

BOOK REVIEWS

T. V. Paul (ed.), *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future*, (New Delhi Cambridge University Press, 2016), Pages: 336, Price: ₹ 595.00

The structure of an international system is determined by the unequal distribution of power among the states composing it. Depending upon whether one or two or multiple states outrank the others in the fundamental attributes of economic, military, and technological capabilities, the structure varies from uni-polar to bi-polar and multi-polar. Whatever be its structure, an international system ultimately serves the economic, political, security, and ideological interests and preferences of its extant complement of great powers. To put it another way, great powers use their superior capabilities - and the prestige flowing therefrom - to enhance the territory under their control through the arrogation of spheres of influence or the acquisition of colonies, and advance their interests by privileging their preferred rules, norms, and institutions to manage the economic, political, and security affairs of the international system as a whole. In effect, as Robert Gilpin notes, great powers exercise control over or govern the international system in accordance with their own interests and preferences.

While an international system's structure and governance do possess a considerable degree of resilience, and thus tend to last for several decades, they are, however, subject to change. A change in structure occurs when the number of great powers increases or decreases. Alternately, a variation in governance takes place when the composition of great powers changes. Such major changes in structure and/or governance are inevitable because, over time, the underlying distribution of power in favour of the established great powers gets eroded by a combination of factors – the operation of the law of uneven rates of economic growth which tends to favour less developed countries; the relative decline of established powers due to non-productive expenditure on exercising control over the system; and technological and organisational innovations, particularly in the fields of economics, transportation and communication, and warfare. Together, these factors cause the rise of new great powers and the relative decline of established ones.

As new great powers rise, they seek to advance their particular economic, political, security, and ideological interests and preferences through both a reordering of the governance of the system and a redistribution of its spoils in their favour. That is, they seek spheres of influence, changes in or replacement of the rules, norms and institutions that manage international affairs, and a recognised place at the high table of great powers. From a systemic perspective, only such a reordering and redistribution would reflect the new distribution of power and restore the system's equilibrium. However, established powers do not favour such changes because these necessarily involve a dilution in their own roles, statuses, interests, and spoils. Given the absence of a super ordinate authority over and above states, war—the final argument of sovereigns—has served as the principal mechanism so far to reorder the system and restore its equilibrium. Various terms such as hegemonic, systemic, or global wars, the purpose and consequence of such wars have been to determine the new hierarchy of power and prestige, and thus, the new structure and processes of the international system.

Such a denouement in the nuclear age would be an unmitigated disaster for all of humanity. How can such an outcome be prevented in the 21st Century as America experiences relative decline, China ascends to the rank of great powers, Russia reasserts its great power status, and India and Brazil more gradually emerge as great powers? That is the question at the heart of the volume under review. And its answer is: peaceful, systemic change is possible through the accommodation of rising powers. Accommodation, as defined by T. V. Paul, the volume's editor, "involves mutual adaptation and acceptance by established and rising powers, and the elimination or substantial reduction of hostility between them" through "status adjustment, the sharing of leadership roles" and the associated privileges in international institutions, and "acceptance of spheres of influence". That is, established powers should not militarily challenge rising powers but, instead, grant them "the status and perks associated with the rank of great power". And, rising powers should not attempt a forceful overthrow of the existing order but, instead, pursue a peaceful rise, seek incremental changes, and remain content with "a larger share of global governance rights, and/or spheres of influence" allotted to them. In other words, peaceful accommodation can be achieved if, on the one hand, established and rising powers pursue grand strategies calibrated to avoid competition or conflict, and, on the other hand, foster cooperation through deepened economic interdependence, integration into existing international institutions, acceptance of the core elements of the other's normative framework, and legitimisation of the territorial status quo in effect,

accommodation would ensure a peaceful and orderly evolution from one structure and/or governance to another.

In Paul's view, five factors prevalent in the world today make such a peaceful transition possible. Interdependence has brought all countries on to a common and beneficial economic framework. Regional and global institutions facilitate meaningful engagement between established and rising powers, and even provide arenas where the latter can assert themselves and acquire higher status. Universal norms of territorial integrity as well as the absence of expansionist ideologies and the assertion of sovereign equality by non-great powers offer a degree of assurance that the territorial status quo would not be violently overturned. And, systemic war has been made impossible by nuclear weapons.

