

Book Reviews



China's India War – Collision Course on The Roof of The World

Bertil Lintner

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018, p 320, Rs 672.00

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All the books on the 1962 Indo-China War fall into two broad categories. In the first are the campaign or battle specific ones, authored by military officers. The second comprises scholarly books on the border dispute. However, it is felt that both categories, by and large, ignore the geopolitical and strategic contexts of the conflict. Bertil Lintner's *China's India War – Collision Course on the Roof of the World* (Oxford University Press, India, 2017) testifies to the diligence with which the author has studied, and interpreted, the Sino-Indian relationship; challenging the established wisdom on the subject.

In eight 'thought through' chapters, the author traces the origins of what he describes as "the improbable border dispute". The book under review is a gripping account from an expert and a journalist who had a long stint with the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and has studied (and travelled in) the area of study, namely, China, India, Bhutan and Myanmar, for over almost three decades. The author, as prognosis, in one of his inferences, points to the fact that a new 'Great Game' will be played out in this century against the geopolitical setting of the 'roof of the world'. "The earlier protagonists, Imperial Russia and the British Empire, will be replaced by the two Asian giants—a democratic India and communist China".

The kernel of Lintner's formulation challenges the dominant interpretation advanced by Neville Maxwell, in his book, *India's China War*. Published in 1970, Maxwell's book argued that "it was India that had provoked the war". In a reversal

of Maxwell's theory, Lintner advocates otherwise. It was China that desperately needed and initiated the war for several reasons – domestic and international, with the boundary dispute merely being an alibi.

At the time, tens of millions of people had died in a famine in China as a result of the Great Leap Forward, and there was a crisis within the Communist Party. Mao Zedong was at his least popular moment and needed to unite the Party and the country behind himself. India was a convenient enemy because the Dalai Lama had been given refuge in India in 1959. The other reason was that in the 1950s, India under Jawaharlal Nehru, had become the main voice for the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa and had facilitated the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. As per the author, at that time, the West's three-world theory included the Western Bloc, the Eastern Bloc, and the Third World (underdeveloped nations). The Chinese view of the world comprised the superpowers, the lesser powers, and the poor countries (Third World). China wanted to become the leader of the revolutionary forces in the Third World and had to dethrone India from that position.

Through his extensive scrutiny, Lintner arrives at the conclusion that “rather than India provoking China, it was the communist leadership of China that had behaved aggressively”. As two large civilisational entities that went through a century of colonial subjugation, India and China share a very complex and contested relationship, underlined by disputed borders. In addition to deliberating upon the matters pertaining to China and India, little known details about the Chinese influence in Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and India's northeast add to the texture of the book, and provide an all-encompassing context influencing the Sino-Indian equation over a wide timeline.

In an attempt to influence Bhutan and distance it from India, China has endeavoured engagement in various forms. Bhutan is China's only neighbour that doesn't have diplomatic ties with it. Relations are maintained through the boundary talks, which have been going on for more than two decades. Bhutan, that has been under Indian influence, is now asserting itself as a sovereign power. The recent Doklam issue could be viewed in this perspective. By constructing the road in Doklam, as per the author, the Chinese plan was to get Indian troops out of Bhutan's Haa valley and involve them more directly in this conflict, which would embarrass the Bhutanese. The statements from Bhutan at the time were very cautious, and many Bhutanese held the opinion that India had overreacted and wanted to show its control over Bhutan. As stated by the author, “China is on a charm offensive in Bhutan. They're sending acrobats there, circus performers,

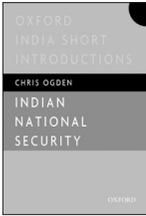
football teams, tourists, scholarships for students. Clearly, China wants to extend its influence to all its neighbours, and that includes Bhutan”.

Also, as opined by the author, the Indian Ocean is going to become the major challenge in the near future and it is unlikely that the future conflict between the two Asian powers is going to unfold in the Himalayas. These facets have been brought out in the book by a categorical description of the maritime domain as the most recent arena for competition between the two Asian powers.

Vis-à-vis the land boundary dispute, the author doubts the seriousness and sincerity of China in resolving the same. According to him, in the context of the larger picture, China doesn't care if the boundary remains unresolved. It is looking not for a solution but for a strategic advantage. And the prime conflict of interest is building up in the Indian Ocean, with lots at stake for the global powers. This is the context of an anti-China quad that is emerging, comprising India, Japan, the US and Australia.

