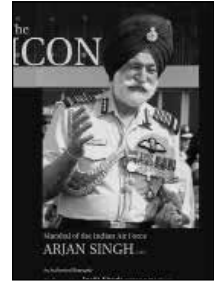

Book Review

**The ICON: Marshal of the Indian Air Force
Arjan Singh, DFC
An Authorised Biography**

Jasjit Singh
KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd, and
Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi, 2009
Rs 880



In a nation that has few heroes, Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh, DFC, a sprightly 91-year-old Second World War veteran and former Chief of Air Staff, is a real national icon. Commissioned into the Indian Air Force at the age of 20 in December 1939, Arjan Singh learnt his trade strafing the tribals in Waziristan while flying the Westland Wapiti. At 24, commanding the 'Tigers', No. 1 (IAF) Squadron, he helped to fight the Japanese to a grinding halt at Imphal and to turn Field Marshal Sir William Slim's defeat into victory in Burma (Myanmar).

An intrepid pilot and a bold commander, Arjan Singh's immense contribution to India's war effort was soon recognised and Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander, Southeast Asia, and later the last Viceroy, personally pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on the young officer's chest on the tarmac of the Imphal airfield when it was still under siege. The post-Independence years saw Arjan Singh rise rapidly through the ranks, serving with professional brilliance through various command and staff appointments, till he took over as the Chief of Air Staff just before the 1965 War with Pakistan.

He led the Indian Air Force with great distinction during the war in which Indian Gnats and Hunters ran rings around the US-supplied F-86 Sabre jets and F-104 Starfighters of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). A Mystere ground-attack aircraft shot down a PAF Starfighter! Arjan Singh was honoured with the Padma Vibushan and became the first Indian to be promoted to the rank of Air Chief Marshal.

After his retirement from the IAF in 1969, he served as India's ambassador in Switzerland, with simultaneous accreditation to the Holy See, and then in Kenya. He served as member of the Minorities Commission, chairman of IIT-Delhi, and as Delhi's Lt-Governor. He was able to discharge all of these responsibilities with immense enthusiasm and great vision. And on January 26, 2002, a grateful nation bestowed on this visionary leader the ultimate honour an air warrior can aspire to: the rank of Marshal of the Air Force.

Air Commodore Jasjit Singh (Retd), author of *The Icon*, is himself a decorated air warrior, Padma Bhushan awardee, renowned national security analyst, former director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, and author of acclaimed books. He has not only told the story of the life and times of the Marshal with deep affection and sincerity, but has also woven into the narrative an analytical history of the IAF during its early years.

The expansion of the IAF, acquisition of new aircraft, setting up of facilities to manufacture fighter aircraft in India and the perennial air transport operations in support of the army deployed along far-flung frontiers are all covered in great detail. The story of why the combat air power of the IAF was not employed against the Chinese during the 1962 border war, ostensibly to avoid the bombing of Kolkata by the Chinese, is told dispassionately. It was a major military folly, indeed, for the use of air power would have made a substantial difference to the end result.

Remarkably, air power was again not used against forces in East Pakistan in 1965, even though the Kalaikunda air base was attacked by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). The book debunks the well-entrenched myth that the PAF won the air war in 1965 with hard facts about the number of sorties flown, the total damage inflicted and the air domination achieved. The author says that over 90 per cent of the army's requirement for close air support was provided and that the army was more than satisfied with the efforts of the IAF to keep the PAF at bay.

Jasjit Singh also highlights the gaps in the higher defence organisation, the absence of adequate intelligence assessments – sadly, still to be corrected – and the almost complete lack of joint operational planning. The yawning gap in the civil-military relations is also evident. The Ministry of Defence requested the US for 12 squadrons of F-104 Starfighters and two squadrons of B-52 bombers in 1962 without consulting the IAF! There are obviously still many lessons that have not been learnt.

Above all, the book amply reflects the profound compassion for fellow warriors that the Marshal displayed throughout his long and illustrious career,

and still does in his 90s. The Icon is the biography of an air warrior whom India is truly proud of – a tale well told. It should be compulsory reading for all soldiers, sailors and airmen – as well as for their political masters and the bureaucracy.

(Courtesy: Mail Today, May 10, 2009.)

By

Brigadier **Gurmeet Kanwal** (Retd)

Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

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India China Relations: The Border Issue and Beyond

Mohan Guruswamy and Zorawar Daulet Singh

Observer Research Foundation

and Viva Books Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2009



Despite booming economic ties between India and China, the long standing border dispute continues to cast a long shadow over the relations between the two countries. The border issue also remains the biggest obstacle to complete normalisation of ties. There has been a regular high level interaction between the two sides to formulate a strategic dialogue (2006 was dubbed as “Sino-India Friendship Year”). The strategic dialogue included the development of bilateral relations, economic and trade development, defence cooperation and settlement of the boundary dispute as core issues. Yet friction and tension continues to simmer over many core and fundamental issues. Prominent among these are the border dispute, China’s reluctance in giving approval at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the Indo-US nuclear deal, a continued lack of support for India’s candidature to the UN Security Council and the Tibet issue.

