While this will make India more efficient, it also makes the structures more vulnerable to cyber threats. For example the entire financial sector is reliant on wire transfers making it vulnerable to Chinese hackers. India therefore will do well to emulate the Chinese model with suitable modifications. India has a sizeable IT sector capability. The need is to channelize some of this capability for developing offensive as also defensive cyber capabilities under a formal structure.

Brigadier Sandeep Jain

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