

Critical Issues in Indian Politics: India's Foreign Policy,

edited by Kanti P. Bajpai and Harsh V. Pant, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 452, INR 1,095

Critical Issues in Indian Politics: India's National Security,

edited by Kanti P. Bajpai and Harsh V. Pant, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 486, INR 995

*Stuti Banerjee**

Indian foreign policy has made tremendous progress since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Today, India is being seen as an important regional power and a responsible global player. It is the goal of India's foreign policy to achieve major power status for the country in the international arena. This ambition has been a common thread in the policies of all political dispensations to have ruled the country. To achieve this stated goal, India needs to be pragmatic and instead of being guided by the past, it has to look at safeguarding its interest in the future. However, as Bajpai and Pant point out, the common view, even in India, is that the country acts in an ad hoc manner, has no overarching view of its interests or policies that might serve those interests and lacks what might be called a 'strategic culture'.

The end of the Cold War witnessed India questioning the relevance of its foreign policy of non-alignment. It has been pointed out by C. Raja Mohan in the reader on foreign policy, that the policy of non-alignment

* Dr Stuti Banerjee is a Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.

ISSN 0976-1004 print

© 2013 Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1, January–March 2014, pp. 127–134



and the movement, though related, are two different ideas. This distinction is not understood and even today the relevance of the policy is equated to the importance of the movement. It is very significant to note that the movement was a product of the policy and came much later.

The transition from non-aligned to an acceptance of the United States' (US) dominance, economic reforms and the beginning of coalition politics at home are some of the changes that India has adjusted to. India is expanding its strategic reach and to widen this space,

it is accepting the role of alliance—albeit in a limited manner—by crafting alliance like relations with the US, while not giving up on its special ties to Russia or exploring deeper relations with the European Union and Japan and managing its complex ties with China.

Having established a need for a strategic culture, Kanti Bajpai describes it as 'consisting two parts. The first is an assumption about the orderliness in the world and the second is the assumptions about operational policy that follows from the prior assumptions.'

India has ambitions of becoming a major power. Some would even say that this ambition is rooted in a self-image that as a grand civilization, India is entitled to be recognized as a global and regional power. However, this self-proclamation needs to be pushed by certain resources and capabilities. Sanjay Baru has brought forward the need for economic performance from India. India's declared nuclear power status notwithstanding, there is a gap between credibility and capability. This gap, between current strategic capabilities and potential as a major power, can be bridged through sustained economic growth. Fiscal growth would lead to increased investments in health, education, urban services and rural development. These are all aspects of India's overall national security concern. Economic growth, to a large extent, will shape the way India is able to harness and utilize as well as deploy its strategic assets to project power and influence. For any state vying to be a major power, it is imperative that her military be supported by indigenous technology and hardware. This is a critical area where progress has been very slow and it is reflected in our conduct of foreign policy, especially with respect to the major powers.

India's relations have changed greatly with the major powers. 'From estrangement to engagement' is the term that is often used to describe the changes in India–US relations. As pointed out by Ashley Tellis, the transformation in the relations has [had] enormous consequence for both

countries and the future 'balance of power' in Asia. The end of the Cold War provided the US with an opportunity to re-engage with India and to pursue the relationship without the pressure of the politics of the previous decades. Convergence of ideas has added value to this relationship. However, the two are aware that this does not translate into supporting each other on all issues. India is not an alliance partner of the US, nor is it an uncritical partner. India's size, history and her ambitions mean that she will voice her opinion to safeguard her interests. The US–India nuclear pact is an example of India negotiating a deal that provides the necessary foreign technology and also protects Indian interests. The deal, while cementing the partnership, is also an indicator that India will not be submissive to the US interests.

The other major power that the reader has focussed on is China. Whether India and China are rivals or friends is a question for which we are still searching for answers. Both countries are expected to mark the present century as the 'Asia century'; they are the challengers, expected to shape international geopolitics and economics in the foreseeable future. The two chapters on India and China are compact yet comprehensive in their views on the relations between the two countries. They study the Sino-Indian war and the reasons the war continues to shape India–China relations. The war was not simply a dispute on the border but involved historical heritage, the trauma and humiliation inflicted as a result of colonialism as well as the politics of the Cold War. The chapters bring to the readers the various stages leading up to the war and the points at which India could have avoided military action, such as the failures of the border negotiating talks. The chapter is not a judgement on the political leadership of India; in hindsight, it has been acknowledged that their understanding was flawed. India was not militarily in a position to fight with the Chinese Army, and this is a fact that was accepted in 1962 as it is accepted now.

