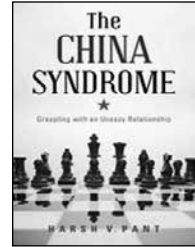

Book Reviews

**The China Syndrome:
Grappling with an Uneasy Relationship**
Harsh V Pant

(New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2010)

Rs 399/-



The China Syndrome: Grappling with an Uneasy Relationship is a book that puts forth the realist vs. idealist debate vis-à-vis India's claim to be recognised as a major global power, even though Indian policy-makers themselves do not seem clear about their objectives when it comes to realising this objective, being symbolic of diverging trajectories. The Indian approach towards handling its relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) at best, according to the author, can be described as lackadaisical. In contrast to China's well-laid-out policy towards India, India has, from time to time, oscillated from going ballistic over China to a sort of defeatist acquiescence. This, in turn, has manifested with India failing in every aspect in evolving a coherent long-term strategy towards Beijing.

The book details the areas of India's convergence and divergence of strategic interests with China as they vie for a greater strategic space and say in Asia. However, what perhaps is the most pertinent subject that this book chooses to focus upon is what the author describes as "India's China Problem". The competition for regional influence will always underpin the realities of the Sino-Indian relationship, with India experiencing the need to shape its foreign policy accordingly. It might then seem puzzling that a nation such as India, that hopes to be a global player, is so insouciant about its closest competitor.

While delving into discussions regarding a nation's strategic culture, the author cites the argument put forth by critics that culture does not matter in global politics and foreign policy, and that cultural effects can be reduced to

the epiphenomena of the distribution of power and capabilities. Interestingly, according to leading China analysts, Beijing has historically exhibited a relatively consistent hard *realpolitik* strategic culture that continues even now. China's strategic behaviour exhibits a preference for offensive uses of force, mediated by a keen sensitivity to relative capabilities, and the Chinese decision-makers seem to have internalised this strategic culture. Chinese decision-making tends to see territorial disputes as high-value conflicts, due in part to a historical sensitivity to threats to the territorial integrity of the state.

On the other hand, the author affirms that India's ability to think strategically on issues of national security is at best questionable, with a perceptible lack of institutionalisation of the foreign policy-making process. In fact, it is this lacuna that has allowed a drift to set in, without any long-term orientation. The book underscores the fundamental problem wherein those holding the levers of power succumb to the temptation of controlling institutions and awarding loyalists with assignments, sidelining merit and competence. The onus is largely on the bureaucracy, which is not organised to think strategically, leading the author to accuse the foreign and security policy bureaucracy of remaining insular and opposed to even a consultative relationship. This, in turn, establishes the fact that the Indian bureaucracy is out of tune with the changing realities in the realm of foreign policy.

While elaborating upon the framework of the existential 'China debate' within India, the author classifies the views as those of the pragmatists, the hyper-realists and the appeasers. Though this cacophony of views reflects Indian democracy at its best, in many ways, it also impedes the formulation of a long-term strategy. The author states that unlike Beijing, New Delhi remains reluctant to take advantage of the many faultlines in Greater China, even though China's inability to respect ethnic differences within its borders is its Achilles heel.

In a critical analysis of all the indicators of power, be it economic or military, India continues to remain behind China in terms of its capabilities. While India's economic and military capabilities have no doubt increased substantially in recent times, with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fourth in the world in purchasing power parity and its military the third largest in the world, China's capabilities have continued to trump India's. Significantly, unlike China, India is not at ease with the notion of exercising global power. The author has sought to put at centre-stage the fact that the pursuit of power remains at the heart of international politics, affecting the influence that states exert over one another, thereby, shaping political outcomes. Indian policy-makers remain diffident,

almost apologetic about their nation's rising profile. While referring to China's 'peaceful rise' campaign, the author promulgates the idea of shedding the sophomore naivete that China's ascent to power will be any different given that *power is necessarily expansionist*.

In so far as the Indian understanding goes, the political and strategic elites have developed a suspicion of power politics with the word 'power' itself acquiring a pejorative connotation. The relationship between power and foreign policy was never fully understood, leading to a progressive loss in India's ability to wield power effectively in the international realm. As far as the present structure of global politics is concerned, India has two options to choose from: that of either playing the game of global politics by the rules laid down by its structure or resigning itself to a secondary status in the global hierarchy. The study offers an insight into the Indian strategic discourse that tends to overemphasise the promising future potentials in the Sino-Indian relationship while simultaneously deemphasising its troublesome past and more worrisome present realities.

