

Pakistan's Security and the India-US Strategic Partnership: Nuclear Politics and Security Competition

Prof. Dr. Syed Shahid Hussain Bukhari (London/New York: Routledge, 2021, 254 pages)

Reviewed by Ahyousha Khan¹

The book is described by the author as an academic contribution that “highlights the imperative for a comprehensive inquiry of the subject with reference to Pakistan’s security concerns” (p.19). Thus, this book is a retrospective analysis of India-US strategic relations and provides most detailed description and assessment of the evolutionary process. The book assumes a greater value as it elaborates on the implications of this evolving strategic partnership on Pakistan. It further explores the extent to which this partnership can affect the balance of power between Pakistan and India. The evolving India-US strategic partnership is seen as carrying severe consequences on regional peace and stability as it is evidently tilting the pendulum in India’s favor. This timely study was a necessary initiative because there is a dearth of a Pakistani perspective on India-US strategic partnership and the available literature does not explain the whole “gamut” in one compact study.

The book comprises of ten chapters including introduction and conclusion. In terms of themes and context, the first three chapters of the book are based on the explanation of the topic, theoretical framework and historical development of India-US relations. Next three chapters (from chapter 4 to 6) discuss in great detail about the tenants and dynamics of their strategic relations including the discussion on highly controversial India-US nuclear deal and its

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implications on non-proliferation regime. There is also a chronological explanation of all the defence agreements and cooperative measures between India and the US. In doing so, the author addresses fundamental questions of why both countries chose to develop these agreements and what are the prospective advantages both actors want to attain from this partnership and cooperation? Chapter 7, 8 and 9 of the book, delve deeper into the implications of this partnership for Pakistan's security. Pakistan's threat landscape vis-à-vis its South Asian nuclear rival has been analysed. Furthermore, how the deal will contribute to changing Pakistan's security calculus by shifting the strategic equilibrium has also been discussed in this book.

The author provides rich literature review on the subject and argues that "in sum literature survey suggests that large number of studies related to India-US strategic partnership have concentrated on exploring ways and means of strengthening and enhancing the relationship" he further adds that "realities on ground in Pakistan have been ignored and none of the studies have tried to address comprehensively the implication of the strategic partnership for Pakistan" (p.19).

To analyze India-US strategic partnership and its consequences, this book primarily relies on the theory of the "Balance of Power (BoP)" and deals with the concepts of alliance behavior and strategic balance. Additionally, the author chooses the theory of "Power Transition" to analyze the impact of strategic partnership.

While formulating the theoretical framework, the author argues that Pakistan has been employing various techniques to balance India in the region, while India is trying to create a hierarchal system (p.38). Moreover, the author, Dr. Bukhari states that it is not actually the 'balance of power' or 'power transition' theory that are causing the conflicting situation, it is in fact the 'element of change' that is responsible (p.42). As both concepts (balance of power and power

transition) are insufficient to explain the phenomenon, the author has suggested a new concept of “virtual balancing,” where he argues that “balance is both a rational and stable state of being” (p.44). The book delves deeper into the history of the India-US relationship and categorizes the early phase as a time of “strategic estrangement.” However, the end of Cold War and 9/11 changed the interests of both states. Author states that a dynamic change in the relations occurred when the US President Bill Clinton visited India and later the ties were further strengthened when President Bush and later on President Obama visited India. These visits by the head of state and growing partnership explain that in its post 9/11 policy for the 21st century, the US considers India as an important actor that can support its interests in the region. Author is of the view that the US assistance to India however, will not be fruitful in the longer run keeping in view the history of Indian foreign policy. It is more likely that India will not fulfill the US expectations while putting its own interests at stake. The book also analyzes the measures taken by the US to facilitate India in its nuclear program; where the former changed its domestic laws to strike a nuclear deal with India. On page 65, the author quotes from the report of House of Representatives, which states that “that legislation was passed by the US House of Representatives on July 26, 2006 ..., providing discriminatory waiver to India from instrumental clauses of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, which weakens the non-proliferation laws.”

After analyzing the whole debate on nuclear cooperation with India, the author states that “the discussion on the bill was on the importance of nuclear cooperation than a debate about forging closer ties with India as a future Asian power” (p.66). Author does not just rely on the modern history of Indo-US nuclear cooperation but goes way back into history when first agreement of nuclear cooperation between both countries was signed and India was subsequently

provided with Tarapur Reactor. Later on, material from the same reactor was used by India to conduct the “so-called PNE of 1974.”

