

Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi, *The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia's Evolving Balance of Power* (Houndmills:Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 154.

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The book revolves around the theme of rise of China and the relative decline in the US power causing transition of power in international politics. It centers on the assertion that “Facing an assertive China in the Asia-Pacific, US President Barack Obama announced in late 2011 his strategy of pivoting toward the region” (vii). This policy is essentially aimed at balancing China’s growing power in the region and India is an important component of it. In the light of this assumption the book examines India’s foreign policy responses when faced with a changing balance of power in the region. It also looks at how India perceives China’s growing military and economic power as a strategic challenge. The book argues that rather than just endorsing the pivot, Indian foreign policy has shown signs of pursuing a three-pronged hedging strategy i.e. developing a close relationship with the US, trying to stabilize relations with China, and forging a more localized form of balancing by increasing its defense partnerships with other regional powers.

Chapter one tries to make a case that China’s rise is not benign but a threat to its neighbours and global powers like the US. The book argues that China’s peaceful rise is shifting towards an assertive revisionism that has evoked distrust in Asia and around the world. It further argues that since 2009 China is pursuing its territorial interests in East China Sea, South China Sea and along the Himalayan border with India. It sees China’s massive military modernization as an attempt at developing asymmetric offensive capabilities to counter US intervention in the region while simultaneously exerting control over its smaller neighbors. The authors argue that this has stoked an arms race across Asia. The US on the other hand, refuses to give up its influence and power in the region.

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The second and third chapter focus on the evolving trajectory of India's relations with the US in the context of pivot to Asia policy. It discusses the US expectations of India to play a central role as a balancer against China. It provides insights into the foreign policy debate within India which remains divided among those who argue against India's active involvement in the pivot strategy and others who see pivot as a strategic opportunity for New Delhi to build a closer strategic partnership with Washington. The authors characterize Indian foreign policy response to pivot under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government as "punctuated reluctance" while the Modi government's response as a more enthusiastic supporter of the US presence in the region. The book provides useful insights into domestic dynamics that feeds into India's foreign policy. It argues that the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has unveiled a more assertive and proactive hedging strategy whereby it government continues to invest in normalizing relations with China but not at the expense of its strategic partnership with the US and like-minded regional states. The book argues that the UPA government was practicing defensive hedging. The chapter also ponders on the decreasing influence of the US vis a vis Pakistan and the growing Pak-China alignment which the authors see as a challenge and cause for concern.

Chapter four looks at India-China relations and characterizes them as a "protracted contest" that has been sharpened by China's rise. Arguing that China is increasingly encroaching upon India's national interests, the authors point towards the strategic imperative to balance China. The chapter also looks at the Pakistan-China "axis" and terms it encirclement from the north combined with maritime encirclement and expresses concern over the changing balance of power in the Indian ocean in favor of China. China's growing defence capability is also a matter of concern for India. The chapter also looks at different views within India regarding China. There have been few schools of thought in the Indian policy circles that do not look at China antagonistically. Some have argued against being part of the anti-China containment ring and are in favour of internal balancing. However, the authors have argued that India is benefitting from the US led security order and China's rise is a threat for India. They point towards that limits to balancing China internally and argue that external balancing may be India's best option. In this

context, the pivot is an excellent opportunity for India and the authors suggest that India should make the best of the opportunity.

The subsequent chapters explicate India's local balancing strategies. The book provides an in-depth account of the emerging strategic partnership with Japan and India arguing that China's rise and doubts about America's commitment and staying power in the region has brought Tokyo and New Delhi closer. The authors note that India and Japan are formulating a triple hedge against the power rebalancing in Asia: by increasing their defense partnership, pursuing economic engagement against over-dependence on China's economy, and creating a multilateral hedge against China's increasing influence in international and regional institutions. The book sees India's engagement with other major Asian countries as an attempt to build a web of balancing relationships against future uncertainty in Chinese intentions. This includes India's growing defense partnerships with Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and South Korea.

The authors conclude that the US pivot to Asia strategy represents a significant opportunity for India. The chapter's a few recommendations for India include the need to engage the US more enthusiastically, the need for India to set aside over-optimistic assumptions about its relationship with China and act to build its economic and military power. The authors also urge India to consolidate defence and security ties with other regional states.

While the book provides many useful insights into the dynamics of India's foreign policy, there are many flaws as far as the assessment of China's rise are concerned. In the last decade or so, there has been a burgeoning Western literature on China's rise and how that is a threat to the West and especially the US. The book seems to be following and promoting the same line of thinking. It does not truly engage with the question whether China is a revisionist or a status quo power. While China has emerged as a major economic power, it has not challenged any regional or global powers militarily. It is more of a status quo power rather than a challenger of status quo. Therefore, China's rise can be characterized as defensive realism rather than offensive realism. This means that rather than being the strongest power in an anarchic world system, China just strives to defend its position in the system.

Book Review (Online)

The book provides insights into the internal dynamics of India's foreign policy choices which is useful for scholars, students, academics alike. While the book very much tows the official India line vis a vis China and transitioning balance of power in Asia, it is useful since it provides insights on a purely Indian point of view. Also, the assertion that India is pursuing a three-pronged strategy to manage the emerging strategic transition, is very insightful. Overall, the book is an interesting read and provides useful information on India's China policy as well as the dynamics of its policies in Asia.