In what the author labels as the means of 'tackling China', India needs to be upfront about the lack of progress in finding mutually acceptable territorial concessions as it puts its own house in order and focusses on redressing the balance of power with China. New Delhi needs to develop its economic and military might without, in any way, being apologetic about it and put forth a clear articulation of its national interests and engage China on a host of issues ranging from the border problem to the alleged dumping of cheap Chinese goods in the Indian market. The recognition that appeasing China is neither desirable nor necessary, even as a direct confrontation with China is not something India can afford, at least in the near future, needs to be comprehended.

A suggestive approach propounded by the author is that Indian policy-makers begin acknowledging the real driver behind China's policies and not really mull over debating if China is a malevolent or a benevolent power. Given the growing disparity between the two competing nations, this book suggests that India needs the United States as an offshore balancer in the region to prevent China from gaining regional hegemony. That said, it also needs to be mentioned that India, needs to further enhance its economic, military and global political muscle as it aspires to be a global power to be reckoned with. Furthermore, although the book discusses various facets of foreign and security policy-making and the existing gorges between New Delhi and Beijing, a significant facet that is amiss (that perhaps could have been accorded greater depth in terms of both research

and analyses) is the military modernisation campaign undertaken by China and its consequent impact on India, especially in the wake of the recent brazen aggressiveness that India has witnessed at the hands of the Chinese. Overall, this book is a perceptive study and comes across as a hard-hitting statement on the foreign and security policy-making in India when it comes to crafting its relationship with perhaps the most significant, yet intricate country of the region—China.

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**Awakening Giants, Feet of Clay:
Assessing the Economic Rise of China and India**
Pranab Bardhan
(NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010)
\$18.71



Sustained and rapid economic growth in India and China has been attracting a great deal of comparative attention from the academic, industrial and policy-making perspectives. Both countries have managed to move out of the shackles of underdevelopment and are today prominent pillars of the world economy. Considering the fact that both are non-Western countries and have had a history of colonial rule, they are bound to be compared. Their geographical proximity and strategic rivalry/competition lends this comparison another dimension.

In the past few years, there has been a major focus in academic writings on this subject, even to the extent of coining the term *Chindia*. Academicians as well as scholars have been trying to compare and contrast these two countries. Professor Pranab Bardhan's *Awakening Giants, Feet of Clay: Assessing the Economic Rise of China and India* is a valuable addition to the existing literature. It stands out since the author is looking only at the economic parameters and has not delved into the realm of politics and bilateral relationships. Bardhan has very

beautifully juxtaposed the good and the bad about the two Asian economies that have created some fascination about themselves of late.

The book is neatly divided into ten chapters and they all deal with specific aspects of economic development. The author has asserted that he attempts to understand the differences and the existing problems in the development patterns of these countries from a political economy perspective. From this perspective, the book compares and contrasts the Chinese and Indian situations in the rural sector, ecological environment, infrastructure development, pattern of savings, poverty and inequality and also provides some perspective into the future trajectory of the growth in these areas.

The author argues that the general arguments regarding the growth pattern of China and India are highly oversimplified. He shows by examples and data how the understanding on the economic development pattern has till date been overhyped and there is an exaggeration of the achievements by these countries. His primary example to support his argument is the poverty reduction in China. The common understanding on this has been that China has been able to elevate a large section of its population out of poverty as a result of its integration in the global economic system. On the other hand, Bardhan argues that this is not the real reason since China was able to do this before it got integrated in the global economic system (China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001). Bardhan states that this happened in the 1980s due to land reforms and other related policies (p. 93).

The author highlights the fact that it is very difficult to conclude whether an authoritarian model is better than a democratic one for generating economic growth. In the sixth chapter, he highlights that “in both the countries, a major part of the economy is in hands of the private sector” (p. 88). He also concludes that “in spite of some recognizable characteristics of East Asian developmental state in both countries, they are actually quite different from the model in their own way” (p. 89). Thus, he argues that to say that one is better than the other is quite difficult as both countries have shown that there are some sort of checks and balances at different levels of the system.

On the debate surrounding the level of savings in these countries, the author states that both China and India are very high savings economies. He points out that the problem with China is that most of the financial sector is controlled and dominated by the large government banks which do not provide the people with adequate returns on saving. On the other hand, in the Indian case, the banking sector is more balanced. He also points out that the Chinese banking sector is

majorly hit by the large number of non-performing and bad loans which is not the case in India. The author also highlights the fact that there is a very large informal financing sector in India and he concludes by saying that with the passage of time, there will be a definite increase in the demand for new financial products and services (p. 77).

