

BOOK REVIEW

Klaus Lange, Klara Knapp and Jagannath P. Panda (eds.), *Revisiting Contemporary South Asia: Politics, Economics and Security* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2012), Pages: 221, Price: Rs. 995.

The South Asian region, comprising eight countries according to SAARC membership, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, accounts for one-fourth of the world's population. It is a melting pot of multiple ethnic, cultural and linguistic groupings which have had a long history of dynamic human interactions, territorial realignments, social and religious movements, cultural assimilations and ingrained economic exchanges. According to a World Bank regional brief 2012, over the past twenty years South Asia's annual economic growth rate has been an average of 6 per cent. This has resulted in declining poverty and impressive improvements in human development. Yet, according to the World Bank's more recent poverty estimates, the South Asian region is home to most of the developing world's poor. As pointed out by Dr. Jagannath P. Panda in his foreword to the book, India's rapid economic growth, the emerging security and political complexities of the region and various global geo-political developments pertaining to the region have made this region "exciting now", making it one of the "hotspots of global politics". It may also be noted that South Asia is a least regionalized region of the globe.

This book is the result of a conference held in Bruneck (South Tyrol, Italy) organized by the Institute of Transnational Studies (ITS), in Italy and Germany during 2–4 December 2011. In sixteen chapters, it presents particularly the European perspective on South Asia.

The book has three themes: political, economic and security. Under the political theme are the contributions by Lt. Gen (retired) Asad Durrani, Dr. Jagannath P. Panda, Brig. Rahul Bhonsle and Dr. M. Amarjeet Singh. General Durrani talks of a New Great Game in the Central Asian region and about India's interest in it. Dr. Panda and Brigadier Bhonsle discuss India-China and Sino-Myanmar relations. The former discusses the boundary issue, China's articulated perspective on the Kashmir issue, the water issue, etc. Brigadier Bhonsle discusses the various aspects of Sino-Myanmar relations and their impact on India. Dr. Amarjeet Singh discusses cross-border migration vis-à-vis Bangladesh.

Madhulika Sharma, Michael Bauer and S. Narayan discuss the economic aspect. Sharma talks of the contradiction between South Asia's economic growth vis-à-vis its poor human development index. Bauer discusses the factor of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the recent developments in the Middle East, their internal dynamics and the economic and strategic relations of the Middle East with Pakistan and India. Narayan presents the various economic parameters of each country of South Asia.

There are nine contributions discussing the security aspect of the region. Dr. S. Gopal, talking of the Maoist insurgency and cross-border terrorism, points out the need for revisiting and taking innovative approaches for solving the old problem areas. Joyeeta Bhattacharjee discusses India-Bangladesh security cooperation vis-à-vis the insurgency in the North-East. Hein Kiessling talks about the establishment, structure and functions of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and India's Research and Analyses Wing (RAW). P.K. Ghosh, discussing maritime issues, discusses the need for India and China, the two rising maritime powers, to cooperate to address common security challenges in the seas. Alain Lamballe talks about water-related tensions in four of the major countries of South Asia. Rajaram Nagappa talks of hard security, namely missile programmes, nuclear capabilities and confidence-building measures. Brig. Vinod Anand talks about the Afghanistan and Pakistan factor and points to the importance of the United States' continuing involvement in Afghanistan. Col. Harjeet Singh discusses South Asia from a geo-strategic point of view, the internal dynamics and external influences in the region and the importance of the Indian Ocean region. Subimal Bhattacharjee talks of managing the cyber security infrastructure and taking major initiatives to protect the freedom of speech.

The book appears to be focused on the South Asian subcontinent, to the exclusion of the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Also, thematic compartmentalization of the essays might have been a more practical approach.

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Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the West* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), Pages: xxi+234, Price £14.99 (INR 399).

