

BOOK REVIEW

Bertil Lintner, *China's India War: Collision Course on the Roof of the World*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press India, 2018), Pages: 352 Price: Rs. 675

The 1962 war between China and India has had a very lasting impact on the relationship between Beijing and New Delhi. Even today, when these two countries are interacting with each other, the shadows of the war are quite noticeable. Anything ever written on this topic is read and analysed in great depth by both sides. Following the existing scholarship, Bertil Lintner's book titled *China's India War* provides a very interesting read for anyone who is curious or interested in the events before and after the 1962 China-India War. The book is a welcome addition to the existing literature. The basic argument around which the author weaves the book is that the forward policy adopted by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was not the reason behind the Chinese decision to attack India. Lintner argues that,

To be fair to Nehru, he appears to have been unaware of what the Chinese were saying about him behind his back in the 1940s and 1950s. His Forward Policy was never meant to provoke the Chinese but to reassert what the Indians considered to be the traditional boundary and to check the continuing Chinese advance by connecting all the gaps and plugging the holes along the frontiers by establishing new outposts and sending out patrols even to the remotest parts of Ladakh and the NEFA (pp. 97-98).

Lintner then goes on to discuss the developments before the actual war which were not related to the forward policy and had actually begun before that. According to him, Mao was not comfortable in sharing the leadership of the Third World with Nehru. Things became further complicated after the Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India. Mao as well as Zhao Enlai were 'upset' with this development, and were waiting to get an opportunity to 'teach India a lesson'. The 1962 War was the accumulation of all these developments. The book stands out in its juxtapositioning of the internal developments in China and India with the international scenario which actually led to the 1962 war.

The author argues:

With China's ultimate victory in the war, Mao's ultra-leftist line had won in China; whatever critical voices that were left in the Party after all the purges fell silent.

By now, there was also no doubt that Mao's vision and ambitions went beyond China's borders. He wanted to become the leader not only of China but also of all the revolutionary movements in the world (p. 114).

Lintner's book is a lucid narration of the past and the present situation on the India-China border region. Though the book is an easy read, the author's discussion of the developments in a non-linear fashion, and the continuous shift in the time-line does appear a bit confusing. However, the book covers border issues till the Doklam standoff of 2017 and, thus, is contemporary. It helps in satisfying the curiosity of the people interested in India-China border conflicts. The time-line presented by the author at the end of the book helps one understand the overall regional dynamics. It is also a good addition to the literature discussing Chinese inroads in the Himalayan region of South Asia. One just feels that a better chapterisation and compartmentalisation of issues would have made the book better.

The book also brings to the forefront the argument that India-China relations cannot be understood or studied in isolation. The relationship is more than just a bilateral one. The range of issues which describe India-China relations is huge, and it is obvious from the fact that even though the book is titled *China's India War*, the author could not limit himself just to the war. There is extensive discussion about the India's relations with its neighbours, the USA, Russia, climate change, and water issues,

However, one cannot deny that the author has undertaken extensive research; but what lacks in the book is a major argument. The author dwells on the developments in all the South Asian countries from the past to the present, and this exercise diverts the focus from the central theme which should have been the 1962 War. China has been trying to be an important player in the Himalayan region of South Asia, and today, with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is one of the major actors. China has major economic and infrastructure projects in most South Asian countries. However, India-China relationship is still fragile and the contents do not do justice to the title. A more appropriate title would have been 'How China's India War affected the geopolitics of South Asia.' The author could also have divided the book in a more reader-friendly way: the situation before 1962; during 1962; and after 1962. Though very informative, the book fails to focus on any central theme,

and gives the impression of just being a descriptive compilation of events in the Himalayan region.

However, the book will help the current scholars and students working on this area. It can be a good source of information about the developments in the region. It is a comprehensive collection of the debates and political underpinnings which influenced the 1962 war, and which are still in play.

