

## Book Reviews

ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH, *Power & Diplomacy – India's Foreign Policies During the Cold War* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 398 pp., ₹995.00, ISBN-13: 9780199489640.

For some years now, it has become customary to speak of an 'archival turn' in studies of the evolution of Indian foreign policy. The progressive declassification of records by the Ministry of External Affairs and the greater availability of private papers in different depositories in India has also enabled a balance to be struck with the traditional dominance of western source material. The period from the late 1940s till the mid-1970s thus has become a fertile field for scholars of international relations focusing on India. The empirical depth imparted by archival research has enabled a closer examination of the actual framing and conduct of policy and moving away from the grand narrative perspectives of non-alignment. In brief, the archives have now, somewhat belatedly, of course, emerged in India, as a useful antidote to lazy theorising or according greater weight without adequate analysis to normative factors in the construction and implementation of external policy in India.

Zorawar Daulet Singh's new book *Power and Diplomacy* is a good example of this archival turn. The author has attempted a comparative analysis of foreign policy under Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's and done so by delving deeply into the archival record—both declassified documents of the Ministry of External Affairs as also private papers of a range of actors beginning of course with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself. The meat of the book lies in studying three significant regional crisis situations under each prime minister. What this enables the author to do is to probe deeply into what are otherwise regarded as fundamental continuities in Indian foreign policy and to look closely under the narrative cloak of non-alignment. His hypotheses, briefly summarised, is that between the 1950s and the 1970s there were dramatic shifts in Indian strategic thought and behaviour which the larger envelope of non-alignment conceals and obscures.

In the 1950s, India under Nehru's leadership consciously sought to act as an extra-regional peacemaker. This peacemaking role, in turn, was derived from 'an alternative

regional philosophy of interstate relations where security dilemmas could be muted in both Asia and India's immediate vicinity'. Nehru's role conception, in Singh's analysis, had three pillars—'Asia-centric internationalism, rejection of traditional balance of power imagery of international life and the expression of an alternative concept of security called the peace area'. Singh argues this role had 'an inner logic and coherence' and that those who have pointed to continuities between Nehru's and the British Raj's geopolitical views have overstated the case.

Creating and expanding the 'peace area' in Asia was central to India under Nehru in the 1950s and the book seeks to illustrate this through an empirical investigation of what the archival record reveals of actual conception and articulation of foreign policy during (i) the East Bengal crisis of 1950 between India and Pakistan that culminated in the Nehru Liaquat pact on minorities, (ii) the Indo-China or Vietnam crisis of 1954 and (iii) an escalation in 1954–1955 in the Taiwan Straits in the Western Pacific which potentially could have led to a US–China clash. Each of these situations, in Singh's narrative, offered multiple options for policies to be embarked upon. The one finally chosen showed an inclination for eschewing traditional geopolitics and preference for 'an alternative doctrine—the area of peace concept—to confront these new security threats and challenges in Asia'. Underlying this preference was the belief that India's security was linked inextricably to Asia and stabilising the latter was therefore what constituted national interest.

This worldview dramatically changes within a decade. From the mid-1960s, with Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, there was the crystallisation of a different vision. India's role had now 'dramatically contracted to that of a largely sub-continental security seeker'. By far the most innovative parts of Singh's analysis lie in giving the reasons for this shift. The change was not simply one of geopolitical circumstance—that is, that the world had changed or Indian capacities had evolved and were greater. Nor was it simply the questions of an idealistic Nehruvian perspective maturing into a more hard-nosed appreciation of the world and regional affairs. Both these elements are present but in Singh's telling Indira Gandhi's security seeker role conception rested on three core beliefs:

First, a definition of India's interests in more narrow terms, and a regional image centered on the subcontinent rather than on an extended Asian space that lay at the heart of Nehru's image. Second, a divisible conception of security and an inclination to leverage the balance of power for geopolitical advantage rather than reform Asia's 'interaction culture' as per Nehru's role conception. Third, an inclination to employ coercive means to solve disputes or to pursue geopolitical ends in South Asia rather than a preference for accommodation and strategic restraint embodied in Nehru's worldview.

So this is very much of a contrasting mindset and world view and illustrating it is India's response to three regional situations—(a) to the escalation by the USA in the

Vietnam War of 1965–1966, (b) the East Pakistan crisis of 1971 and (c) the accession of Sikkim over the first half of the 1970s. As in the three, Nehru era situations the treatment here is archival and source-based and brings out the conflicted and difficult process of decision-making that is often lost in more general treatments.