Overall, the book is a comprehensive review of the border rivalry between India and China, with several crucial aspects under its purview, covered in different chapters. It details the history and contemporary state of the Tibet issue, unravels the Chinese connection with insurgency in India's northeast and Maoism, discusses the merger of Sikkim and the controversy surrounding it, debates the situation of Bhutan vis-à-vis India and explores the question of Myanmar and India's 'Look East Policy'. The first four chapters of the book deal with the aspects related to the war, *per se*, and the later ones are dedicated to Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and the ongoing geostrategic and political facets, crucial to an understanding of the India-China equation in a holistic manner. The wealth of detail that Bertil Lintner provides is worthwhile for those who want a more rigorous and in-depth analysis of the defining relationship of the 21st century—one that will make or mar the Asian century.

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Indian National Security

Chris Ogden

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The concept of ‘security’ has evolved over a period of time and is fluid. For each one of us, what constitutes security is different and liable to change along with the spatio-temporal context. It is for this reason that Barry Buzan labelled security as an “essentially contested concept”. Some go on to argue that it is difficult to define ‘security’ in any ‘objective’ way and that any problem can become a security issue once it has been ‘securitised’ by the policy-makers. Traditionalists argue that military force is the primary threat, and other issues, such as migration, drugs, environment and poverty, should be considered only as potential secondary causes of insecurity. In this sense, ‘security-insecurity’ can be defined “in relation to vulnerabilities – both internal and external – that threaten or have the potential to bring down or weaken state structures, both territorial and institutional, and governing regimes.”

However, when one looks at the situation in developing countries like India, the need for a broader notion of security is incontestable. Non-military issues like scarcity, unemployment, displacement, migration, underdevelopment, insurgency, drug-trafficking, small arms proliferation, communal violence, etc are at the heart of the insecurity of the developing countries; minus these problems, the emerging nations would be in a better position to focus on development. As Caroline Thomas puts it, “Security in the context of the Third World does not simply refer to the military dimension, as is often assumed in the Western discussions of the concept, but to the whole range of dimensions of a state’s existence which has been taken care of in the more developed states, especially those in the West.” In short, as Vayrynen rightly observes, “In developing countries, the notion of national security cannot be separated from the non-military threats to security.” This is mainly because the developing world is characterised by “their colonial background, the arbitrary construction of their boundaries by external powers, the lack of societal cohesion, their recent emergence into juridical statehood, and their stage of development.” To put it in layman terms, “Security, in any objective sense, measures the absence

of threats to acquired values; in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.”

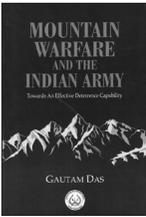
Twenty-first century India faces peculiar security challenges. Few countries have suffered so much violence, so frequently. India is considered as one of the countries worst affected by terrorism and political violence, in terms of the numbers of incidents and casualties. Threats to India’s national security arise from internal and external sources. Unfortunately, today, there is a blurring distinction between internal and external threats. Some go to the extent of arguing that “India does not face an external threat in the conventional sense” but only internal security threats from external sources. These external sources, consisting of both state and non-state actors, combined with internal breeding grounds, have made the situation more complex on the day-to-day basis. The challenge is also dealing with these complex security threats within the framework of a democratic polity devoted to respect all fundamental human freedoms and, at the same time, protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Chris Ogden’s recent book *Indian National Security* touches all the key issues pertaining to India’s national security. Written in three chapters, sandwiched by an Introduction and a Conclusion, the book provides a good outline to India’s national security. While the Introduction touches on conceptual aspects of ‘national security’, Chapter 1 looks at the origins and characteristics of the national security of India. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the internal and external dimensions of India’s security respectively. In the Conclusion, the author makes a significant observation on the changing, and continued evolution of the concept of national security, in general, and in the Indian context, in particular. Chris Ogden, a senior lecturer in Asian Security at the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, takes a comprehensive view of security: covering trade, energy, environment, critical infrastructure, food, water, international diplomacy, and disaster and humanitarian relief, apart from traditional military issues like borders, terrorism, invasion, and so on. Such multi-faceted approach and analysis is necessary to comprehend the contemporary discourse on India’s national security.

