



INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS: COOPERATION OR CONFRONTATION?



Edited by Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik



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India Study Centre
Institute of Strategic Studies
Islamabad



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Dedicated to the Peace and Prosperity of South Asia

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Foreword

For over seventy years since its independence in 1947, India has remained entangled in conflictual relationship with most of its neighbours. From the illegal occupation, and later annexation, of Jammu and Kashmir and the economic blockades of Nepal, to border and water issues with Bangladesh and blatant interference in Sri Lanka, India has had difficulties in forming peaceful relationships with its neighbours in South Asia. Even with China, with which it has fought a war in 1962, conflict resurfaced in Ladakh region recently. India has also completely overwhelmed the sovereignty of Bhutan. Cumulatively, India seems to have developed a pattern of conflictual relations with all its neighbours.

A number of questions arise. Are India's aggressive designs an attempt to establish its hegemony in the region? Does India want to engage with its neighbours only on its own terms? Could India have chosen a different path, the path of cooperation rather than confrontation? This book seeks to find answers to these questions. Various chapters of the book explore whether India's relations with its neighbours are destined to remain confrontational or whether regional cooperation can become India's preferred choice to deal with its neighbours.

There is a disturbing trend shaping up in today's India. The growing wave of Hindu nationalism is making India head towards an uncertain future. Internally, the country is fast moving away from its avowed objectives of being a pluralistic and secular country. It is firmly on track to create an ideological state that would recognize only the right of Hindus to live in India. This emanates from the philosophy of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which provides the inspirational guidance for the BJP government of Prime Minister Modi. In many ways, the Hindutva philosophy of the RSS is a form of extreme xenophobia, that has little to no space for non-Hindu minorities. India could well face severe commotions and disturbances if it continues on the path of creating a Hindu Rashtra to the detriment of all its minorities.

The external prong of this approach is that the Indian government seems to be asserting its hegemony in the region and treat South Asia as its area of influence. The neighbours of India, especially

Pakistan, believe in sovereign equality and are not prepared to take dictation. This pitches India in a confrontational mode with its neighbours. Will India change its course? Perhaps it might. After all, the entire Asian continent has embarked upon the path of development through connectivity. China's BRI is connecting countries far and wide. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor, too, is opening up north-south connectivity, promising new vistas of cooperation. Should India move towards the path of cooperation, the entire neighbourhood could benefit from this shift in Indian approach. The critical question is whether India will choose the path of cooperation or whether it would remain convinced on asserting its hegemonic influence viz its neighbours.

The situation has further become complicated after the onset of major power competition between the United States and China. The US has chosen India as its preferred partner to contain the rise of China. The US tilt towards India has further emboldened the Modi regime to take a heavy-handed approach in the neighbourhood. For instance, instead of working with Pakistan to resolve the longstanding Kashmir dispute, it went ahead to annex the disputed territory, and is currently engaged in changing its demography. In the process, Kashmiris have been subjected to untold brutalities and human rights violations, which have attracted criticism from around the world.

A yet more dangerous trend that has lately become visible is Indian shifting doctrines towards preemptive strikes, like the one it carried out in February 2019. Pakistan responded by bringing down the intruding aircraft, but sent a strong signal of restraint and responsibility by releasing the captured pilot. To engage in such provocative conventional confrontation with a nuclear armed state is high risk politics. Likewise, India is confronting two nuclear armed states, China and Pakistan, in conventional skirmishes, which is highly irresponsible.

The need of the hour is for India to take positive and definitive steps to promote peace and cooperation in the region. The region of South Asia can become a bastion of peace if the biggest state of the region, India, chooses to engage its neighbours in a spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit. This region is suffering from poverty and under-development. India can take a lead in

channeling its cooperation with its neighbours in the direction of regional economic integration and peaceful coexistence. It would further help if India shows willingness and flexibility to resolve the unsettled disputes with its neighbours. The SAARC should also be allowed or enabled to play its role for the common good of the region. Only time will tell whether India chooses cooperation or confrontation in its relations with its neighbours.

The India Study Centre at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad has taken a lead in publishing an all-encompassing book on this important subject to understand the regional dynamics arising out of Indian behaviour viz its neighbours. The objective is to provide the readers with impartial and objective analyses so that they could draw their inferences. I hope the book will be of interest to the wider readership across the globe.

Let me commend the worthy authors at home and abroad for their scholarly work, and adding quality literature to the existing body of knowledge on this subject.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of team of the India Study Centre, led by Dr. Saif Malik.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry
Director General
Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad
August, 2021

Preface

“Know thy enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated.” This famous quote of great Chinese philosopher and strategist Sun Tzu has great relevance for Pakistan as well as other South Asian countries viz-à-viz their relations with India. Since its independence in 1947, India has adopted an aggressive policy towards all its neighbours. With Pakistan, India has fought three full scale wars, whereas, other smaller countries of the region have always been treated as India’s colonies.