Paul's policy prescriptions are indeed sensible. However, the prospect of established and rising powers actually pursuing cooperative policies aimed at avoiding competition and conflict is practically non-existent. Because, under the condition of anarchy, a state's principal task is to maintain its relative power vis-à-vis others. Consequently, even when a state cooperates with other states, it seeks not only absolute gains for itself but also takes into account its gains relative to those of others. Such a calculation is necessary to ensure that its relative power is maintained, and the balance of power is not undermined. Given this imperative, peaceful accommodation is an unrealistic proposition because it entails established powers willingly diluting their status and interests and thus their relative power and position as well as voluntarily welcoming enlargements in the status and interests and thus the relative power of rising states.

To illustrate, it is highly unlikely that America would voluntarily abandon its presence and interests in East and Southeast Asia in order to enable China establish a sphere of influence in that region. That would tantamount to a diminution in US power, status, and relative position vis-à-vis China. An established power is likely to adopt such a course of action only when confronted by collapse so as to garner a respectable status and measure of influence in the system's new structure and/or governance. This is exactly what the Soviet Union did in 1989 when it voluntarily abandoned its informal empire in Eastern Europe as well as its alternate economic and ideological order. If circumstances are not that dire, established powers are more likely to withdraw from peripheral regions by accommodating rising powers there so as to concentrate on the principal challenge in the main geopolitical theatre. This is what Britain did in the 1890s and 1900s. As Ali Zeren and John Hall note in Chapter 6 of the volume under review, Britain accommodated America

and recognised the US sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere in order to concentrate on the German challenge in Europe. America similarly accommodated a not-yet rising China in the 1970s for strategic reasons relating to the Vietnam War and the Cold War, as Lorenz Luthi points out in Chapter 7. Thus, the two actual instances of accommodation in history were driven not by considerations of ensuring a peaceful systemic transition but by strategic compulsion and advantage.

For their part, rising powers are unlikely to be sated by what established powers have to offer, and may seek to violently overthrow the status quo or establish alternate institutions and processes. Paul recognises this when he advocates that established powers pursue a mixed grand strategy composed of gradual accommodation and deterrence. As Martin Claar and Norrin Ripsman note (Chapter 8), Britain initially attempted to accommodate Germany before both the World Wars. But a deeply dissatisfied and extraordinarily ambitious Germany decided to violently challenge the status quo. The other alternative was partially exercised by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II when it established a separate economic order.

Which of these options will today's four rising powers choose? Chapters 10 through 13 of the book under review indicate that while Brazil and India are likely to remain content with a process of gradual accommodation of their interests and statuses, and even Russia may become sated if its interests in Ukraine are accommodated, accommodating China's territorial interests and identity is likely to prove to be an enormous challenge.

Nor are the factors that Paul identifies as favourable likely to propel states to practice cooperative accommodation. These factors are not fundamental attributes of the system but are, instead, outcomes of conscious choices made by states to further their interests. And as such, they are subject to change, a fact that Paul recognises. To begin with, future military technical revolutions and the employment of asymmetric strategies may enable states to overcome the domination of defence and deterrence engendered by nuclear weapons. Even if these do not occur, nuclear weapons are unlikely to change the calculi of states about their interests and relative positions, as witnessed during the Cold War.

Second, economic interdependence is neither irreversible nor a factor of peace. As Claar and Ripsman point out, Britain considered the imposition of higher tariffs on non-Empire trade to overcome economic competition from Germany in particular. Now, America is considering the imposition of tariffs on imports especially from China in order to correct the trade imbalance and

boost the manufacturing sector at home. Nor is interdependence a factor of peace and stability. A high degree of European interdependence did not prevent World War I. And, as highlighted by Jeffrey Taliaferro (Chapter 9), Japan's acute dependence for oil and raw materials afforded America an opportunity to coerce and ultimately goad Japan into initiating war. Today, as Philip Potter points out in Chapter 3, while trade and financial interdependence between China and America has promoted stability in their otherwise competitive relationship, the narrower interdependence between Europe and Russia for gas supplies and revenues has increased "both the probability and consequences of conflict".

Finally, states, especially great powers, are likely to comply with norms and rules only if, or so long as, it is in their interest to do so. International institutions cannot induce or compel them in this regard. Moreover, as Paul acknowledges, the world is unlikely to remain forever immune to expansionist ideologies and intense nationalisms demanding a violent overthrow of the status quo. Even in their absence, recent years have witnessed a series of norm violations and disregard for institutions. For instance, although China is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it dismissed as null and void the 2016 ruling of the Convention's international tribunal on its expansive claims in the South China Sea. Again, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 despite the universally acknowledged norm against conquest. And, America intervened in Iraq without UN Security Council authorisation. Institutions can be effective only when great powers allow them to be so. And, great powers will allow institutions to be effective only so long as these serve their interests.

