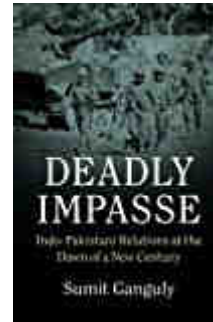


Sumit Ganguly. *Deadly Impasse: Indo-Pakistani Relations at the Dawn of a New Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xi + 176 pp. \$99.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-76361-5; \$26.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-12568-0.



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Indo-Pakistan Relations

In the field of South Asian studies, a new work by Sumit Ganguly is always welcome. A scholar with vast experience of the history, politics, and impact of the decades long Indo-Pakistani rivalry, few thinkers are as well equipped to assess and explore the continued salience and influence of that rivalry into the the twenty-first century.

Deadly Impasse: Indo-Pakistani Relations at the Dawn of a New Century takes a perceptive look at Indo-Pakistani relations from 1999 to 2009, a decade that saw recurrent crises, attempted peace negotiations, and outbreaks of seemingly state-approved terrorism. Ganguly takes as his central issue the disputed lands of Muslim-majority Kashmir, a point of contention between the two states ever since the 1947 Partition. The volume itself is slim, but crisp, clear, and succinctly argued. Across seven chapters, Ganguly sets out his case that thinking of Indo-Pakistani tension strictly in terms of security is to misunderstand the nature of this long-standing and seemingly intractable confrontation.

The study centers around the applicability—or

otherwise—of the concept of the security dilemma to continued Indo-Pakistani tension. At the outset, Ganguly poses the deceptively simple question: does the security dilemma adequately explain the nature and persistence of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute into the twenty-first century? The dilemma suggests that the simple act of a state attempting to increase its security—for example through the purchase of advanced arms—actually makes it less secure, as its rivals perceive this as an aggressive act and in turn embark upon their own attempts to increase their security.

In the simplest terms, the author's argument is that no, the security dilemma does not adequately explain continued Indo-Pakistani tension, especially regarding the hot-button issue of Kashmir. Drawing on Charles Glaser's notion of the "greedy state" that acts from non-security motives (the desire for wealth, territory, or prestige), Ganguly makes the case for the significance of Pakistan's revisionist desire to challenge the South Asian status quo established in 1947. This is in turn coupled to the power and influence of the Pakistani security/military establishment in political affairs. Indeed,

the author notes that the Pakistani military has “been long committed to a policy of unrelenting hostility towards India” (p. 54). Moreover, the desire to integrate Kashmir into Pakistan stems from irredentism on Islamabad’s part and its self-perception as the true home of the subcontinent’s Muslim population. Ganguly thus argues that these factors more convincingly explain the persistence of regional conflict.

Pakistan’s irredentism and self-perception collide with India’s own self-image as a multiethnic, multireligious state with an Islamic population equal to that of Pakistan (although, the multireligious aspect is a contentious issue more for the nationalist elements in Indian politics, who at the moment are in the ascendancy). This in turn leaves New Delhi unwilling to abandon Kashmir. It is also important to emphasize that Ganguly in no way positions India as blameless regarding the Kashmir situation. For example, New Delhi’s flawed management policies there in the 1980s and 1990s fomented an insurgency which Islamabad subsequently took advantage of.

Deadly Impasse also interrogates the role of state-sponsored terrorism and its corrosive effects on cross-border negotiations. In the wake of the Kargil War, there were several initiatives attempting to resolve a “basket” of issues, such as territorial disputes (Kashmir obviously being central here), drug trafficking, nuclear weapons, terrorism, and trade. Despite a willingness on the part of leaders such as Pakistan’s Pervez Musharraf—influenced by a constellation of issues such as a perception that US support for Pakistan was waning and worsening economic woes—and India’s Atal Behari Vajpayee to engage in dialogue, intransigence and internal divisions on both sides consistently hampered any attempts at resolving persistent Indo-Pakistani disagreements.

This was only inflamed by the actions of Pakistan-based militants carrying out attacks in India, for example, the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament and the attacks in Mumbai and New Delhi in late 2008 that had at least some connection with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Ganguly quite rightly nuances the argument here, noting that actual connections between the ISI and the attacks is limited and circumstantial. Notwithstanding who supported the attacks, these were events that India’s security establishment was manifestly unprepared to cope with. India’s demands that Pakistan take responsibility for terrorism met with resistance in Islamabad and a concomitant Pakistani unwillingness to crack down on militants basing themselves on

its side of the border. This unwillingness stemmed from the military’s support of terror tactics as a component of their asymmetric warfare against their neighbor.

Given the author’s previous important work on South Asian nuclear topics, the attention paid to this area might have been a little more expansive. Pakistan especially has a complex set of command and control procedures linked to a—perceived and possibly actual—willingness to take steps towards nuclear use in the event of a major confrontation. The reader is left wondering if more could have been said about the fundamental procedures associated with potential nuclear use on the subcontinent and how this interacts with the issues outlined in this volume.

This is not to say the nuclear topic is absent; far from it. Ganguly comments on Pakistan’s stated willingness to deploy nuclear weapons in the face of a significant Indian incursion into its territory. This low nuclear threshold for Islamabad is correctly assessed as significantly complicating any potential Indian war plans, despite New Delhi’s vast conventional military superiority.

It is also noted that in the lead-up to the Kargil War, Pakistani commanders (wrongly, as it turned out) believed Indian leaders would avoid confrontation for fear of the conflict spiraling into a nuclear exchange. The author also usefully comments on the ways in which the Indian political and military establishments attempted to formulate doctrines that would permit them to fight a conventional war “under the nuclear shadow” (p. 47). However, marginally greater attention to the regionally and globally crucial nuclear issue would have been helpful, especially for readers unfamiliar with the role played by nuclear weapons in the region.

Deadly Impasse is a welcome addition to the literature on modern South Asian relations. It goes beyond analyses that privilege security-based explanations for the ongoing tension to encompass Pakistan and India’s respective self-image, the role of political division and intransigence, the impact of domestic economic crises, and the shadow of “the bomb.” The argument is clear and founded in an impressive command of the evidence and shrewd analysis of it. Sumit Ganguly’s timely volume aids our understanding of a hugely significant and long-lasting regional confrontation that has potentially global consequences. It is to be hoped that policymakers as well as scholars pay close attention to his perceptive thoughts and recommendations on the matter.

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