

Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India–Pakistan Escalation Dynamics, by Happymon Jacob, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. xxvii + 401, INR 995

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While contending the prevailing realists' explanation of war happening because of power struggle, John Vasquez argues in his book, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, that a majority of wars are fought over territory, either to defend or occupy it. According to Vasquez, territorial disputes between two countries are 'much more war-prone' than others. These disputes underlie the causes of war in two senses: first, '...instead of leading immediately or inevitably to war, [territorial disputes] usually produce a sequence of events that results in war'; and second: 'they are *causes* in the sense that if claims over contiguous territory are settled amicably at one point in the history of two states, it is highly unlikely that a dyadic war will break out between the two neighbours regardless of other issues that may arise in the future.'¹

Both these arguments remain relevant to the South Asian context: the first as a cause of war and the second as a possible/potential solution to the problem. India and Pakistan have been engaged in border disputes since the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of the latter in 1947. The disputes have rendered the relations between the two countries worrisome and strenuous. They have fought four wars till date: 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999; the first of these was fought a few weeks after independence. They have also come quite close to breakout of hostilities

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in a few more instances. Of the four wars mentioned above, three have been fought on Kashmir. Despite these war experiences, crises and escalations between India and Pakistan are quite common.

The reasons behind these crises and escalations—diplomatic, political and military—are claimed as follows: while the Indian side argues that Pakistan is responsible for infiltration and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and rest of India, Islamabad has been accusing India of unprovocative firing along the Line of Control (LoC). One way or the other, the LoC and International Boundary (as India refers to the border with Pakistan, except in Kashmir)/Working Boundary (as Pakistan calls it) (p. 91) get involved in the crises, leading to escalations. Happymon Jacob questions these prevailing notions in his book, *Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India–Pakistan Escalation Dynamics*. The book aims to locate the ceasefire violations (CFVs) at the centre of crises and escalations between India and Pakistan. These CFVs are crucial in both ways, that is, they are the cause of crises which can lead to escalations and they are outcome of other crises and expression of escalations.

Jacob argues that the role of CFVs in India–Pakistan crises and escalations has not been explored and analysed as it should have been. The overemphasis on other factors, like terrorist attacks in India, Pakistani infiltration in Kashmir or unprovocative firing along the LoC (a claim made by both sides), has been at the cost of glossing over the role, or cause, of the CFVs. This does not mean that these factors do not matter in crises or escalations; they are, however, linked with the CFVs. He mentions that the ‘...book offers to de-mythify popular notions about the causes of CFVs in J&K and India–Pakistan escalation dynamics’ (p. 13). To carry out this difficult task, he analyses the literature on escalation; covers the evolution of India–Pakistan relations; discusses the management of the border between the two countries; and then explains what causes the CFVs along the LoC and substantiates his argument with evidence.

The main cause of CFVs is not the infiltration into Kashmir by Pakistan, as generally assumed. Had that been the case, then when there were fewer infiltrations or infiltration attempts the CFVs should have been less (pp. 174–76)! Nor do these violations necessarily come down when political authorities in the two countries want them to (p. 17). In case of Pakistan, it can be said that the military has the upper hand and does not listen to its civilian leadership, therefore the CFVs from Islamabad side. By that logic, Pakistan should be the chief instigator. However, the

author argues, that is not actually the case (p. 17). Indeed, the CFVs along the LoC are not—or at least not solely—because of these familiar factors. Rather, they happen because of the dynamics of the whole range of factors. At the same time, CFVs themselves also remain the cause of crises that can lead to diplomatic, political or military escalations (p. 19).

Jacob brings in the role of organisational behaviour for the purpose of explaining the CFVs. The military as an institution/organisation has its own culture of operating and furthermore, there are subcultures within the military. These subcultures may have their genesis in the nature of different regiments, the areas in which they are stationed, the environment in which they operate, the problems they deal with, etc. The sections of military operating in specific context come up with 'tactical innovations' according to the requirement. 'Such innovation may not even be part of the larger belief system or culture of the force as a whole but are developed over the years as standard operating procedures (SOP) to be adopted in a particular context to guide operational effectiveness' (p. 37).

