

BOOK REVIEW

Talmiz Ahmad, *Turmoil in West Asia: Sectarian Divide Shapes Regional Contestations* (New Delhi, IDSA, April 2016), Pages: 81, Price: Rs. 150.00

The dynamics of the Sunni-Shia divide in West Asia; the role history, ideology and identity play in explaining the divide and their continued reinforcement in serving contemporary political interests in the region have been perplexing. As one tries to grapple with how geopolitics concurs with the present day sectarian divide, how the Saudi-Iran rivalry articulated on sectarian lines is likely to shape the political balance of the two sects as well as the future of the region, and how the jihadi groups are triggering broader sectarian conflict, this monograph is valuable resource for giving an in-depth analysis of these thought provoking questions.

The author's credentials on the subject are impeccable. He has vast experience as a seasoned diplomat and writer who has served in the region from Iraq to Yemen to Saudi Arabia and has assiduously been building immense knowledge on West Asian affairs. His earlier works on political Islam, religious conflicts, reforms, and politics of West Asia are well known. The monograph makes valuable reading since he has admirably interwoven the diverse and complex, temporal and spatial dynamics of the sectarianism in the region into a lucid, simple and coherent narrative.

The monograph comprising of eleven chapters begins with an introduction to the various fronts and ferocity of contestations and conflicts five years after the Arab Spring. The armed conflicts involving domestic elements and foreign forces in Syria and Yemen, sectarianism, proliferation of Jihadis (Al Qaida, ISIS) across the region and the ensuing violence are some of the flames that refuse to be doused. It asserts that though the ongoing conflicts and competitions are the fallouts of recent developments in the West Asian polity, the battle-lines have been deliberately drawn along and support mobilised on the basis of primeval sectarian cleavages. Since the Arab uprisings, the Saudis perceived an increasing Iranian influence close to the country's borders (Yemen, Bahrain) and in Syria to consolidate its regional influence. Iran's alleged "interference" in the domestic politics of the Arab countries by encouraging Shia aspirations and agitations have

been re-casted as the “existential” threat to the Sunnis (leaders/people) from the “Other”, i.e. the Shia. The chapter gives the sectarian calculus and modus operandi of Saudi interventions in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. The author puts forward the argument that the present-day centrality of the sectarian cleavage in defining political contentions in West Asia is the result of the consolidation of two separate developments in regional politics that have now coalesced. The first is the increasing salience of the sectarian identity in Iraq through the last few decades of the last century that culminated in the “empowerment” of Shias after the US-led war in 2003. The second is the deliberate mobilisation of domestic and regional support on sectarian basis by Saudi Arabia and its allies to confront the perceived expanding influence of Iran in West Asia.

The second chapter illustrates the crystallisation of the Shia identity in Iraqi politics, the collapse of cross-sectarian nationalism and the assertion of sect-based claims to power in post Saddam Iraq. It includes the marginalisation of Shias from the state formation through decades of Arab nationalism and Islamism that glorified the Sunni narrative of Islamic history, their systematic exclusion from domestic decision making, brutal repression, and the denial of their religious rights. The monograph gives a glimpse of the brief camaraderie between the government and Shias during the Iran-Iraq war to mobilise the support of Shia dominated Iraqi army. He marks the brutal state repression of the series of Shia uprisings in parts of southern Iraq in March 1991 after the defeat of the Iraqi troops by the US-led coalition as a turning point in sectarian relations. The chapter explains the deterioration of sectarian relations through the 1990s as the Saddam government under sanctions was garnering tribal and faith based support in domestic politics.

The third and the fourth chapters give an account of intellectual traditions and the trajectory of the different creeds of salafism, their advocates ranging from the Saudi state, the Islamist activist groups, (the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates) to transnational Jihadists, as well as located sectarianism at the core of Salafist ideology. The author also gives a detailed narrative of the systematic “theological othering” of the Shias in the Salafist discourse as well as of the virulent enthusiasm with which jihadists like Zarqawi pursued cleansing of faith by “total war” on Shias before they could fight the Western powers. Thus, these chapters give an understanding of how Saudi Arabia mobilised support for its strategic competition with Iran on the ideological basis of Salafism and its total rejection of other manifestations of faith as false and illegitimate, and found common grounds with its otherwise opponents, the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaida and the likes in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The

author traces anti-Shia discourse resonating not only among the establishment of clerics but also among the Sahawa ideologues.