Notwithstanding this critique, *Accommodating Rising Powers* is a valuable and unique contribution that provides an ideational framework to ponder over the vital questions and issues relating to peaceful systemic change in international politics.

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Tilak Devasher, *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, (New Delhi, Harper Collins India, 2017), Price: ₹ 470.00, Pages: 472

The recent lynching and killing of a young Ahmadi University student, Mashal Khan (23), on 13 April 2017, in the Pakistani tribal Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over charges of blasphemy indicates the culture of “intolerance and violence [that is] not a new phenomenon; [and] dates back to the origins of Pakistan itself” (p. xvii). This is the subject of Tilak Devasher’s book, *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*. While reading its first few pages, one is compelled to ask: what is it that has led to the silencing of all debate in Pakistan? Are ongoing military operations a solution to the “totality of the malaise” inflicting Pakistan? To find answers to these questions, Devasher’s book provides a comprehensive account of a country that ‘faces problems internally’ and how it “poses [threats] externally to the world” (p. xxi).

Divided in seven main sections and eighteen chapters (excluding the Introduction and the Conclusion), the book opens with Devasher’s “fascination with Pakistan” as a child when he heard stories of two Air Force officers, who served in the Royal Indian Air Force during World War II and had fought together with his father. These two colleagues of his father in undivided India later went on to “head the Pakistan Air Force” (ix). As he reminisces about the memories of his childhood, a curious Devasher gets engaged in understanding the contrast between the sophisticated aesthetics of the elites in Pakistan, which include television and sports, and the harsh realities of its political, economic, and religious development.

A student of history, the author later joined the Cabinet Secretariat, specialising in security issues pertaining to India’s neighbourhood. He decided to “write a holistic book on Pakistan that would encompass the ‘exciting’ issues [as well as] the ‘boring’ ones to analyse why Pakistan was hurtling towards the abyss” (p. xi). It was this fascination with the paradoxes within Pakistan that led him to write “a book about Pakistan” (p. xi).

The book opens a Pandora’s box, starting with the agonies, insecurities, and anxieties of the Muslim community in an undivided India, the politics around the Pakistan Movement, the birth of the Muslim nation, the tussle for power between the political class and military dictators, and the eventual dawning and unfolding of the Islamisation Project which, according to the author, is part of “The Superstructure” section (p. 141). However, this reviewer would argue that Islamisation, which is the political ideology of Pakistan,

should be understood as ‘The Base’ upon which ‘The Superstructure’ is built, wherein all aspects of the society interact – sometimes converging, and diverging on other occasions.

Nevertheless, the author in this section delineates the hurtling trajectory of “Islamisation and the Growth of Sectarianism” (p.143) in the country. In his opening remarks in the Chapter on Islamisation, Devasher traces the beginnings of this issue to the founder of the nation, Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

...Jinnah demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims so that they could practice Islam, free from being swamped by the Hindu majority. His successors, civil and military, have all, in varying degrees, strengthened the Islamic character of Pakistan, either out of conviction or opportunistically for political survival. A plethora of Islamic political parties, groups, and organisations ensure that the Islamic nature of Pakistan is reiterated on a daily basis (p.143).

In attributing the responsibility for employing religion in statecraft to Jinnah and his early successors, the author also elaborately comments on the internal contradictions in Jinnah’s views on the nature of the Pakistani state. There are instances in history where Jinnah stated on record that Pakistan “would not be a theocratic state and that the state had nothing to do with one’s religion” (p.144). In his famous address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (11 August 1947), he aligned himself with this thought of a non-theocratic state, and asserted,

We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one state ... you will find that in the course of time, Hindus will cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims ... in political sense as the citizens of the state.

However, Jinnah’s later two statements – one during the Muslim League Council meeting in Karachi on 14-15 December 1947, and the second on 25 January 1948 (just months before his demise) – were quite different. In the first gathering in December, he clearly stated that “Pakistan is going to be Muslim state based on Islamic ideals.” Similarly, in his January speech, he said that Pakistan’s Constitution would be based on Islamic laws to “make Pakistan a truly great Islamic State” (p. 145).