Dr. Gunjan Singh,
Research Associate,
Institute of Chinese Studies
New Delhi



Alyssa Ayres, *Our Time Has Come: How India is Making Its Place in the World*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2018), Pages: 360, Price: 695.00

The awareness that India is a consequential global actor has come only gradually to Indians and international observers. India has always had ‘weight’: its size; it being seventh largest in the world; its demography, it being the second most populous; it being a civilisational state with a distinctive culture; and it having a thinking class. These attributes are known. But, is it a major power? If it is, what kind of a power is it? The book under review is a substantive and detailed narrative about India’s trajectory in its rise to major ‘power’ status, and an examination of where it stands in the global order.

But, first, one can ask what ‘power’ is actually? It is an everyday word, both in life as well as in the discourse on international relations. But it is an ambiguous concept. Going further, we also have a proliferation of vocabulary on the subject: ‘great power’, continental power, regional power, emerging power, and somewhat differently, global player, significant actor etc. Seen in this framework, it is helpful that, at the very beginning, Alyssa Ayres quotes Nicholas Burns, a distinguished former US diplomat, to explain what the concepts mean when a country begins to be recognised as a global player.

If you survey 195 countries in the UN system and you ask “What are the

countries that have global interests and have the capacity to act globally? ... It is a handful of countries. India by virtue of its geography, its history, and now its strategic interests, is increasingly being taken in a global direction as opposed to just thinking of itself as a regional power (p.11).

This is a useful explanation, even if not a rigorous one. Ayres comes well qualified to tell this story and, in a sense, it is a narrative of her own professional career. She first came to India in 1990 as a student for a 'semester abroad program'. As she recognises in brief vignettes of her impressions from that period, it was a different India then, preoccupied as it was with its internal challenges (Mandal, Mandir etc.) and not plugged into global affairs. In subsequent decades, her interest and engagement with India continued, first as a researcher with the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) and, later, in the US State Department, focusing specifically on South Asia. She thus brings nearly three decades of India watching to her analysis. It must also be noted that she is attitudinally positive about India, and believes in its aspirations for change, reform, and recognition. It is equally important to note that she is part of the academic — and at times bureaucratic — US establishment invested in India. All this makes hers an important book from the point of view of projecting India's growth story, especially to an American readership.

The structure of the book is simple and logical. In its three sections, it begins with "looking back" to a period when India lacked self-confidence and global connections. We move on to the 'transition' period, starting with the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, but also a period of 'reform by stealth' as some have characterised it. In the third major section called 'looking ahead', she looks at the current period when she sees India as more aggressively and ambitiously seeking its 'rightful place'. A positive aspect of the book is that it is not cast as a history of India's achievements or successes, be they economic or technological. Such a narrative would be full of chronology, or statistics, or lists. Ayres' main focus throughout is about perceptions on where India figures in the global scene, whether in the past or the present, and to see an ascending arc in this regard. Her style is easy and engaging, and is aimed at the general reader. She meets lots of diverse personalities, some Indian, others American, with a range of opinions. The result is absorbing reading, but inevitably impressions and perceptions take over rather than rigorous analysis or critical reasoning.

Interestingly, Ayres starts with a chapter on how India's place in the world was conceived in its ancient or historical literature. She makes the obligatory references to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the *Mahabharata*, and Vivekananda. She has talked to influential Indian scholars and practitioners

who recognise that elements of strategic thinking and statecraft were indeed a part of the Indian tradition, and traces the roots of some of India's foreign policy fundamentals — such as non-alignment, autonomy, and 'the world is one family' concepts — as derived from traditional wisdom. Hence, her affirmation that thinking about the place of India in the world is not new.

However, in an operational sense, this has become more meaningful with the growth of the Indian economy and is getting better meshed with the world economy. The book has useful descriptions of how, since the nineties, India became more engaged with the world in trade, investments, technology transfers, the communications revolution, participation in financial architecture of the world, and so on. Starting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government and continuing with the Modi government, the opening up of India has been both physical as well as in terms of its mind-set. Though the rhetoric of 'self-reliance' and self-sufficiency is still sometimes used for political purposes, India has embraced globalisation, and regards itself as a beneficiary. The book does a convincing job of describing this process, with numerous examples from the last two decades.