Such tactical innovations or subcultures may be ad hoc, like on the LoC. Jacob argues that the nature of the LoC is ambiguous and contested. It is not a clearly divided line between the two countries. The Ceasefire Line agreed on in 1948 became the LoC after the Shimla Agreement in 1971. However, rather than drawing the line on the ground, maps were used to mark the line, creating confusion when it was applied on the ground. Jacob points out that it would 'be inaccurate to say that there exists absolute clarity on the ground just because there is clarity on the map' (p. 70). With no clarity where the line is, there comes the possibility of the rule 'grabbers as keepers' (p. 98). Furthermore, construction of bunkers, trenches, tunnels, etc., which are meant to gain strategic points over the other, often provoke firing from the other side (pp. 178–88). In such a context, the forces stationed on the LoC have developed their own ways, beyond the political system of the country and their main military culture, to address these immediate problems/threats.

'Local military factors', he argues, 'significantly contribute to CFVs' (p. 17). These factors, what the author calls autonomous military factors (AMFs), are part of the militaries' context-based subcultures. They are useful to explain why there are CFVs when there is no infiltration/or less infiltration, or in absence of a major diplomatic or political standoff. Jacob defines AMFs 'as military factors on the tactical operational field that are not tightly controlled or determined by central political or bureaucratic

authorities even though they could be' (p. 55). The AMFs are common in both the forces on the LoC/border. That remains the reason why both sides are involved in CFVs, despite the fact that the two militaries have different cultures and the civil–military relations are starkly different in the two countries: in India, the military has been genuinely under civilian control;² while in Pakistan, the military has been deciding the affairs of the state.³ As a result, AMFs remain defused and more 'local'.

There are two types of AMFs: strategic (specific to the behaviour of military/army in opposition to the objectives of the political establishment); and tactical (specific to the behaviour of the forces at local levels due to various cultural and operational reasons) (p. 55). The categorisation helps explaining the causes for CFVs and Jacob counts five types: operational reasons; politico-strategic reasons; retributive reasons; cultural factors; and inadvertent firing. Of these, 'most prominent reason for CFVs' is 'operational reasons' (p. 178). This is so because AMFs come into play most in operational reasons that include defence construction (p. 178), no clarity of the LoC (p. 188), personality trait of commanders (p. 192), emotional state (p. 197), fun and gamesmanship (p. 198), revenge (p. 200), and command and control issue (p. 202). On keen observation, it can be inferred that the other three types of AMFs (excluding inadvertent firing) are linked with the operational reasons as they are meant to respond to immediate concerns or threats. This causes CFVs which can lead to crisis and subsequently to escalation.

The role of AMFs in the CFVs between India and Pakistan is indeed an interesting exposition. It brings out the fact that the operations along the LoC, though dependent on the military headquarters and political centres of the respective countries, have developed their own dynamics over the period of time amidst the confusion about the LoC and other political issues, like civilians crossing the line. Therefore, the complicit approach to let the local forces deal with the problem, without any clear guideline from the above and in absence of a political solution to these contentious issues along the LoC, can lead to crises and escalations. James Fearon argues that one of the reasons for war is 'rational miscalculations of relative power and resolve'.⁴ All the wars between India and Pakistan, including the 1999 Kargil War that was fought when both the countries had become nuclear powers, were driven by miscalculations. Therefore, clarity about the dynamics of CFVs is necessary for 'thinking about policies that can control escalation' (p. 292). One of the first thing can be done is to come up with some agreement on the LoC. Indeed, a political

solution to the problem would be the best as, according to the author, during the times of political engagement CFVs generally come down. Vasquez, referred to earlier, also maintains that political settlement of territory issues not only resolves the border conflict but also reduces possibility of conflict on other matters as well.⁵

Line on Fire painstakingly explores the complications in India–Pakistan relations and their link with the CFVs. The conceptualisation of AMFs is indeed a novel way to look into the dynamics of the crises and their escalations, especially when electronic media and social media circulate and overplay any incident on the LoC to sensationalise it. These warn us of potential threats, in case of any miscalculation. The book is a significant contribution on territorial conflicts in general, and the nature of the LoC, its role and development of subcultures in military in particular. It should spur further scholarship on the undercurrents of border/LoC management and CFVs between India and Pakistan that can offer more policy options.

NOTES

1. John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 136.
2. See Steven I. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy since Independence*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2015.
3. See Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.
4. James D. Fearon, 'Rationalist Explanations for War', *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1995, p. 382.
5. See Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, n. 1.