With the above backdrop, the authors have sought to shed light on the historical evolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute. They have traced the legacy of a great game that was played in the region by the British and the Soviets to secure a buffer for themselves against each other’s perceived advancements in the region. In the initial chapters, the book traces a series of cartographic surveys and conventions undertaken by the British with tribal chieftains on the outer periphery or the ‘ring fence’ of their empire in the subcontinent. These surveys

for the first time led to the formation of a common frontier between India and Tibet in 1816. The surveys not being very accurate, also led to the formulation of several 'claim' lines by both sides over each other's territories.

Chapter 2 of the book dwells on the evolution of the boundary with China under the British rule, while Chapter 3 gives an overview of the India-Tibet-China relationship as Tibet continues to have a significant influence on the relations between India and China. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a detailed study on the legacy that was inherited by India on gaining her independence and major bilateral treaties signed in the 1950s. A legacy of underlying 'claim lines' thereafter culminated in the debacle of 1962 when policy-makers in India only anticipated China to 'bark' and not to 'bite' in response to India's forward policy in relation to its North-East.

In the concluding chapters, the book covers a broad sweep of various diplomatic efforts and steps taken since the 1970s to mend relations, with reciprocal visits between both countries at the highest levels. Both sides have signed a number of trade and cultural agreements. The signing of military confidence building measures has led to significantly lowered tensions between the two countries on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Although the authors advocate a *de jure* settlement around a *de facto* position coming close to a kind of package deal where both sides authenticate each other's present positions in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh (Tawang) after evolving a national consensus, in the final analysis, the book could have possibly deliberated more on other aspects between the two oldest and largest civilisations in the world. Historically, China has settled land disputes with most of its neighbours, but the little progress on the border issue with India should also be seen in the light of China's phenomenal rise and its ambitions of emerging as a superpower, where it sees India as the only power in the region which can pose some challenge to it. Hence, 'other factors' could also impinge on an early settlement of the border issue. The transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan, its continued diplomatic support to it over Kashmir and the issue of channeling the Brahmaputra waters northwards and their effects on finding a quick solution to the border dispute has not found much mention.

The book assumes significance in the present geo-political context where China is gradually emerging as a power to challenge American hegemony in the world. The increased US involvement in South Asia, with India entering into a strategic alliance with the US, is a cause for concern with China. China, in all likelihood, will continue with the present status so that it can leverage the border issue with India at the opportune moment.

Although the book fails to provide any new solution to the long-standing

border dispute, the manner in which the complete border issue with China has been presented will be useful for researchers undertaking studies on India-China relations. Besides, the nature of India's open society, electoral democracy where policies are under public scrutiny, vis-à-vis China being a state without encumbrances of public opinion, combined with China perceiving India as the only rival it has in Asia, poses yet another challenge to those who proceed towards a resolution of the border issue between the two countries. The book will also provide a ready reckoner for future diplomatic and political initiatives that take place to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the complex border issue with China. It should be compulsory reading for all officers dealing with the India-China territorial and boundary dispute.

By

Colonel **Ravi Tuteja**

Deputy Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

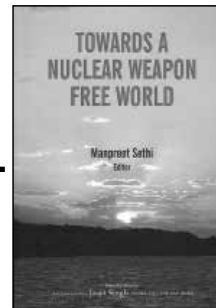
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Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World

Manpreet Sethi [Ed.]

KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi

Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi, 2009



In June 2008, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) organised a conference to discuss the possibilities for global nuclear disarmament. Held along with the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), the conference explored the opportunities for, and challenges of, a nuclear weapon free world (NWF) in the transformed security context of the new millennium. This book is a compilation of the papers presented at the conference by the world's leading experts on disarmament.

Essentially, the conference and the ensuing compendium marked the twentieth anniversary of the Action Plan introduced by the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, at the Third Special Session on Nuclear Disarmament of the UN General Assembly. As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in his inaugural speech, the Action Plan was a "comprehensive exposition" of India's approach towards global disarmament. Ten years before the nuclear explosions

of Pokhran II shook the world, it is interesting to note how the Nehruvian concepts of “atoms for peace” and “global disarmament” simultaneously constituted India’s nuclear policy. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi had referred to nuclear deterrence as the “ultimate expression of the philosophy of terrorism”. As much water has since passed below the bridge, Brazilian diplomat Sergio Duarte enquires if the Action Plan can still inspire constructive multilateral initiatives for global nuclear disarmament.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the post-Cold War euphoria around the possibility of the universal elimination of nuclear weapons has sadly demised. There are two diametrically opposing logics for this – one, that the possession of nuclear weapons by some states has led other states to covet nuclear weapon technology. As a result, the mistrust, cynicism and frustration borne out of the failure to shed the “baggage of the past” have resulted in the inability to move beyond the possession of nuclear weapons and associated status or stigma. Manpreet Sethi deals with this in the preface and then again in her paper on devaluing and delegitimising nuclear weapons.