Quite apart from the trade, economic, and technology dimensions, a significant aspect of India's place in the world has to be seen through the prism of security. In a world of alliances and security arrangements, where does India stand? As an American and as a former State Department official, this is a vital issue of interest to Ayres. Her belief that there should be a closer embrace between the US and India comes through clearly in the book, and she sees such closeness as beneficial to both countries. She rightly sees that great progress has been made in this direction in this decade, but also recognises the caution and hesitancy that the Indian establishment has demonstrated. The fact is, that despite American proclamations (as for example by Condoleezza Rice) that the USA will help India's rise to great power status, India has hedged its bets, and is less than full throated in its support to US policies and priorities. It prefers to be a 'swing' power, rather than tilting to any one side. This option has acquired greater immediacy in the context of US-China competition or contest. On the cluster of critical question around this, Ayres takes a balanced and pragmatic approach, in my view. She is acutely aware of India's reservations about an unequivocal alliance with USA

India's transition — from non-alignment to a focus on 'strategic autonomy' to the current government's creation of a 'multi-aligned' approach to the world — still contains at its core a belief that formal alliances threaten national independence. While many countries see alliance relationships (with the US or others) as a beneficial security umbrella, a way to protect

their own territory, in India the ideas spurs anxieties about servitude or subordination (p. 216).

Her recommendation in consonance with the CFR report is

to approach India like a joint venture partner, not an ally-in-waiting. This business term suggests a partnership between two entities with specific shared objectives and by its specificity acknowledges that not every undertaking of either entity would be shared. ...With a mental model that better captures the type of partnership possible with a proud, powerful India, the US will increase the odds of success and reduces those of disappointments (p. 217).

The book also covers the highlights of India's greater role, and even greater aspirations with regard to global institutions. India is now assured of being consulted and becoming a contributor in decision making in critical areas like climate change, chemical or biological weapons, cyber security, digital revolution, and other such current concerns. Ayres discusses in some detail India's coming out of straight jacket on the nuclear issue, thanks to American support. Its membership of the NSG, or its ambition to become a permanent member of the UNSC are beset with procedural and substantive difficulties, beyond the capacity of India or the USA at present. Meanwhile, she notes that it is a part of most of the new international architectures that have been crafted, such as G-20, BRICS, AIIB, or the Solar Alliance. Thus, India's global role is being recognised as inevitable and useful. But, as she notes, India's aspirations are higher. She quotes S. Jaishankar (the former Foreign Secretary), from his lectures while he was articulating an approach during his tenure:

It is, therefore, time to ask ourselves whether India should raise its level of ambitions. Are we content to react to events or should we be shaping them more, on occasion even driving them? Should we remain a balancing power or aspire to be a leading one? (p. 95).

The USA and India have together reached remarkable understandings in the security field in the last two decades. The removal of obstacles for the transfer of technology in sensitive areas, the special carve out for India in the nuclear field, the agreements reached in the defence sector, and the ongoing intensified cooperation from training to logistics are all qualitatively different. For Indians in general, and for Indian diplomats in particular, the book and Alyssa Ayres' orientation permeated with goodwill for India and belief in its progress can only be welcome.

Nevertheless, a more objective and critical reading of the book raises some questions. To start with, the title itself: it is doubtful that thoughtful Indians feel that ‘our time has come’ — a declaration in a triumphalist mode. Curiously, the author ascribes the slogan to a speech made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kuala Lumpur: “Now, it is India’s turn. And we know that our time has come” (p. 9); at the same time, the sentiment is also attributed to TV anchor Arnab Goswami (p. 34). She captures the pride and greater self-confidence that Indians have now; but the point is that they also have an acute awareness of the formidable challenges in terms of poverty, education, health, employment, infrastructure, and so on. As historian Ramachandra Guha is fond of pointing out, a story about India’s post-independence trajectory will come up with a ‘fifty-fifty’ verdict — of accomplishments and failures in equal measure. Indian strategic thinkers are asking important questions about India-China competition; whether the world will be unipolar, bipolar or multipolar; the need for India to double its per capita income; and so on. It can be argued that a sense of ‘having arrived’ is not necessarily the overwhelming public mood today.

How relevant is it to pin ‘India’s place in the world’? Granted, it is a somewhat natural habit to be asking and answering this question; but one should be aware that it is more a psychological need than a real one. The hierarchical ordering of the world is also in question, since today many accept that a multi-polar world is a better paradigm than a vertical listing of world powers.

