

### **Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernisation*, New Delhi: Penguin-Viking, 2010.**

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Stephen Cohen has been a long-time South Asia watcher. His books on the region's two protagonist militaries (*The Pakistan Army* and *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of the Nation*) have established him as an influential military analyst. His other two books, *India: Emerging Power* and *The Idea of Pakistan*, have further enhanced his reputation as a leading interpreter of the region not only for the Americans but for the South Asians themselves. The present book has been co-authored by Sunil Dasgupta from the University of Maryland.

The book makes the argument that although there has been a greater outlay on defence—increasing by a factor of three over the last decade—the resulting modernisation has been less than coherent, which explains the title of the book. The authors are critical of India's policy of strategic restraint, which according to them accounts for the lack of political direction for India's military modernisation. They attribute this to the political elite's reasoning that the international environment is benign, that the balance between defence and development must tilt in favour of the latter, and that the militarisation of policy is not desirable. Instead, the authors support a result-oriented strategic transformation and a military makeover, because, "India's new affluence and the nuclear tests of 1998 raise hopes that the country will break out of its strategic restraint—and assume its place as a great power."

According to them, "[India's] Modernisation has lacked political direction and has suffered from weak prospective planning, individual service-centred doctrines, and a disconnect between strategic objectives and the pursuit of technology." They recommend a structural transformation involving the following: strategic modernisation of the nuclear arsenal; organisational reform to include the creation of a joint chiefs of staff with a chairman; acquisition and production reforms to include the private sector; and development of knowledge resources in the defence sector.

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These issues seem unexceptionable in view of their repeated reiteration in military analyses and strategic literature. However, they need to be seen in light of the last chapter of the book on recommendations for US engagement with India. The latter's rearmament has attracted much attention. That it appears directionless is disconcerting to those, who want to engage with India, such as the US, not only for military modernisation but also strategically. India intends to spend \$100 billion over the coming decade and is strategically placed in terms of the regional balance in Asia and the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it will be courted by many players, particularly the US. For American analysts, therefore, to interpret the Indian reality for the administration is understandable. However, that it also has the agenda of opening up India for US strategic purposes compels thought.

The warming in India-US relations, recounted in the book, goes back to the famous Kickleigher visit at the end of the Cold War. The relationship has only deepened, despite the setback in the wake of the Shakti tests. The Kargil War brought the two sides together as much as the behind-the-scenes meeting of minds between Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh. The Indo-US nuclear deal has been the high watermark of the relationship. That said, the interest of the US urging India down the path of an easier familiarity with power and its instrumentality, needs to be taken with caution.

India's policy of strategic restraint has served India well despite its relatively dangerous neighbourhood. India has stuck to its aim of continuing on its economic trajectory. This entails avoiding distractions, even a provocative terrorist action of the order of 26/11 in Mumbai. This policy does not mean that India is neglecting defence. Not only have more allocations been made but measures are being taken to ensure effective spending, including a streamlined defence procurement policy, promulgation of a new defence procurement procedure in January 2012, and the implementation of the Rama Rao Committee recommendations for reforming the defence technology sector. Deficiencies still remain, such as the slow acquisition processes, inadequate indigenisation, lack of coordination between the ministry and the armed forces, and the jointness deficit in the absence of a CDS. An evolutionary approach, that has been the Indian way, suggests that these would be tackled at appropriate internal, political, and external strategic junctures.

What the US and its analysts want are speedy processes and the early institution of a reformed structure. This is pure self-interest since the US is in need of a strategic partner, if not an ally, who could help shoulder the regional order responsibilities while they disengage, in some proportion, to the extent warranted by their attenuated economy. It is no wonder that the authors argue that a "sufficient overlap exists in American and Indian visions to justify the effort in both countries to alleviate, if not remove, the persistent bureaucratic and perceptual obstacles that are so evident." There are two reservations on this score from

the Indian perspective: the first is in respect of the desirability and the extent of the engagement with the US, and the second is the timing of India's taking over responsibilities as a great power.

The answer to these lie in India's political discourse and in its holistic security circumstance. The Indian polity does not countenance the idea that the "strategic partnership" with the US, currently part of India's preference for a multipolar world, becomes an "alliance" with India, weighing in on the side of the US. This stance may place India on the side of conservative status quo, in which "stability" is valued over democratisation. India needs to adapt its non-alignment policy to the current global order, maintaining mutually beneficial relations with all consequential powers.

Moreover, its internal security circumstances, not only in terms of internal security but also developmental indices, do not indicate that the time is ripe for India to break out of the region to become a global player. India must, therefore, ensure that it prioritises development over defence for at least a decade longer. In the interim, it needs to sustain a deterrence posture, rather than modernise with power projection and extra-regional responsibilities in mind.

That the authors have succeeded in igniting this debate makes this book a very useful contribution to the security discourse.