Coming to a more recent past, Dr. Bukhari provides a detailed description and dissection of the “123 Agreement.” He criticizes the 123 Agreement by stating that “the scope of the agreement is too wide such that it creates too many opportunities for India for the advancement of its nuclear program” (p.69). Author states many reasons as possible rationale behind the US support to India. These reasons include India’s potential as a “counterweigh against China and Pakistan,” regional hegemony, market for the US exports etc. The recently adopted policy of alignment with global powers by India is termed as “poly-alignment” by the author as opposed to the previously adopted policy of “non-alignment.” India stands to gain more from this partnership in the absence of any restrictions. There is defence cooperation to acquire advanced technologies, and a tacit recognition about India as a nuclear weapon state. Moreover, through this partnership India has managed to strike an exceptional deal with the IAEA where an uninterrupted fuel supply ensures energy security. It has also access to the space technology and is continuously strengthening its maritime power.

While pointing out the loopholes in the Indo-US nuclear agreements, Dr. Bukhari highlights that the nuclear agreement does not even ensure that the technology transferred will not be used for military purposes. He elaborates on the impacts of deal on nuclear non-proliferation in chapter 5 stating “despite decades-long efforts to curtail nuclear proliferation, NPT seems to fall prey to the realist paradigm where states are free from any kind of moral or even legal obligations to safeguard their interests” (p.95). The book also explains Article I and II of the NPT and deliberates on how Indo-US nuclear deal is a direct violation of these two articles. It maintains that the US is enabling India to enhance its nuclear weapons stockpiles through this

deal. Author expressed his frustration regarding IAEA protocol that was designed to widen the scope and jurisdiction of the IAEA safeguards. But in case of India, it limits the scope of protocols to the extent that their efficacy equals to nil. In the author's word "India specific IAEA safeguards are designed only to get so-called legitimacy for the cooperation" (p.99). Similarly, in case of NSG, the waiver granted to India violated the legal as well as ethical morale of non-proliferation advocates. It allowed India to have exemption from the IAEA's full-scope safeguards, exemption from alternate verification measures, exemption from restitution of transferred items, lifetime exceptional authorization for transfer of trigger list items and exemptions from legal frameworks.

The book convincingly establishes that nuclear non-proliferation concerns in a realist world are of contemporary nature and used by major powers just to achieve their foreign policy goals. History and development of India-US defence cooperation is explained in chapter 6 that provides a detailed account of defence agreements between them. The creation of Pakistan and India and their bilateral relations is used as a prism by the author to explain the reasons behind their volatile ties. The chapter mentions major wars, crises, and disputes; and how nuclear deterrence has played its role in maintaining the strategic stability. Author states that until 2019, US would be prominent in "brokering a peaceful end of the dispute" (p.168). However, in 2019 crisis due to its alliance with India, the US lost its neutrality and was engaged in "recessed diplomacy" (p.168). Similarly in 2019 crisis, the US was involved in diplomacy "which was intended to pressure Pakistan, while at the same time provide latitude to India to undertake punitive measures" (p.168). In such a situation, the role of nuclear weapons has become more difficult as now these weapons are contributing to increasing the risks while making nuclear South Asia more dangerous.

Analysis of the India-Pakistan conventional and military capabilities provides awareness about the significant role of nuclear weapons in their bilateral ties. Author states that due to massive military modernization in India, Pakistan's dependence on "nuclear use option" has increased in the recent years. Owing to the ongoing strategic partnership with the US, India will have access to more sophisticated weaponry which would increase the gap in "war fighting" capabilities of both states. Author quotes Michael Krepon in his book on the issue of growing conventional asymmetries, where Krepon states that "the growing conventional capabilities in India could increase nuclear risks in South Asia" (p.202).

A reference to this fact is also provided in the Introduction chapter stating that every time India was about to receive preferential treatment from the US, Pakistan's apex nuclear decision-making body National Command Authority (NCA) expressed reservation at national and international level. Due to this extraordinary partnership with the US, India's strategic thinking has seen a major shift. Now, Indian decision makers are becoming more and more offensive towards Pakistan. The book raises a serious alarm about India's propensity to materializing certain actions under the nuclear overhang, suffering from a "false sense of superiority" (p.207).

In the conclusion chapter, the author is of the view that there are neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies in inter-state relations. The current trend in international politics suggests that the India-US relations will improve day by day because of "India's realist assessment in the US's strategic calculations ranging from regional influence to global politics" (p.219). As far as Pakistan is concerned, it cannot escape from the strategic challenges that are knocking at its doors. Author believes that Pakistan can tackle this issue by creating a "coherent strategy" (p.222). Dr. Bukhari explicitly criticizes the US for its role in creating instability in the region and states that the US policy

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is based on “short-sightedness.” He prompts that the US needs to understand that India will not be a successful hedge against China because even in 21st century the US is relying on a Cold war mentality of the alliance formation and military pacts, whereas its adversary is relying on the “soft power.” He suggests that for South Asia, the US needs to move from realist school and needs to develop “a conjecture of realism, liberalism and constructivism (realibcon) in the strategic decision-making process” (p.225).