While writing about the history of Islamisation of Pakistan and about the various speeches delivered by the founder of the nation, Devasher raises an important question on the imposition of *Shariah*: “whose *Shariah* will it be?” (p.142). This question does not have a straightforward answer in the book. It

is left for the reader to find the answer to this crucial question at a time when Pakistan is at war with its home-grown terrorist outfits like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that aims to replace the Constitution with TTP-derived *Shariah*.

The problem of terrorism is not limited to the domestic sphere; in fact, Pakistan has been involved in the export of terror, not limited to neighbouring countries like Afghanistan and India but also beyond. On the issue of terrorism, the author starts with the remark made by the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, during a press conference in Islamabad in October 2011: “You can keep snakes in your backyard and expect them to only bite your neighbour. Eventually, those snakes are going to turn on whoever has them in the backyard.” While domestic terrorism has claimed 60,772 combatant and non-combatant lives between 2002 and beginning of July 2016 – according to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) – international terrorists, like Mohammad Hafiz Saeed, have been living with impunity in Pakistan, despite “openly and repeatedly” giving “calls for jihad in Kashmir” (p. 187). Saeed, along with other ideological heads of extremist organisations, moves about openly across Punjab, including the Provincial Capital Lahore and the Federal Capital Islamabad, calling for *jihad* in the *infidel* states.

While discussing “The Provincial Dilemma” (pp. 69–96), Devasher describes the coming together and the consolidation of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities under the one overarching and unifying force – Islam.

The dilemma was that Pakistan was created by putting together geographical provinces which shared a common religion but had never before shared a common history, culture, language or ethnicity. All of them had a strong attachment to their traditions and were resentful of any central control. Not surprisingly, while the Bengalis managed to get away, elements of the Baloch, Pakhtun, and Sindhi have been struggling to free themselves from the grip of Punjab.

Apart from these grinding issues, Devasher’s major contribution is the introduction of the WEEP Model of Analysis that focuses on the country’s water issue, education emergency, economic crisis, and population growth. In his WEEP Analysis, the author discusses the water crisis in Pakistan, which is the result of population growth and complete neglect of water infrastructure. However, the water crisis has been conveniently attributed to India, and its failure to comply with the commitments of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) signed between the two countries.

Fortunately, the matter has been set at rest by chairman of the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) who, while briefing the Senate Standing Committee on Water and Power on July 9, 2015, said that India was using less than its allocated share under the IWT (p. 224).

Similarly, on issues of education, economy, and population, the situation is equally grim. Pakistan ranks 113 out of 120 in the Education Development Index, and is in an education emergency, which is “the result of decades of neglect of education sector” that was “hijacked to achieve ideological and political goals in line with the thinking of the elites, especially the military” (pp.241–242).

As violence continues in the country in the forms of blasphemy, vigilantism and sporadic killings and despite the implementation of National Action Plan and Operation Zarb-e-Azb, the indications are that the problem in Pakistan is that of its narrative, which can neither be controlled nor eliminated militarily alone. Devasher suggests two ways “to make Pakistan modify its behaviour”:

The first is forcing Pakistan to behave, not through appeasement and inducements but through forceful non-military action, such as reducing, if not stopping multilateral and bilateral financial assistance ...The second option is to wait for Pakistan to collapse under its own weight (p.390).

Warning that “if the army were to obstruct civilian control or the politicians were to fail the country again, Pakistan’s tryst with the abyss is sure”, Devasher closes on a pessimistic and a course-corrective note by quoting poet Muhammad Iqbal: “If you do not fathom, you will be destroyed, O people of Pakistan, Even your story will not endure in the stories of the world” (p. 392).

The book covers various internal aspects of Pakistan. It is comprehensive in its narration and quotes heavily from the available literature on the subject, making it more of a reiteration of thoughts and ideas on Pakistan. As earlier stated, the book provides a comprehensive account of a country that “faces problems internally” and “poses [threats] externally to the world.” Owing to the richness of citations, the book is an important addition to the available body of work on Pakistan, and is recommended for policy makers, scholars, and the academia.

The title of the book, ‘Courting the Abyss’ dramatises the perilous situation that Pakistan finds itself in today. However, it should be acknowledged that,

despite internal fissures and failures, many other 'fragile and failed states', have continued to stay in existence – though perhaps not in the shape that they were originally designed to be. Pakistan may slip into that category.

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