Perpetual political instability, conflict, war and crisis of governance amidst the abysmal state of development in Pakistan and Afghanistan are currently the major concerns for peace and security in an interconnected world. Even after the demise of Osama bin Laden and other top al-Qaeda and Taliban commanders, the political and security scenario in this region is highly uncertain. Although the forces led by the US broke down the momentum of the Taliban, as claimed by US President Barack Obama, security is still fragile in Afghanistan and major parts of the country continue to be treacherous. Pakistan seems to be gradually sliding down into the status of a failed state, highly vulnerable to “terrorist attacks, political change and economic collapse”, as the author points out. As a sanctuary for the Taliban and a state supporting terrorist groups and other criminal organizations through its military and ISI, Pakistan is losing its political credibility in the eyes of the international community.

Ahmed Rashid in his book has attempted to capture the current crisis in Pakistan and Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Obama administration’s Af-Pak policy. He traces the roots of the crisis to the nation-building process, inherent weaknesses of the various institutions, inept and kleptocratic political elites and flawed and myopic Western approaches towards the two countries. Military solutions have limited value in responding to the rising fundamentalism in Pakistan and the incessant war in Afghanistan. A comprehensive strategy based on socio-economic development, people-oriented approach to governance and viable political design and institutional mechanism to accommodate ethnicity and address their grievances are required to heal the wounds of three decades of war in Afghanistan and resolve the problems in Pakistan. The author is of the view that both countries lack a viable political culture and vision for resolving socio-political problems and promoting inclusive and sustainable development in their societies. The crisis of governance stifles economic growth and civic sense that can serve as the bedrock for establishing and nurturing a genuine system of democratic governance.

The present book is the latest in a trilogy, the earlier volumes being *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* and *Descent into Chaos*. The aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, according to the author, has made no substantial difference in the life of the common citizenry in Afghanistan. In his view, the Karzai government is unable to steer the country’s administration to find a solution for its rentier economy and set up a merit-based

system of governance. It has also failed to ensure the rule of law, transparency and accountability: the President himself has been accused of rigging the presidential election for his own benefit. There is a trust deficit between the international community, particularly as regards the Obama administration, and the Afghan government. European countries, overburdened with their domestic economic crisis, find it difficult to sustain their engagement with Afghanistan. Obama has failed to stop Pakistan from supporting the Taliban, develop a sustainable Afghan economy, minimize corruption, and promote good governance. Obama has advocated a regional solution to the Afghan crisis, which is made difficult by the United States' uneasy relationship with Pakistan and growing hostility with Iran. US support for India's growing involvement in Afghanistan can further antagonize Pakistan and complicate the regional environment.

Many in Pakistan's foreign policy establishment wishfully think that China may replace the US, and that a strengthened Sino-Pak partnership can deny India any strategic advantage in the South Asian region. Rashid dismisses the idea. In the light of China's growing engagement with India, particularly in trade and business that accounts for over \$60 billion – India-China trade reached \$73.9 billion in 2011 – Pakistan cannot expect unconditional Chinese support on any political issue, including Kashmir (p. 195). Also in his view, ethnic crisis and political instability in Pakistan are against China's interests. China is also afraid of Pakistan-based militant groups fanning the Uighur secessionist tendencies within its own territory.

In the interests of a more positive outlook for South Asia, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan, the author advocates regional cooperation to replace even the vestiges of confrontation among the countries of the region. A healthy regional environment is bound to create opportunities for harnessing the potential of regional trade and business. Pakistan's geo-strategic location can enable it to become a hub of regional trade. In the case of Afghanistan, revival of the regional trade routes would immensely help to generate transit revenues. President Karzai needs to send strong signals to convince the world and the Afghan people that his government has been genuinely exploring possibilities for peaceful solutions and security, bridging social, political and ethnic divisions and delivering public goods to the citizenry.

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Gurudas Das, *Security and Development in India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), Pages: xxviii+181, Price: Rs. 595.

