

Books

Strategic Himalayas: (Republican Nepal and External Powers)

By: Nihar R. Nayak

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Reviewed By: Brig C S Thapa (Retd)

Dr. Nihar R Nayak is an Associate Fellow with the Institute of Defence Study and Analyses (IDSA), and has worked a lot with conflict management in South Asia needless to say the very fact that he chooses Nepal and its foreign policy is indeed heartening. The book has been correctly defined as a courageous effort to define new Nepal by Prof S D Munsri. This book needs to be read by policy makers and the author has done well to explain the position of Nepal as classically defined by them "as a yam between two rocks India and China". The Book is well researched extremely well covered with tables and Figures, the role of America and Pakistan are also dealt with, plus the anti India feeling are very well covered. Nepal has just been hit by a very bad earthquake and the social costs of the earthquake will cost any nation a lot of ill will. There is acute poverty in Nepal currently and human trafficking is likely to increase, over a period of time this will be a sour point between India and Nepal, the Chinese stand insulated because of the mighty Himalayas, and Pakistan does not have cultural and old ties, thus if this social aspect is not well managed, and the Nepalese being proud people this issue too will affect geo strategic ties and anti India feeling may increase at some stage.

The book is neatly written in eight chapters. Chapter one is interesting and academic as it lays down the broad parameters for the study. Chapter two analyses the foreign policy of Nepal and the author does well to bring out "while earlier Nepal was looking towards the West for investment it now looks more towards its neighbours for investments". From an Indian point of view Chapter three "Protecting the sphere of influence: India's relationship with Nepal is very important. The author has tackled de nouveau issues which normally remain cloistered in international diplomacy, like "conflicts over peace treaty 1950", and others like trafficking, ill legal trade, border encroachment and migration. I wish he had given some suggestions and also thought about the impact of this issue on the identity of the Gorkhas of India.

Chapter four deal with China in Nepal: From Political to Strategic Engagement is written with end notes over 35 pages while the chapter on India is written on 33 pages, which just shows that there is more to write on China- Nepal than Nepal- India. A perusal of the two chapters also shows bungling by India and China improving its position, which should leave policy makers alarmed. The author has well brought out Chinese aims in Nepal for the short term and midterm. Chapters five, six and seven are very informative and deal with US, European Union and Pakistan respectfully. It is Pakistan's role in Nepal that India needs to be aware off. As pointed out, "despite being economically fragile and politically unstable Pakistan has been consistently providing development aid to Nepal", the reason is simple the open border opens many avenues for Pakistan's security agencies.

Chapter eight on conclusions is rather short. The author should have stated in clearer terms "what is wrong with India's policy in Nepal. Though India is blamed for a lot of Nepal woes and their intelligentsia are anti Indian the author could have well compared with other smaller countries where this is not the case. Why does only Nepal blame India for all its woes? This question needs to be answered? Why do cultural and religious ties fail? Why after recruiting manpower and having good will in the interior of Nepal does Indian policy fail in Kathmandu?

A good book and the author has done well to cover aspects of Nepal which we generally tend to overlook.