India's relations with Pakistan are perhaps the most studied and debated topic in India. The rivalry between the two has continued unabated over a long period of time and involved wars and conflicts and has cast a shadow over relations with other states as well. T.V. Paul's chapter is a study of this enduring rivalry and the reasons for its continuation.

The most important contribution of the book is perhaps in highlighting the reforms that are required to develop and overcome the structural problems of India's foreign policy. Foreign policy is a strategy that is thought, implemented and executed by members of the Indian Foreign

Service. The members of the service are chosen after a tough examination; however, the number is highly inadequate to represent India and her interests across the various missions and consulates around the world. It is high time that the service expands its intake of officers as well as reforms itself to retain and attract high-calibre officers. The service should increase its reach to bringing in non-career officers from universities and Indian think tanks. The service has to invest in the development of world-class social science research and build partnerships with institutions. As India starts to play a more proactive role in international affairs, the foreign service of the country has to be able to match to the new challenges.

The change in India's foreign policy outlook is also reflected in the introspection on its national security. The security threats are both external and internal and from states and non-state actors. The reader on national security is a comprehensive view of the need to undertake reforms in the defence sector. The India armed forces are trained to fight the threats that emanate from outside the boundaries; however, they are now increasingly facing the enemy within. The forces have realized the need to change the training apparatus to cope with this new development.

Rajesh Rajagopalan has written about the Indian Army's counterinsurgency doctrine that developed as a rest of the Naga insurgency and was formalized during the Mizo insurgency. As the Indian Army was fighting fellow Indians, the doctrine imposed limitations on the amount of force to be used. The concept of 'cordon and search' was introduced to isolate the insurgents from the general population. The doctrine called on the army to assert direct control over an area by establishing large number of military posts, while emphasizing the superiority of force both in deployment and operations. The army was able to achieve success in controlling the Naga and Mizo insurgencies with the help of this doctrine that revealed a conventional war bias. However, by the 1980s, the army realized that it could not provide the solutions to insurgencies. The role of the army was to establish 'normalcy', thereafter it was the political leadership which needed to provide the solutions. Examining the insurgencies in the North-East, Bethany Lucas points out that while violence has been a part of the insurgencies of the North-East, they have never been of the scale witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir. The author states that the reason for insurgency in the North-East is the lack of rule of law despite the heavy presence of the military. However, the author is unable to bring forth the reasons for this lack of rule of law while stating that violence has reduced in the region.

Terrorism in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is perhaps one of the most intense and violent that India is facing. The government has identified certain 'moderate groups' and has been negotiating with them. Praveen Swami's chapter on the issue brings out the statistics that counter the stated claims of the policies such as the 'healing touch' programmes. The issue has implications beyond the borders of the state as was evident from the attack on the Indian Parliament. Pakistan's role in supporting terrorist activities and infiltration is well documented. The demolition of the Babri Masjid is viewed by the author as a major factor in Pakistan's continued involvement.

Pakistan and India are neighbouring nuclear weapons states that are hostile to each other. A breakdown of deterrence between the two would have serious consequences for South Asia. The credibility of India's support for the nuclear disarmament movement was questioned after the nuclear test by India in 1998. It was viewed as an antithesis to the philosophy of non-violence of Gandhi. Bharat Karnad's article is a discourse on the Gandhian way of satyagraha. He points out that Gandhi has never advocated his 'doctrine of non-violence' to guide defence policy, circumscribe national security options and imperative or otherwise be a hindrance to the furtherance of national security in anyway. The chapter presents views on the use of force and Indian statecraft as advised by ancient text to present-day national security policy.

When India tested her nuclear weapons, there was a sense of euphoria in the nation. However, economic sanctions and India's inability to take any military action against Pakistan after the attacks on the Parliament led many to question the need for such weapons—a question answered by K. Subrahmanyam and George Perkovich. Their chapters are a detailed account of the decisions to test the nuclear weapons in both 1979 and 1998, by India and Pakistan. However, India has to understand that nuclear weapons alone will not make it the major power it strives to be. The drawback of both these chapters is that they were written just after the nuclear tests of 1998 and 15 years hence, both India and Pakistan have developed a nuclear policy that provides the basic tenants of nuclear use by both.