Despite that, today’s India is very much different from what it used be just few years ago or what the founding fathers of Indian Republic wished it to be. Today, India is driven by Hindutva ideology which not only dismisses its own minorities as outsiders but also seek to realize the long-cherished dream of “Akhand Bharat.” While the dream of Akhand Bharat may remain a dream, but in the effort to realize it India has not only been openly challenging the sovereignty of all its neighbours but has also compromised the security and stability of the region.

Be it the economic blockade of Nepal, interference in the internal matters of Sri Lanka in garb of peacekeeping force or belligerence towards Pakistan, India has been acting as a bully in the region. On top of that, since 2014, with the rise of a right-wing government, India’s own internal policies have also been a source of great concern for regional countries. The treatment being meted out to minorities, particularly Muslims, the exercise of controversial and discriminatory National Register of Citizens in Assam and introduction of Citizenship Amendment Act, all have the potential to destabilize the region politically and economically. Worst, the plight of the people of illegally Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir is yet another story of Indian brutality towards people whose only crime is to demand their right to self-determination.

Hence, it is important for Pakistan as well as other smaller South Asian countries to understand the current trends in India’s internal policies as well as its policies towards its neighbourhood. It was indeed this need that led the Institute of Strategic Studies to focus on different facets of contemporary India.

The book exclusively focuses on the Hindutva philosophy and how it is affecting the Indian society as well as the region. Within India, this extremist ideology is manifesting itself in daylight lynchings, killings, and forceful conversion to Hinduism of the minorities. Whereas, beyond India, driven by expansionist designs, India is increasingly adopting a very hostile posture towards its neighbours. Be it Nepal, Sri Lanka or India's otherwise close ally Bangladesh, India is having troubles with all its neighbours. Needless to say, that with Pakistan, the relationship has seen a sharp decline since 2014 when Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power and this relationship further deteriorated following the suicide attack in Pulwama in February 2019 by an indigenous Kashmiri youth. Since Pakistan strongly suspects Indian intentions of carrying out false flag operations and put the blame on Pakistan for its own nefarious designs, the book also deeply looks into this possibility and how Pakistan can respond to any such Indian misadventure in future.

Any discussion on the peace and security of the region will be incomplete if the issue of Kashmir is not pondered upon. Termed as the nuclear flash point in South Asia and the reason behind two full scale wars, the Kashmir issue is the main bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The book, therefore, devotes a chapter on Illegally Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) focusing primarily on the aftermath of August 5, 2019 particularly, the gross human rights violations of the Kashmiri people.

Beyond the South Asian countries, this book also deals with the factors that pushed the Chinese forces to secure the Ladakh region in response to the Indian aggression and hegemonic designs. The paper concludes that although this is not a routine face to face conflict, it will however, not gear up to full-scale war.

A chapter in the book is also dedicated to trace the evolution of the concept of Indo-Pacific and assesses its impact for the region of South Asia. Since, the Indo-Pacific concept contains very few new ideas on how to deal with the rise of China, this chapter maintains that the term itself does not present a revised regional order. Analysing the strategic implications of Indo-Pacific for South Asia, this chapter further explains that this concept could be seen as a harbinger of security dilemma for the region.

With its vast canvas of issues of peace and security of the region, it is hoped that the book will provide necessary insights to the policy makers of not only in Pakistan but also other smaller South Asian countries to formulize an appropriate response to the growing belligerence of India.

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South Asia unfortunately is one of the least integrated regions in the world. At the same time, it is also one of the least peaceful regions as it has seen full scale wars, near war situations, internal conflicts, insurgencies, and terrorism. The mistrust that exists between member states has never allowed the regional countries to take advantage of their full potential and improve the living conditions of masses. The main reason for the mistrust among the regional states is the hegemonic policies pursued by India particularly since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. India being the largest country of the region shares borders with almost all the South Asian countries and thus, has disputes with almost all regional countries. Be it the illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and Siachen Glacier, economic blockade of Nepal or supporting insurgency in Sri Lanka, India has never hesitated from taking steps that have the potential to destabilise the region and compromise its peace and security.

The India Study Centre (ISC), based at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, is dedicated to conduct research and analytical studies on multi-dimensional aspects of India, and promote policy discourse on India's foreign, security and socio-economic policies and implications for Pakistan and the region as well as India-Pakistan relations. The ISC organises policy discourse on strategies pursued by India through conferences, seminars/webinars, panel discussion and round tables to develop a better understanding of the issues of concern. The Centre aims to highlight the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in its true perspective and urge the world to play its due role in ensuring the human rights of the people of the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) along with resolution of the issue as per the UN resolutions.

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