Our Time Has Come: How India is Making its Place in the World came out in 2018, and it is reasonable to expect that much of it was completed before the tumult and tribulations of the Trump presidency were manifest. Reviewing it in 2019, it is inevitable to ask whether partnerships with the USA are stable and the course that such partnerships run are predictable. When even close allies are uncertain about US policies, India’s innate caution makes sense.

Ambassador B. S. Prakash,
Former Ambassador of India to Brazil and to Uganda,
and former Consul General of India at San Francisco, USA.

★★★

Zorawar Daulet Singh, *Power & Diplomacy: India's Foreign Policies during the Cold War*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2019), Pages: xv + 399, Price: Rs. 845.00

The book 'Power and Diplomacy' by eminent international relations scholar Zorawar Daulet Singh examines in depth India's foreign policy during the Cold War period since independence in 1947 to mid-1970s. The author has analysed the worldview, strategies, and processes leading to the strategic decisions of Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, with a brief study of the 1964–66 period when Lal Bahadur Shastri was at the helm.

The author has undertaken an exhaustive study of available literature as well as personal interviews with policy makers and practitioners that are still around which have enriched the volume. He has adopted a case based examination of India's foreign policy choices covering the 1954 India-China situation, the Formosa crisis, Vietnam in the 1960s, the 1971 birth of Bangladesh, and the merger of Sikkim with India.

The central argument of the narrative is that from projecting itself initially in an extra-regional peacemaker role during the Nehru period, when India intervened in several crises in Asian high politics, India's role dramatically contracted to that of a largely sub-continental 'security seeker' in the Indira Gandhi period.

The author explores the links between the belief and behaviour in the practice of foreign policy, and asserts that the worldviews of Nehru and Indira were 'different and even antithetical to each other'. The author contends that 'For Nehru, it was about developing an alternative regional philosophy of inter-state relations ... whereas Indira Gandhi aimed to develop an Indo-centric sub-regional order where external involvement could be restrained and Indian leadership asserted'. Indira Gandhi believed that India could not win friendship with its neighbours simply by making concessions. The author persuasively explains the 'two competing regional philosophies - Nehru's reluctance to impose India's will on its periphery and Indira Gandhi's willingness to do so'.

The author suggests that till the 1962 debacle, Nehru's conception of India as a peacemaker was shaped by his core beliefs - Asia-centric internationalism, the rejection of the traditional balance of power strategies and a preference for ethical statecraft relying on persuasion rather than coercion. To isolate India from the Cold War contestation, Nehru adopted an 'area of

peace' concept which offered an 'alternate path to security for materially weaker states'. This concept had the roots of Non-alignment and also sought to moderate great power competition in contested newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. Even in the aftermath of 1962, when Western military assistance was critical, Nehru resisted US attempts to co-opt India in its vision of Asian security.

The author argues that the 1954 Sino-Indian agreement on Tibet should not be seen in isolation; it was a partial response to the emerging US-Pakistan military alliance. Nehru consciously did not opt for a balance of power strategy but worked to enlarge areas of peace in the neighbourhood, and enhance India's peacemaking role in Indo-China. Nehru saw the US-Pakistan alliance as a shock to Asian security rather than merely a threat to India's security interests. Also Nehru, in the overall interest of India's economic dependence on the West, did not respond to Soviet overtures for military supplies. In the author's view, in the rising Indo-US discord at that time, the US-Pakistan pact was not a key issue; the differences were on the nature of Asia's order, the approach to the Communist bloc, and Washington's China policy.

At a conceptual level, Nehru believed in 'indivisible security impelling him to frame developments in an extra-regional context rather than merely on its India-centric implications'. The author is rightly critical of Nehru, as 'Nehru was not interested in ... pressing minor advantages on India's inherited position in Tibet. ... His main priority was regional security through his peace area concept.'