India's nuclear programme is linked to the Chinese nuclear programme. However, the international community is concerned about a possible nuclear war between India and Pakistan. The section on nuclear weapons and strategic stability is interesting as it present both the views to the readers. Sumit Ganguly has argued that nuclear deterrence exists

between the two countries. Pakistan is more secure in its knowledge that as it has nuclear weapons, India will not attack it. However, it has time and again tested India's patience. For India, nuclear Pakistan is not the only factor that has to be calculated when responding to a threat from the country—it has to also factor in the possible responses from China. On the other hand, S. Paul Kapur, in his article, argues that nuclear weapons are the cause of instability in the region. He contends that nuclear weapons provide Pakistan with a shield to repel an Indian attack, thus encouraging aggressive behaviour. This changes India's conventional military posture leading to more instability in the region.

While the lack of reforms in the defence sector has been blamed largely on the Indian bureaucracy and the political class, the three services cannot be completely absolved of their share of the blame. Inter-service rivalry, though healthy in some respects, is also a roadblock to reforms. It is surprising that after the recommendations of various committees over the past few years, there is still no office akin to that of the Joint Defence Staff. There is no debate on national security or the issues that govern the civil–military relationship.

In a region where democracy and the military have a strained relationship, India should be rightly proud of her ability to be a successful democracy with the military in the barracks. The credit has to be shared with the military which has remained confined to its sphere of duty and has readily accepted the prevalence of the civil leadership. However, the lack of foresight between the two has meant that the Indian armed forces are facing major infrastructure problems, equipment obsolescence and a shortage of officers.

A lot has been said about India's ability to fight a war with Pakistan and the capabilities it has to fight a war with China. However, the wars India would have to fight in the future will not be limited to the land, air or sea domains alone, they would include the aerospace and the cyber domains as well. India has to prepare her forces to meet these new threats as well with enhanced training programmes. Anit Mukherjee has analyzed the detachment that is prevailing between the military and the civil institutions. He has identified three main characteristics of this relation: the tradition of non-interference in defence issues by politicians; lack of bureaucratic expertise; and considerable autonomy enjoyed by the three services over their staff. He has gone on to identify the various committees that have initiated reforms and the reasons why these reforms have not taken place.

Nuclear security cannot be limited to the role that the Indian defence forces play. Internal security of the nation is protected by the police force. K.P. Gill and Ajai Sahni have identified the role of the police in being the first line of defence against forces opposed to the state. Gill's chapter is a detailed account of the rise of terrorism in Punjab and constraints under which the police force worked to emerge victorious. He has identified the political decisions that helped and hindered police operations. He also discusses issues such as lack of guns and ammunitions and attacks on family members of policemen which affected the morale of the force. Tackling the complex issue of Naxalism, Ajai Sahni points at the excessive focus that has been used by both the Naxals and the government to seize power. He cautions that this approach is incomplete if there is no social and political transformation at the grassroots. Both the writers are critical of the state and central governments and have called for reforms in the training of the police force. They talk about the need for strengthening the force by providing them with better facilities and infrastructure, building more police stations, and providing them with better equipment.

The editors of these two readers have done a commendable job in identifying the issues that need to be highlighted by providing the reader with appropriate articles. The volumes are restricted in their scope to articles published in the past 15 years. While the insight and analyses the articles present are as much relevant today as when they were originally published, some of the articles could have been updated. This is especially true of some chapters published in the reader on India's national security.

India's foreign policy deals with a range of issues and it is understandable that it cannot be encompassed in one reader. The editors have restrained their range to India's relations with her neighbours and with the important international powers. However, the omission of Russia-India relationship and the changing dynamics within it is glaring, especially given that some chapters in the reader mention Russia as an important power.

The two readers are important addition to the literature on India's foreign policy and national security policy. They give a clear understanding of the making of India's foreign policy, the ideas that help shape it and the past that she continues to carry into her present and future; and fill the much-needed gap in the understanding of national security policy. The readers are critical of the defence forces, especially their inter-service rivalry which has also hampered the development of a comprehensive policy.

While the readers appear to be focussed primarily on students and scholars studying policymaking, it is hoped that the readership would include members of the armed forces as well as decision makers so as to better understand the problems that India will face in the future and how best to overcome them by working together.