Ogden is considered as one of the authorities on national identity, security, and domestic politics in East and South Asia. He has recently written *China and India: Asia’s Emergent Great Powers* (2017), *New South Asian Security: Six Core Relations* (2015), *Indian Foreign Policy: Ambition & Transition* (2014) and *Hindu Nationalism and the Evolution of Contemporary Indian Security: Portents of Power* (2014). The short book – *Indian National Security* – is timely when

there is an increasing appetite for understanding the complexities of India in the globalised world wherein non-state actors, both violent and otherwise, are playing a dominant role in determining the future course of world politics. Given the crisp nature of the book, it will serve as basic reading not only for students and scholars who intend to do a course on India's national security, but also essential reading for every Indian policy-maker who wishes to understand the security dynamics of his country and convert that understanding into coherent and implementable policies. This does not mean that there is a dearth of scholarship on India's national security. Numerous scholars and practitioners have given a detailed treatment on various internal and external aspects of Indian security issues. However, Chris Ogden's short book stands out in putting everything in one place in a crisp manner. This is a challenging task and that too in less than 180 pages.

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Mountain Warfare and The Indian Army: Towards An Effective Deterrence Capability

Gautam Das

GB Books, New Delhi, 262 pp, Rs 1195/-

Mountain Warfare and the Indian Army: Towards an Effective Deterrence Capability by Col Gautam Das is an excellent discussion on mountain warfare in the Indian context. As is well known, India shares a major part of its hostile/ disputed borders in the mountains with unpredictable adversaries and a potential to flare up into a war at any point, reinforcing the relevance and importance of mountain warfare for the times to come.

The book examines the historical perceptions and operational methods of actual combat which have shaped Indian military thought, to provide a rationale for India's present mountain warfare practices. Col Gautam Das has skillfully reviewed and analysed a huge amount of open source literature on mountain warfare related to India, especially since 1947 onwards, and has beautifully blended this with his own rich experience, as well as those of a large number of veterans, to cull out extremely important lessons, going on to suggest deterrence capability options for India.

In Part One, the author has dwelt upon historical threat perceptions on India's mountain frontiers, military geostrategic background, basic considerations of mountain warfare, culminating with the Indian Army and mountain warfare wherein he has drawn attention to the fighting experiences of the British Indian Army in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Burma Campaign, especially the battles of Kohima and Imphal, the 1965 and 1971 Operations, Operation Meghdoot and Operation Vijay.

In Part two, the author has dwelt upon combat operations in detail, with a focus on Low Intensity Conflict Operations (LICO) and Counter-Insurgency (CI) operations in the mountains, defensive and offensive operations in the mountains on the Pir Panjal and Himalayan ranges, high altitude warfare, helicopter operations and Special Forces operations in the mountains. The author has drawn important references from the battles of 1962 (Sela, Bumla and Walong), 1965 (Hajipir) and 1971 (Uri, Poonch, Nangi Tekri, Dhuruchian and Kargil). The attack on Poonch by Pakistan's 12 Infantry Division and the attack on Dhuruchian by 14 Grenadiers (multi-directional attack) have been described

in detail to highlight lessons which are extremely important and relevant for all military planners in today's environment.

In Part Three, the focus is on logistics and human resource imperatives, maintenance of morale and aero-medical evacuation. The author highlights the importance of mules (new breed Hinney), modern concepts of logistics and specific logistics requirements for offensives in the mountains.

In Part Four, the author has dwelt in detail on the battles of Op Vijay (Pt 4812, Kahalubar, Three Pimples, Pt 5140, Pt 4875 and Tiger Hill), highlighting the success achieved in spite of the short preparation time given to most units, maintaining desired combat ratios, air evacuation of casualties and setting up of adhoc Divisional Maintenance Area (DMA), for the assaulting formations, drawing important references, and their relevance today. Attention has also been drawn to the newly raised mountain strike corps, air land operations, with specific analysis in relation to joint functioning of air and ground forces at the strike corps level. While examining credible deterrence capability in the mountains, the author has highlighted the drawbacks of the peace-time locations of the mountain strike corps vis-a-vis the requirement of acclimatisation for operations, and the restricted area of operations based on a single axis build-up/maintenance. The author further goes on to suggest operational and doctrinal concepts for a corps level offensive in the mountains, culminating in a suggested organisational concept for a mountain strike corps for offensive operations.

Col Gautam Das is an avid writer with a large number of books on military affairs to his credit. He is an emblematic infantry officer who has blended his rich experience of having served in the Pir Panjal and the Eastern and Western Himalayas. He is an eminent mountaineer, having served in operations with the Special Frontier Force (SFF), and Assam Rifles and knowledgeable about staff at a frontline Corps Headquarters (HQ). The book is well written, maintaining a smooth flow from the past to the present, while highlighting important lessons in mountain warfare. A 'must have' book for all libraries and a 'must read' for all professional officers.

Brig RC Dwivedi is the chief instructor of PROMEX.