On infrastructural development, the author highlights the fact that China is way ahead of India. The author states that this is one difference which is quite visible to the people visiting these two countries. The two most important sectors in which this gap is most prominent are “power and transportation” (p. 54). The author states that in these two sectors, in spite of the fact that China was behind India, it has clearly surged ahead in the past few decades.

The most striking feature of difference between these two economies is the social sector. The author beautifully highlights how China is way ahead on these parameters and India is still lagging behind. The author points out that in “broad aggregate health outcomes, China’s performance has been far better than that of India” (p. 104). He further shows that “even during the time after the cultural revolution, two-third of Chinese population was either literate or semi-literate while, on the other hand, more than half of the Indian population was illiterate” (p. 111). The author also points out that India’s educational inequality is one of the worst in the world (p. 112). The strongest argument of the author is that “in both these countries,” the governance and accountability issues will not be resolved easily” (p. 115).

The other important sector in which both these countries have been trying to improve is the environmental degradation issue. As a result of the development momentum, there has been some neglect towards its effects on the overall environmental outcomes. However, in the past few years, there has been an increase in the consciousness and also awareness. In order to try and control the massive problems, there has been “some tempering of the developmental aspirations in both the countries” (p. 124).

In the last chapter, the author discusses the “existing vested interests and the other developmental problems from the perspective of political economy” (p. 124). He concludes the whole debate around economic development and who will do better than whom by stating that “both China and India have done much better in the last quarter of the century than they did in the last two hundred years...and though both polities have shown their resilience in their own ways, one should not underestimate their structural weaknesses and the social and political uncertainties which cloud the horizon.” (p. 159). The book is primarily

focussed on the economic debates and is thus full of economic jargon and models as the basis of discussion. As a result, for a person with a non-economic background, this book becomes a very difficult read despite the fact that it is only 150 pages long. However, it is a must read for people who are working towards acquiring a more nuanced understanding of the current positioning of India and China vis-à-vis each other on the development front. With a rich amount of data and tables, the book manages to provide the readers with an enormous amount of information.

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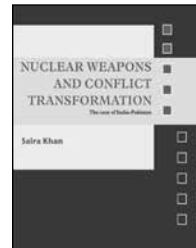
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**Nuclear Weapons and Conflict Transformation:
The Case of India-Pakistan**

Saira Khan

(Oxon: Routledge, 2009)

Rs 2096/-



Nuclear proliferation continues to dominate the plethora of problems faced by the contemporary world. Analysts continually and extensively focus on why states go nuclear, the issue of illicit nuclear proliferation and other issues related to the domain. However, Saira Khan in her book *Nuclear Weapons and Conflict Transformation: The Case of India-Pakistan* delves into an aspect, majorly ignored by most security analysts.

The book explores the question of what happens to protracted conflicts when the states involved acquire nuclear weapons and elucidate the same with a theoretical framework. The author deftly uses the theory and applies it to the case of India and Pakistan. While non-nuclear states involved in protracted conflicts tend to manage the crisis through full-scale wars, nuclear states resort to low-medium intensity conflicts to contain the situation below the threshold level, where the threat of employment of nuclear weapons prevents both parties from escalating the conflict. When parties go nuclear, full scale

wars are no longer viable. Due to low probability of escalation of war, the crisis situation continues on a lower level, embedded with a high degree of volatility and remains indefinitely alive. The book is divided into two parts. Specifically, the first part charts the theoretical and scholarship work on the issue of nuclear proliferation and protracted conflicts. The second part of the book is devoted to the application of the theory to the case study of the India-Pakistan protracted conflict.

The first chapter focusses on the previous literature and studies dedicated to conflict transformation, which is essentially considered undertheorised. The author states that many theorists consider conflict transformation as a positive attribute of conflicts, which may not always be the case. Subsequently in the chapter, Khan through her research has theorised that the acquisition of nuclear weapons may actually have a negative impact on conflict transformation.

The second chapter deals with the scholarship related to the ramifications of nuclear weapons acquisition. In the section on the triggers for proliferation, the author covers the dichotomy between the nuclear haves and have nots, after the five declared nuclear powers render other nuclear-seeking states as proliferators. Furthermore, the security regime has failed to prevent proliferation primarily due to its basic framework, and freedom of functioning in member countries. Importantly, it was designed to “prevent the transfer of nuclear material to non-nuclear states.” Khan presents a theoretical framework on the association between the acquisition of nuclear weapons and the life-cycle of prolonged conflicts. With the acquisition of nuclear weapons, the possibility of a conventional war recedes and the nature of conflict shifts towards “indefinite protraction.” This prolonged conflict is a result of the more intense crises that prevail with the absence of war. Owing to external pressures, parties are compelled to undertake negotiations that eventually become futile. In this chapter, the author aptly amplifies the issue of stability/instability paradox and its consequences.

