

# BOOK REVIEW

*Uneasy Neighbours:  
India, Pakistan and U.S.  
Foreign Policy*  
by Kanishkan Sathasivan  
Ashgate: Aldershot,  
England, 2005.

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Indo-Pak relationship has baffled many observers over the years. It has been characterised as the most enduring of all rivalries by others. It is interesting to find the relationship between the two countries alternating between periods of acute crisis and periods of relative peace stifled by mutual suspicion and distrust. No amount of external pressure or persuasion, or internal readiness, could remove the clouds of antipathy between these two countries. In the context of a nuclear South Asia, this persisting hostility,

between these two neighbours, has generated considerable debate primarily in the US. The region is regarded as a 'nuclear flashpoint' or 'the most dangerous place in the world' by many analysts in the US and the West.

In that sense, the book under review by Kanishkan Sathasivan builds on the already existing prejudices and rather than examining their authenticity, decidedly reinforces them. Moreover, the title of the book (*Uneasy Neighbours*) is impaled by the subtitle (*India, Pakistan and US Foreign Policy*), which in fact almost shades off into the barbed wires in the cover illustration. The book, in fact, focuses more on the interactions of the US with the 'uneasy neighbours' than on the different facets of uneasy neighbourliness, which the author brilliantly alludes to in Chapter 2 of the book borrowing the formulations by Buzan and Weaver .

The rudimentary discussion in the beginning through the maze of pre-

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colonial and post-colonial history of the subcontinent, which is at best sketchy, propels Kashmir as the bone of contention between the two states of India and Pakistan. There is some sort of predestination, a strange sense of determinism in the Kashmir-centricity of the discourse, which is given further impetus in the second chapter of the book. But here again the discussion fails to rise above the ordinary and the facetious and allows itself to be guided by a particular strand of thought. It is strange to find the discussion toeing the familiar line of forced 'even-handedness' to de-recognise the fact of popular antipathy towards the Pakistan sponsored tribal raid on Kashmir, which was even clearly brought out by the well-known Pakistani General Akbar Khan, who had planned the raid. The only innuendo that only the most careful reader can stumble upon is the statement that "the first Kashmir war among India, Pakistan and Kashmiris themselves was fought from October 1947 to January 1949" (p. 8). The expression seeks to hide more than it seeks to reveal. In which sense the war was among Kashmiris themselves is left to reader's imagination. There is nothing more to the portrait than statement of facts in the second chapter.

Similarly, in the discussions on the US foreign policy towards India and Pakistan the author's over dependence on certain sources impacts the formulation of his arguments. He is helplessly waylaid by the arguments he borrows from certain observers who have specifically dealt with these issues from the American view-point digging out their own sets of evidences from classified and unclassified official sources. The author, rather than seeking to question or examine these points of view, scours these arguments and serves them as incontestable home truths. These oft-quoted authors in parentheses divide the honours for the discussions among them and show Sathasivam's over-dependence on limited sources. The old, familiar story of personalities stalking the foreign policy terrain and making hostage to their fancies and caprices forms the bulk of the discussion. Without demeaning the role of personalities in the politics of these countries, one can say that the possibility of discussing the political, economic and social processes that limited the choices of these personalities at the helm of affairs at different phases of history and conditioned the foreign policies of India, Pakistan and the US has been given lesser emphasis.

There have been flashes of innovation, however, in characterising the nature of relationship among these three countries. For example the author describes Indo-US relations riven by 'an undercurrent of mutual suspicion and antagonism' as a 'long series of steps forward followed by an equal number of steps backward' (p. 57). Similarly the author describes Pakistan as the 'arch nemesis of India' (p.9) or calls Pak-US relationship as a 'marriage of convenience' (p.95), an 'uneven patron client relationship' and 'having a cyclical pattern brought about through a series of truly transformational events'. While one may disagree with these formulations they point to the author's generalizations and make the conclusions predictable.

The chapter on India and US foreign policy dwells on the unthinking rejection of US offers by the earlier Indian leadership and does not seek to explain the 'whys' and 'hows' of such reaction. The fact that the US thinking on Kashmir was significantly conditioned by the interpretation of the Pakistani and British Commonwealth Officials and was completely apathetic towards the Indian point of view, which was the root cause of the hiatus in the beginning, escapes the author

completely even when he hints at the unreasonable Nehruvian 'nyet' to Eisenhower's offer in 1958. The Nehruvian worldview, being characterised as anti-US and anti-capitalist in the book could have been weighed in against his deep antipathy towards homegrown communists.

The fact remains however that the two countries sought to court each other but were victims of their own self-images and national-interests. They ran into each other's embrace without any effort when they chose to, and India was particularly eager to court US in the initial days but for the American inclinations to respond to Pakistani advances with 'even-handed' sympathy. The history of the subcontinent as well as the unfolding cold war calculus stood in the way of the three coming together in any kind of triangular relationship of inter-dependence. Even if things have turned for the better and the so called process of 'de-hyphenation' is on at the moment, the inertia of Indo-Pak rivalry continue to pose serious challenges to US foreign policy towards South Asia.

A serious flaw in the book is the complete absence of any discussion on how the two neighbours have interacted with each other. There

have been several rounds of negotiations, between these two countries which have not been dealt with in any appreciable manner. Some of them have been quite frank and open in spite of the trust-deficit between the two countries, like the Indus Water treaty of 1960 and the Nehru-Bogra talks of 1953-4 or Bhutto-Swaran Singh talks of 1962-63. There is passing mention of the 1963 talks but the discussions on them could have thrown light on the nature of official interaction between the two countries. This could have given the author some background to test his hypothesis of 'uneasy neighbours'. The role played by the US in all these could have been analysed in detail as a measure of American interest in India-Pakistan relations.

There is no mention whatsoever of the non-official level of contacts between the peoples of these two countries. There could have been another hypothesis here looking at the facile elitist version of hostility struggling with the natural sense of bonhomie between the two people who have shared experiences of history over a considerable length of time. This can act as a buffer against the dangerous portents of a nuclear holocaust in the sub-continent. Howsoever competent the elites

might be at posturing against each other, a total 'mutually assured destruction' is off limits in south Asia, if one looks at the self-sustaining bonds of friendship among the people in spite of the walls of distrust built officially around them. However, if Kashmir is to be projected as the most dangerous place in the world then such arguments had to be obliterated. This is not to berate the argument, however, that the two countries should take care to acquire efficient command and control systems and jointly work towards reducing the risk of accidental nuclear confrontation.

The discussion on strategic thinking in India and Pakistan makes interesting reading and provides the book with some timber towards the end. The Indian war fighting doctrine as well as the recent move by the Indian defence establishment to invest heavily in modernization of defence forces finds mention here side by side with the Pakistani concern about the continued predominance of India as a regional power. The author also flags, quite correctly, the Pakistani sense of insecurity since 1971. However, very soon Kashmir envelops the discourse and one is back to the familiar argument that Indian pre-eminence,

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notwithstanding, Pakistan's determination to match India missile by missile and nuke by nuke will lead to a disastrous arms race and make a nuclear engagement quite probable.

There are certain avoidable errors which could have been avoided like 'throws' for 'throes' (p.100), 'to decided' for 'to decide' (p.69), 'Taiwan Straights' for 'Taiwan Straits' and mention of Nehru as the 'father of Indian inde-

pendence movement'. On the whole, for a reader initiated into the triangular politics of India-Pakistan-USA relationship, the book is a welcome starter. It is certain to lay the foundation for more critical understanding and better comprehension of the multifaceted and complex relationship that is showing signs of creative transformation in the post-9/11 international politics. ■