In a contrary scenario, the post-Cold War also brought about a paradigm shift from competitive to cooperative security. As “decades of hostilities were replaced with dialogue”, the unlikely fallout was the weakening of the movement for global disarmament. As Jasjit Singh puts it, “Apparently no longer under the shadow of the bomb, the international community began to live in complacency”. Further, the move towards collective security has adopted the protective cloak of nuclear deterrence. As Ivan Safranchuk proposes in his paper, there is the belief that nuclear-armed states do not go to war with each other. However, in the future, will this comfort zone of nuclear deterrence be abandoned in order to visualise a new, non-nuclear world?

When Ban Ki Moon took over as secretary general of the United Nations, he pledged renewed support for the cause of disarmament — previously stymied efforts were to be rekindled “to invigorate disarmament and non-proliferation efforts”. This begs two critical questions: first, what are the challenges facing global disarmament and, second, who will assume the role of leadership? Both are dealt with in the course of the book. While Jasjit Singh’s paper discusses the need for a common yardstick, it also plays with the possibility of a global zero. But most importantly, it raises the issue of the “third nuclear wave” and the dangers of the new nuclear environment where the prospects of nuclear violence by non-state actors become more real each passing day.

How then must we look forward to a “nuclear weapon free world” and a

“non-violent world order to sustain it”? Hamid Ansari suggests in his paper that the answers lie in investigating the logic of realism as the current disarmament process is rendered impotent by a political context it cannot change. Ansari also points out the International Court of Justice (ICJ) dilemma: “Would a higher priority be accorded to the survival of the state if the survival of humanity were at stake?”

But even before nuclear abolition can be further debated, it flounders on two basic issues : “the desirability of achieving such a state and the feasibility of doing so”. The diplomacy of nuclear disarmament requires verification, confidence-building and regional restraint. Presuming that the scope for progress in the short-term is relatively modest, the pragmatic logic places emphasis on the possible, not the desirable. In the post-post Cold War scenario, the contemporary security calculus gives the hope for neither – George Perkovich and James Acton detail the workings of the nuclear industry which places so much emphasis on non-proliferation controls and ownership patterns that the call for disarmament doesn’t figure. Incremental as it might be, is the process of disarmament so difficult to achieve that it is eventually less desirable?

Additionally, the ambit of this discourse leaves no space for the emergence of leadership willing to assume responsibility for disarmament. While momentum for disarmament is building in the West, led by countries such as the US, UK and Norway, the emergence of Asia’s role and of coalitions across the world such as the Group of Eight, the Six-Nation Initiative and the Mayors for Peace initiative have interesting potential. Through the book, there is also mention of the Hoover Plan, initiated by George Schultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry and Sam Nunn. Chinese and Russian perspectives present in the chapters by Li Chang He and Ivan Safranchuk prefer a global calculus to a regional one, privileging Cold War, post-Cold War and post-post-Cold War scenario-building to Asian or South Asian contextualising. But other papers refer to the possibilities for universal change “if the political will from the top could coalesce with the push of public opinion from below”.

In the end, the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan is “consistent with as much as six decades of work on the inside and on the outside of the UN to advance the internationally agreed goal of general and complete disarmament”. While the papers in this book do justice to the revival of the plan, they also raise other fundamental questions pertinent to the contemporary politico-nuclear scenario. Has the argument for disarmament ceased to be relevant for the survival of the

human species? Condoleezza Rice is quoted as saying that for the first time since the fall of Westphalia, the prospect of violent conflict between great powers is ever more unthinkable. But as nations learn to compete in peace, will transnational, borderless entities increase problems of insecurity? And in doing so, will they irreparably dent the cause of nuclear disarmament?

If nations give up nuclear weapons because other nations have, what about those unaccounted nukes that are doing the rounds across the world, possibly in terrorist havens? If our bulwark against proliferation is not strong enough to save us from the danger of complete annihilation, will states increasingly resort to nuclear weapons and the time-tested benefits of deterrence? Or will global nuclear disarmament find a new methodology and survive new hurdles? These questions and many more are raised and contemplated in the book, *Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World*.

By

Ms Swapna Kona Nayudu

Associate Fellow, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.