The book broadly attempts to explore “the strong linkages among external security threats, economic underdevelopment and the consequent deterioration of internal insecurity” in India’s north-eastern region. For many decades, this region remained a “conflict trap”, marred by ethnic militancy and cross-border migration upsetting the settled demography. Mainly on account of peripheral underdevelopment and relative lack of political attention, this major strategic part of India’s national discourse was unexplored. However, with the initiation of India’s “Look East” policy, the region has become the linchpin in India’s integration to East Asia and Asia-Pacific. This has also brought a unique identity to the region as the “Extended North-East” that integrates India with Myanmar and Bangladesh, and provides it many socio-economic opportunities. In the author’s view, an out-of-the-box approach should be followed to utilize the lately found opportunities.

The initial pages present a conceptual correlation between economic underdevelopment and conflict situations. Each chapter thereafter deals with specific aspects of this correlation. The book stands out for meticulously clarifying the internal dynamics and prescribing a way out of the “grievance-based ethnic militancy” and related vagaries in the North-East.

The role of good-neighbourly relations has been emphasized, as the stability of a political system, which is a key to security and economic development, can hardly be attained in isolation. About 33 per cent of India’s international land border is in the north-eastern region; and this region shares 98 per cent of its border with the neighbouring countries and merely 2 per cent with mainland India. Hence, cross-border exchange forms an important parameter in the region’s development. Antagonistic relations with the neighbouring countries bordering it would therefore suffocate it.

The author divides India’s relations with its neighbours into three phases: (i) the period between independence and 1962, marked by the Sino-Indian war; (ii) 1962 to 1991, when the cold war ended; and (iii) the current phase, marked by India’s “Look East” policy. The first phase witnessed an emphasis on the concept of an Asiatic Federation and “Asianism”, mooted by the Indian National Congress before independence. The Nehruvian model, which stressed

the need for close cooperation among the post-colonial Asian societies, was based on the premise that such an approach suited the security and development concerns of India in general and the north-eastern region in particular. Subsequent events proved that this premise was misplaced.

There was also the perception during the Nehru era that inaccessible borders deter external aggressors. This premise, which led to slow development of the region, lasted throughout the second phase. The strategic environment in South Asia, besieged by the Pakistan-China-USA axis, allowed India limited diplomatic options to address the security threats. India's foreign policy, especially its neighbourhood policy, adversely affected the development and security concerns of the north-eastern region. Essentially, this region became a militarized zone. The deteriorating security environment on India's eastern borders was a result of the functioning of anti-India forces (e.g., Pakistan and China) which actively encouraged ethnic insurgent movements.

The remoteness of the region, compounded by the hostile environment – both internal to the region and external, makes development initiatives difficult. Grievance is the primary driving force for militancy in the region. The discontents among the various ethnic groups arise out of economic deprivation, interethnic conflicts, underemployment, identity assertion, and autonomy aspirations. The open borders and the socio-political milieu across the border favouring their insurgent activities have resulted in a fragile situation.

The author is optimistic that India's current foreign policy, particularly the "Look East" policy, has the potential to enable the north-eastern region to come out from its landlocked entrapment, to make it land-linked. To break the conflict trap, he suggests three mechanisms: integrate the region with South and South-East Asia through active economic diplomacy; adopt a development model led by community-based organizations; and improve governance through the politics of accommodation as opposed to the politics of identity.

To make the region land-linked, there is a need for a multi-modal transportation network across the border, between the region and the mainland, and within the region. Hitherto, infrastructure development in the region has largely been determined by the state-centric defence-oriented security perception. But neither a security policy that neglects the development needs nor a development policy that neglects the security needs can succeed in India's bordering regions. A composite policy that views both the requirements as complementary to each other needs to be put in place.

Considering the region's cultural similarity and geographical proximity with the neighbouring countries, linking it with them would be the best available option, as envisaged in the "Look East" policy. This is a practical and the only viable option.

Overall, the book is sound, both in method and content, and a must-read for scholars who have interest in the subject.

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Ajay Lele, ed., *Decoding the International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities* (New Delhi: Pentagon Security International, 2012), Pages: 190, Price: Rs. 695.

Man first made his presence in outer space in the early 1960s. Ever since, much has happened in this realm designated as common heritage of mankind that today services a host of civilian and military aspects of our lives. But for two reasons this still remains a “new” frontier of sorts.

