

[Book review] The Crisis in Kashmir by Sumit Ganguly

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**The Crisis in Kashmir.** Sumit Ganguly. London. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. pp x + 182. USD \$49.95. ISBN: 0-521-59066-3.

The Kashmir valley has been a bone of contention between two South Asian neighbors, namely India and Pakistan, ever since both countries achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Although there have been a number of scholarly books written about the conflict over Kashmir, there is hardly any work that attempts to trace the roots of the insurgency in Kashmir. Sumit Ganguly's book not only tries to fill that void by making a systemic study of the long simmering conflict, but he also provides a formula for management and resolution of the insurgency.

What factors are responsible for the upsurge in insurgent activities in Kashmir in the 1990s? The author provides four plausible explanations. First is the active role played by Pakistan in fomenting trouble in the Kashmir valley by supporting the various Kashmir militant groups and ferrying them across the Indo-Pak border for a sustained low-intensity conflict. Second is India's firm and unequivocal stand on denial of self-determination of the people of Kashmir, ninety percent of whom are Muslims with a perceived bias against Hindu dominated India. Third, the emergence of ethnic sub-nationalism of the Kashmir people has been propelled by the Indian government's attempt to depopulate the Muslim majority living in the valley and replace it with an influx and resettlement of Hindus and Buddhists living in the adjoining Jammu and Ladakh regions. Fourth, Ganguly surmizes that the increasing incidence of insurgency can be attributed to the failure of successive Indian governments in strengthening institutional politics in Kashmir.

Without going into detail about the circumstances under which the Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh, signed the Treaty of Accession with the Indian government in 1947, the author provides a roadmap on the escalation of conflicts in Kashmir from 1947 to 1971. During this period three major wars took place between India and Pakistan. However, what is missing in the book is the examination of Pakistan's rationale in claiming Kashmir to be a part of its territory.

The outcome of the 1971 war, as the author states, had profound implications for the Kashmir dispute. India emerged a clear winner in this war, and Pakistan's territory was carved up and reduced by half as the eastern flank of it became the independent nation of Bangladesh. The loss of Bangladesh was a devastating blow to Pakistan's power elite, and the Kashmir issue provided the only significant escape route to divert domestic unrest and popular disillusionment. India's Indira Gandhi and Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto met for a summit in Shimla in 1972 and pledged to solve the outstanding bilateral issues amicably, yet Ganguly states that from Pakistan's point of view, revenge was a preferred option. The author, however, does not mention how Pakistan can exact revenge on India while adhering to the letter and spirit of the Shimla agreement.

India, on its part, failed to take advantage of the gains of the 1971 war. At the very least, it could have dictated terms and declared the Line of Control (LOC) separating Indian-held territory of Kashmir from that of Pakistan-held Kashmir and established it as the *de jure* international border. The author's assertion that the Kashmir issue would have receded into the back burner had India done so at that time does not coincide with the ground reality. The Nixon Administration with its

pro-tilt policy toward Pakistan and China's overt support for Pakistan's military regime were major deterrents for India.

The author prescribes the following strategies and options for resolving the crisis in Kashmir. Ethnic flooding could be one option under which the demographic profile of the valley could be altered by encouraging more and more Hindus to move in to Kashmir. Although it appears to be a tantalizing proposal, in reality, this option will be very hard to implement. In fact, any effort at ethnic flooding/cleansing could have had a disastrous outcome. The author fails to mention the plight of the Hindus in Jammu and the Buddhists in Ladakh, both of which are adjacent to Kashmir valley. Another option discussed in the book is the strategy under which military pressure on the Kashmir insurgents could be significantly increased. Again the author misses the point that India already has stretched its military might to the maximum without any end to insurgency activities in sight. Another option, known as the wear-down strategy, is currently being pursued by the government of India with the hope that, like the Punjab insurgency a few years ago, the militants in Kashmir will see reason at the end of the day and will come to the negotiating table with the representatives of the Indian government. The author, however, does not cite the difference between the situation in Punjab and Kashmir. In Punjab, it was relatively easy to control and contain the Sikh insurgency, as the population was almost evenly divided between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Punjab, moreover, was never a contested territory between India and Pakistan. Yet another option, according to the author, could be to cede the valley to Pakistan. But this would be opposed tooth and nail by a vast majority of the people in India who consider Kashmir to be an integral part of it (India) and no government in New Delhi can afford to stray away from this national consensus on Kashmir. Similarly, holding a plebiscite and arranging a shared sovereignty may sound rational and reasonable only at its face value. The popular psyche in both India and Pakistan will not accept it, as the outcome of these two options would be laden with so many uncertainties and unacceptable outcomes.

The author discusses the possibility that a workable strategy could be planned. Like in Haiti, Somalia, Northern Ireland and the Middle East, the United States, as the sole super power in the post-cold war era, could be persuaded to play the role of honest broker. This will involve dissuading Pakistan from harboring the Kashmir insurgents on her soil and encouraging both Pakistan and India to embark upon a meaningful dialogue at the highest level to break the Kashmir impasse. But then the key question is: Will India accept the United States as a honest broker? The statements made by major political party leaders in India are vehemently against any such mediatory role either by the United States or any other third party. The regime in Pakistan may also find supporting Kashmir militants to be politically expedient for its own domestic constituents.

This book by Sumit Ganguly provides a deep insight into the Kashmir dispute by delineating the various constraints, choices and consequences of strategic decision making. Despite the shortcomings, Ganguly's book has added a new dimension to the existing scholarship in international relations and crisis management.

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