The value of the historical analysis in each of the six situations that comprise the book is that it underlines what Singh describes as one of his key ideas:

India's foreign policy has always been about choices rather than just structural necessity. Within the broad and amorphous confines of non-alignment, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's responses to regional crises were distinct agency-level responses to a tumultuous international environment. But their decisions were not the only options available to India. Policy was often contested, sometimes fiercely, from within India's foreign policy apparatus. Close attention to the battle of ideas in the decision-making process brings to the surface the competing worldviews that animated deliberations during each crisis.

Thus, while the key role of the leaders is obviously present and well known, this battle of ideas is vividly played out only in the archival record. *Power and Diplomacy* therefore also foregrounds what is often missed in scholarship around Indian statecraft and foreign policy: self-image, belief systems and finally a sense of India and its surrounding environment amongst those making or changing policy. In doing so, Singh seeks to restore 'agency' to Indian decision-making and, in the process of doing so, has given us a very fine work.

Finally, it must be said that Singh's overall treatment and arguments are convincing and nuanced. He concedes the persistence of the older ideas well into later phases of Indian history and thus avoids making compartments of strategic culture too watertight. Thus, he points to the Gujral 'doctrine' of the 1990s and its link with Nehruvian beliefs of an accommodative and conflict-avoidance approach.

Nitpicking in a review is a must and one remains therefore tempted to probe deeper into the two contrasting intellectual frames developed for the tenures of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Kashmir from the inception, and Goa in 1961, bookend a very large part of Nehru's tenure as Prime Minister. Singh does not go into Goa in any detail except to say that it was 'a reluctant last resort'. Similarly, Kashmir in 1947–1948 (and not just the military operation), possibly barring the reference to the UNSC, and in fact over the 1950s, would provide a different perspective on Nehru's dealing with Pakistan than that of accommodation that is both implicit and explicit in the book. For Indira Gandhi, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in end-1979—coinciding largely with the beginning of her second tenure as Prime Minister—would also have been instructive to test Singh's overall thesis. Much is often made of Indira Gandhi's reluctance to criticise the Soviet invasion in contrast to the predecessor non-Congress Government. The fact, however, is also that as Prime Minister she did not use the Soviet presence in Afghanistan to put pressure on Pakistan. The India-Soviet pincer

the Pakistan expected and feared so much was never there. On the contrary, she went out of the way to seek to reassure General Zia that Pakistan's eastern borders would not be a cause of concern. It is a different matter that the Pakistanis were not convinced. Memories of 1971 were too fresh. But this was behaviour not entirely consistent with the 'advantageous realpolitik' approach outlined by Singh.

These caveats notwithstanding, a book has to be judged by what it has rather than what it could or should have had. Zorawar Daulet Singh is therefore to be congratulated for what will be a lasting scholarly contribution to the study of Indian foreign policy.

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LEO T. S. CHING, *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 176, US\$23.95, ISBN: 9781478003359 (e-book).

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Leo Ching's book *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Post-Colonial East Asia* is a timely and relevant addition to the discussions surrounding the recent developments in Northeast Asia—China, Japan and South Korea, in particular. For one thing, the 2015 Japan–South Korea accord over the comfort women issue, described in the book as 'an attempt at conditional reconciliation', continues to draw controversy after failing to end the festering dispute, whether or not readers agree with the author's argument that 'the nation-state cannot be counted on as the space for unconditional reconciliation'.

The 18-page introduction may seem rather lengthy for a 163-page book, but it serves as a necessary explanation of the author's background, and why he has decided to write about the sensitive issue of the legacies of Japan's past colonialism. Ching, Associate Professor of Japanese and East Asian Cultural Studies at Duke University, lets us know that he is a Chinese American whose mother lives in Japan with his Japanese stepfather. He also demonstrates a deep understanding of how historical issues have affected (or not affected very much) Japan's postcolonial ties with Korea and Taiwan. Thus, he establishes his voice as one that is based on a unique background and an invested interest as he deals with the complex web of histories covering the subregion of Northeast Asia, summarised by himself in this sentence: 'The book is organized around the theme of anti-Japanism (and pro-Japanism) in three East Asian spaces: mainland China, South Korea, and Taiwan, with an emphasis on cultural representations, with "postcoloniality" and "sentimentality" as unifying concepts'.

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