

**Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory IV eds.,
*Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western
Regional Policy*
(London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 336.**

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Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western Regional Policy co-edited by Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory IV analyses the nature of the current strategic changes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af/Pak) region. It is a part of the Asian Security Studies series and comprises of three parts each containing a series of articles. In the context of international disengagement with Afghanistan, the book addresses and answers three questions: What has gone wrong in the past with regard to Afghanistan and what strategic adjustments are needed? Is Pakistan a strategic ally of the West, or has Pakistan become a strategic obstacle? and What are the possible future scenarios and policy options, and what does strategic re-adjustment really mean? The key topics this book addresses are the prospects of peace and democratic transition in Afghanistan; militant Islam in South Asia and how it features in Pakistan's engagement with the West; the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) withdrawal from the country and its impact on Afghanistan and the wider region; and a critical evaluation of the Western involvement in the region since October 2001.

The first part of the book analyses the situation after the US-led invasion of the country in 2001. It contains many rich firsthand details regarding what went wrong in Afghanistan after the commencement of Operation Enduring Freedom. Schroeder argues that the international community's initial engagement with Afghanistan lacked any long-term plans concerning political and physical reconstruction of the country (p.59). Simultaneously, the Western policies were mainly focused on the Afghans living in urban areas. As a result, around 75 per cent of Afghanistan's rural residents were neglected. It is no surprise, therefore, that the population in these rural areas contributed greatly to the Taliban cadres, once the insurgency in Afghanistan picked up speed in 2006.

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Furthermore, as Schroeder argues, the Western powers were also reluctant to dispatch ground forces to Afghanistan's distant areas to ensure stability and order in the aftermath of the invasion in 2001. Instead, they relied on local militia leaders and their fighters to act as legitimate security forces in these areas. This ill-thought-out strategy had the effect of dragging the international community into the tribal politics of Afghanistan. This in turn led to the favouring of certain tribal leaders, thereby setting the stage for further divisions within the country towards the end of the decade.

Another point that is raised in Schroeder's article is that the US was only able to present a formal strategy after President Obama's arrival in the White House in 2009, roughly three years after the uprisings had taken root in Afghanistan. Moreover, the deluge of troops promised by Obama's strategy never fully made an appearance on the ground, simply because not enough troops were sent to the country to run full-scale counter-insurgency operations. The surge of troops in Afghanistan, therefore, was essentially a story of 'too little and too late.' In the chapter "Prospects for transition in Afghanistan," Cordesman further highlights the lack of lucidity in America's post-invasion plan to stabilise the country. He argues that the new constitution of the country, though conscripted by Afghans, was heavily influenced by a number of Western governments (p. 103). There was an increasing sense of bitterness among the Afghans towards the central government. The constitution also bolstered corruption: whilst the international community's attention shifted to the central government at large, a small number of the elite members of the Afghan central government machinery became ever richer, leaving very little for their constituents, government departments, and other areas of the country. The author is of the view that if the Western approach towards Afghanistan had been better planned from the start, the after-effects of the intervention in the country would have been different in 2014.

The second part of the book analyses Pakistan's role and involvement in the Afghan war. Brasher and Ganguly in the chapter "Militant Islam in South Asia: past trajectories and present implications," try to elaborate spread of militant Islam in the region. In chapter titled 'U.S.-Pakistan Relations: ten years after 9/11,' Fair accuses Pakistan for all the ills and prevalent instability in the region. Here the authors fail to

understand the crucial role and geo-strategic position of Pakistan vis-a-vis regional stability and particularly in fighting militancy in the region of South Asia.

The third section examines the situation from a wider regional perspective. It states that, even though there has been much discussion of the new 'great game' in the region, there is little likelihood that other regional great powers, such as Russia and China, would be very interested in a post-2014 Afghanistan. However, it is argued that India and Pakistan are likely to be heavily involved in the country as a cover to settle their decades-old rivalries with each other. Ultimately, the authors of this section argue, responsibility will fall on the Europeans and Americans to deal with the aftermath of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. A successful resolution to some of the problems requires three components: an internal reconciliation process; a regional commitment and partnership to have a neutral and stable Afghanistan; and a firm pledge from the country's global partners to not abandon the country as they did in the 1990s. In this section, the authors underestimate the stakes and interests of China and Russia in Afghanistan given its geo-strategic location vis-a-vis maintaining linkages to the Central Asian states and for implementation and success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In his chapter, "internal and Regional Preconditions and Assumptions for Peace in Afghanistan," Tajbakhsh has pointed out the flaws in the process of integration of Taliban in the political process by the Western powers. He is of the view that the US did not realise the need for internal reconciliation between Taliban and the central Afghan government before they are accepted by the rest of the Afghan political community as a legitimate political actor.

The Afghan conflict is not about collective national identity but rather, as emphasised by Dobbins in the chapter, "Launching an Afghan Peace Process that the real struggle is over power sharing (p. 149).

Overall, the major contribution of the book is in highlighting how little outsiders actually know about this region. One key lesson from the book is that, in order to deal with the challenges relating to Afghanistan, it is impertinent to know the countries in the region and to view each

country in an objective manner. An inability to face and challenge these discrepancies has resulted in short-sighted policies that offer an ad-hoc solutions to the problem and not a long-term strategy that benefits all involved, particularly the people of Afghanistan. This book is a good read in terms of knowing diverse aspects of Afghanistan conundrum.