The second part of the book covers the case study of India-Pakistan and tests the previously stated theory with apposite illustrations and instances. Observing historical trends, the fourth chapter highlights the India-Pakistan conflict as a protracted crisis. Through this chapter, Khan traces the history of India-Pakistan animosity and the complexities in their relations. Tellingly, the early conflict is unique because rather than “moving from a low level of violence to an intensification phase, it started off with the escalation phase

and a high degree of intensification as war was introduced soon after it began.” All the wars fought between the parties were initiated by Pakistan to settle the issues by force. Pakistan’s defeat in 1971 institutionalised its hatred towards India, thus, leading to an arms race. After India’s pursuit of the nuclear road and declaration in 1974, Pakistan followed suit. After both the parties went nuclear, Pakistan resorted to the “low spectrum of conflict” which involves proxy wars or cross-border terrorism and represents low-cost options for it. Suffering from a stability-instability paradox, the conflict prolonged because it could cross the escalation phase and then crawl down to the de-escalation phase.

The fifth chapter offers a detailed account of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan as a consequence of the security threats faced by them. In the need to acquire deterrent capabilities, both the parties went nuclear. While Pakistan’s nuclear option was India-centric, India took the nuclear road because of the security threat faced from China, post-1962 War. Moreover, conflicts between two states cannot be resolved until the thinking of the parties changes. Issues that motivated these parties to go nuclear did not get resolved after the acquisition and their dependence on these weapons only resulted in prolonging the crisis, if not war. In the sixth chapter, Khan has depicted the escalation of crisis in the India-Pakistan conflict, during the pre-nuclear period. During this period, there were seven crises, out of which three led to war. Interestingly, such high degree of belligerence has not been visible during the nuclear phase so far. 1979-86 marks the period of “transition of nuclear weapons phase”, where enough knowledge about each other’s nuclear capabilities was ambiguous and, therefore, no one took the risk of initiating or escalating a crisis. This period is considered the most peaceful of the India-Pakistan acrimonious equation.

With the backdrop of nuclear acquisitions, Khan analyses the four major crises, specifically, the Brasstacks crisis, Kashmir crisis (1990), Kargil conflict and the attack on the Indian Parliament, and their significance. All four crises were set off by Pakistan after it realised the low possibility of a full-scale war breaking out. The Kargil conflict was a medium-intensity conflict which resulted in an unexpected degree of retaliation from the Indian side. As pointed out, nuclear weapons are “deterrents with constraints” which restricted India in its reprisal. This aspect attracts the weaker side which tends to initiate crises to make small territorial gains and internationalise the issue. It is believed that such crises would have led to an all-out war in the

absence of nuclear weapons. During the Kargil conflict, the US was a major contributor to the diffusion of the crisis and pressurised the warring parties to solve their issues through negotiations.

Following the above line of argument, the author covers the result of nuclear acquisition on peace initiatives in the eighth chapter. Owing to “stability in terms of war and instability in terms of crisis”, the peace initiative and processes proved to be nugatory. Consequently, solving conflicts between parties is utopian if crises continue to be a constant factor, which is the case in the India-Pakistan equation. The ninth chapter dwells on the repercussions of employment of nuclear weapons for conflict resolution. Investigating the instances when India and Pakistan cooperated in other areas besides the areas of contention, Khan draws attention to the transformation of conflict. Cooperating under the cloud of instability and acknowledging the difficulties involved in resolving the issue, the parties learn to “live with the situation indefinitely” and the prospects of terminating the conflict fade. The last chapter, i.e. the tenth, traces the potential for conflict rumination and compares the India-Pakistan rapprochement patterns. The author believes that while the US’ interest in the South Asian region has renewed, Indo-Pak dialogues can be sustained but may not ensure optimistic results with regard to conflict transformation

The author needs to be complimented for delving into the complex issues of nuclear weapons and conflict transformation, a topic that is primarily ignored in the debates surrounding nuclear issues. However, the author might have done well to include the aspects of domestic politics and actors that influence conflicts and act as catalysts in protracted conflicts (in both the countries). Since its inception, Pakistan has been ready to exploit India’s troubles and supported secessionist groups within India, including the Nagas and Mizos, which fostered insurgency movements during the pre-nuclearisation period. It would be desirable to see a detailed account of this aspect in the book. On the whole, the book is well written, dispassionately analysed and contributes greatly to the literature of both nuclear proliferation and conflict transformation.

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