The author summarises Indira Gandhi's 'security seeker' role in her three core beliefs: a definition of India's interests in narrower terms and a regional image centered on the subcontinent; an inclination to leverage the balance of power for geopolitical advantage; and an inclination to employ coercive means to solve disputes or to pursue geopolitical ends. He highlights that Indira Gandhi's foreign policies were 'devoid of extra-regional concerns, which were so central to Nehru's images, and instead focused entirely on an Indian sphere of interest'. Another difference brought out by the author is the 'severing of Nehru's image of an indivisible Asian system, where India's security was seen to be interlinked with the larger geopolitics of the great powers, in favour of a contracted and divisible image of security confined to the sub-continent ...'.

The book has explained the reasons for India's drift towards the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 70s. He rightly states that, in 'matters vitally concerning our national security and integrity such as Goa, Kashmir and Bangladesh ... the Soviet's assessment of the merits of the case coincided largely with

India's'. This hard fact, coupled with socialist economic policies, brought Indira Gandhi close to the Soviet Union. Further momentum on this path was provided by India's concern at the US-China thaw in the early 1970s.

However on the 1971 events, it is difficult to agree with the author's contention that 'a politico-military arrangement with Moscow was neither a knee-jerk reaction nor an ideological move or a quest to move into the Soviet bloc; rather, it was the outcome of an evolutionary balance of power strategy, first conceived in the late 1960s in the backdrop of changing dynamics in the US-Russia-China triangle'. It is well established that the Indo-Soviet treaty of August 1971 was for the limited and specific purpose of warding off any third power intervention in the impending India-Pakistan conflict, and gradually faded away once Bangladesh was born.

On Sikkim's merger, the book brings out the differences between the then RAW Chief, the legendary R. N. Kao, who pushed for a policy encouraging public protests against the Chogyal opening the door for Sikkim's merger with India, and some in the Ministry of External Affairs who advocated a Nehruvian policy of granting Sikkim the status of Bhutan as an independent nation. Thankfully, Indira Gandhi recognised the strategic opportunity for India and opted for the merger.

On page 340, the author asserts that there was no apparent external involvement in Sikkim, either before Indira Gandhi's decision to intervene in 1972 or thereafter. The rumours of the CIA's involvement in Sikkim through the Chogyal's American wife have not been mentioned. It would have been useful for the author to look into US archives and dispatches of that period to substantiate his conclusion of the non-involvement of the USA in any manner with the Chogyal's anti-India actions.

The text vividly brings out the differences in the process of policy formulation between the Nehru and Indira Gandhi era. Nehru laid down the principles as well as the practices of India's international relations as both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and sought inputs only from his alter ego, V. K. Krishna Menon. Nehru was impervious to any different approach suggested by either his Cabinet colleagues (like Deputy Prime Minister Vallabh Bhai Patel) or from senior foreign ministry officials. Indira Gandhi, on the other hand, relied on the recommendations of a group of close advisors, like P. N. Haksar, R. N. Kao, T. N. Kaul, D. P. Dhar, G. Parthasarthy, etc. She gave them direct access, and also allowed different perspectives to come up to her table. Based on these inputs, her clear and decisive instructions were guided by India's strategic interests.

The author has drawn heavily from the extensive body of published works, memoirs, personal papers, and available de-classified official records. The reader is enriched by the copious references and end notes. The interplay of influential advisors to the Prime Ministers, and their own convictions and contributions to foreign policy formulation, have been woven into the narrative in a style which is both informative and interesting.

Since the book looks at India's foreign policy from a Cold War perspective, the absence of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and India's reaction to it is surprising. Those events had brought the Cold War to the Indian sub-continent, and a study of India's approach towards the two super powers would have made this volume complete.

This work would be valuable to strategic analysts for studying the contours of India's foreign policy choices in the Cold War period. It would be a useful input for practitioners and experts grappling with India's possible response to the Cold War-II emerging between USA and China right on India's periphery. Whether India would opt for a narrow India-centric policy, attempt to play a balance of power game, or emerge as third poles along with Japan, etc. will be choices before policy makers in the years ahead. The author rightly says that 'the past holds lessons that policy makers could draw upon while formulating their strategies'.

Ambassador Skand Ranjan Tayal
Former Ambassador of India to Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea
Former Consul General of India in Johannesburg and Houston

★ ★ ★