First, outer space remained a preserve of the two superpowers for a fairly long time. It is only over the last two or three decades that the presence of many more players has become pronounced. Over sixty actors – state and private commercial entities – are active in space today. There are over 1100 operational satellites. And the entry of private players for cargo transportation (NASA has provided a contract worth \$1.6 billion to SpaceX to run twelve cargo missions) as well as for space tourism (as being popularized by Virgin Galactic) is only going to increase. Besides new players, newer technologies are entering the realm of space. For instance, in May 2012 Russia announced that it was developing a sea-based space defence system that will be able to engage targets in low earth orbit. The talk of the US space test-bed and the increasing capabilities of a space-based infrared system to undertake boost phase interception are all pushing the envelope of military uses of space. Thus, the manner of utilization of outer space, the number of actors who are using it and the scope of that use, are all undergoing a rapid change.

The second reason why outer space is referred to as a new frontier is because there is no universally accepted system of governance in place that can effectively regulate the fast proliferating new actors and activities. Space law is underdeveloped and inadequate to meet the rapid advances taking place in technology and numbers of players. As someone has said, “Science soars like an eagle while law drags on like a turtle.” In order to fill this gap, the idea of a code of conduct or rules of governance for outer space activities has been doing the rounds over the last four years. A draft Code was first prepared and introduced into the international discourse by the European Union in 2008. It contained a set of voluntary and non-binding best practices to regulate the behaviour of states in outer space and to inject transparency and mutual trust and confidence into their activities. In India, the CoC received hardly any serious attention from the strategic community. While India is not new to the utilization of space, the issue of space security in its many contemporary dimensions is a relatively less studied area.

At this juncture, a new book on the subject from the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses is a welcome addition. It is also most timely since the issue of CoC will be under discussion over the next few years and a book such as this can serve as essential reading for all stakeholders.

The editor of the volume has done a great service by bringing together writings of scholars of different backgrounds, expertise and countries. Lawyers, technologists, policymakers, academics, military men and industry representatives have presented their perspective on the CoC and “decoded” it for a larger understanding. The views of scholars of all major space-faring nations build an interesting mosaic of country positions. The short pieces make for easy reading.

The articles are structured under three main sections – Debate, Genesis and Global Opinion. The introductory section lays out the background by capturing the essence of the basic debate in two pithy essays. The first one by Ajay Lele expresses scepticism for a CoC, which he believes serves “no purpose beyond offering a feel good notion”. He also questions the use of “forming so-called rules of behaviour, principles, values and standards when there is no authority to punish”. Michael Krepon presents the other view suggesting that the CoC would at least establish norms “upon which sanctions or other penalties can be imposed”. He argues that “Without rules, there are no rule breakers”. He strongly supports the CoC for its “doability” compared to getting nations to negotiate and conclude a legal treaty to this effect. Presenting well-argued cases, these two chapters lay out the issues for debate, which are then further fleshed out by experts in the second section. The nuances of the existing legal instruments and other possible options provide ample food for thought and must be subjected to serious deliberations by all stakeholders in India. The third section encapsulates a range of contrasting views on the CoC from different country perspectives.

Equally useful are the five appendices which provide the ease of reaching out to all relevant documents in one place. However, it must be pointed out that the Text of the International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities – the main theme of the book – is reproduced in its 2010 and not the latest 2012 revised version. In fact, it would have been useful if all the three versions (2008, 2010 and 2012) had been included as appendices. Some statements made recently by India at COPUOS would also have brought better clarity on Indian views on the subject of space security in general.

It is common for an edited book to have some duplication, and this volume does not escape it either. But the primary strength of the book lies in providing

a platform for all kinds of views. And that is exactly the need of the moment, especially in India as it will need to voice a view on the matter sooner rather than later since the EU has expressed a desire to have the CoC finalized by the second half of 2013. A book such as this will encourage the creation of an informed opinion and aid India in preparing to participate in international negotiations from the vantage point of understanding how best to safeguard national interest on this critical issue.

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