The next three chapters unfold how sectarianism entered regional politics between 1979 and 2003 to become the principle driver in geopolitical contestations till 2010 and assumed the defining role in the developments in the region since the Arab Spring. The author has marked the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 as the commencement of sectarian consciousness in contemporary regional politics. While some projected the revolution as Islamic victory, the Gulf monarchies perceived it as Shia empowerment with repercussion on their domestic politics. The Islamic revolution generated considerable enthusiasm and mobilisation among the Shias for reversal of their political fortunes and along with Iranian efforts to promote doctrinal, political, and even military networks in different GCC countries, invited sectarian backlash from the Sunni regimes. Saudi Arabia discredited the Iranian revolution as Shia phenomena through virulent anti-Shia discourses and encouraged the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain to strike a pre-emptive war to stem the tide of revolution. Iran perceived the Iran-Iraq war as the collective hostility of its Sunni Arab neighbours. The cumulative impact of Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war profoundly defined identities and issues in sectarian terms in the Gulf, shaping mutual prejudices and political contestation of the two Islamic giants. The author accounts for the deepening of sectarian divide after the fall of Saddam Hussain as a consequence of sectarian policies of Shia dominated Al Maliki government and the Saudi strategies to balance grave strategic disadvantage in which it found itself vis-à-vis Iran.

Saudi Arabia along with many other GCC countries supported the marginalised Sunni uprising in Iraq that fought the Maliki government and Shia militia to counter Iran's incursions. Amidst this grim scenario, the author meticulously narrates the nuances of the political commitment of the two sects. In the initial phase many Sunni Iraqis refused to espouse jihad and militarily defeated the Al Qaeda in the country's own Sahwa movement in 2007–09 while the Saudi Shia affirmed their loyalty to the Saudi state and in spite of repression, continued to pursue cross-sectarian dialogue with liberal Sahwa members. The author also brings to the notice of the reader the small counter-current of the broad narratives of Saudi sectarian politics such as Crown Prince Abdullah's initiative at the Mecca conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2005 that obtained recognition for the four Sunni schools and two Shia schools (Twelver and Zaidi) as "legitimate and sacrosanct expressions of Islam".

Over the last few years, the Kingdom has become more deeply involved with complex militia politics in Syria and Yemen. It increasingly relied on the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat Nusra while setting up to Jaish al Islam (Islamic Front) and Jaish al Fatah (Victory Front). He quotes Charles Lister in capturing the Syrian situation, “Syria currently represents the centre of the world for jihadist militancy”, enabling the reader to vividly see the consequent unleashing of sectarianism. The social media aided and sharpened the virulent sectarian slandering in tandem with increasing violence in region. The chapter on ISIS explains the centrality of sectarianism and the blatant brutality with which it adhered to, on the basis of the conceptual framework of the preceding chapters. Fighting the Shias, who are “apostates and idolaters”, enjoys the highest importance in ISIS’s “offensive jihad”. The chapter on “Saudi Sectarian Politics” locates the mobilisation along the sectarian divide by Saudi Arabia and its GCC associates in their strategic need to defuse and deflect the reform agenda that questioned the regional political status quo thrown up by the Arab Spring, while simultaneously countering increasing Iranian regional influence. The Arab Spring brought to the fore long-standing concerns relating to “feeble or dysfunctional participatory institutions and uneven access to political and economic capital”. The author asserts that though the Shias were the principal victims of these deficits in the Gulf polities, their agitations in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were not articulated in sectarian terms but in conformity with “cross-sectarian demands for peaceful reform”.

Saudi Arabia’s recent initiatives of setting up an “Islamic military alliance”, a coalition of 34 countries to fight ISIS and other terrorist groups have the dangers of turning into a Sunni coalition without the inclusion of Iran and Iraq. The execution of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia has elicited only muted support amongst its regional allies, along with Turkey’s caution that the region “could not sustain such tension”. The author in his chapter “Prognosis” submits that it is unlikely that sectarian mobilisation can be sustained over a long term, as sectarian projects not only lack historical depth but have limited relevance in solving issues confronting the region. The counter-sectarian traffic on social media, the reformist intellectuals and activists in the region, the non-conformist views of Egypt and Turkey on the sectarian approach, and the strategic ground realities that limit the efficacy of sectarianism in securing the state (especially Saudi Arabia) are some of the factors that may quickly reduce or even remove the political relevance of sectarianism. The prognosis that sectarianism could be divorced from political contestation either by state action or the general populace according to the reviewer would be driven more by the arduous process of social re-engineering

and metamorphosis of the loyalty-based political economy of West Asia to one of pluralist and participatory order.

The monograph is a valuable scholarly resource that enables the reader to comprehend the motivations of state and non-state actors, to find parallels in intellectual discourse and political articulation, and to synthesise many strands of issues that sectarianism and regional political contestation encompass.

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Prem K. Budhwar, *Canada-India: Partners in Progress*, (New Delhi, Vij Books / ICWA, 2016), Pages: xvii+216, Price: Rs. 850.00

How does one sum up Canada-India relations over the past nearly seven decades? The answers are many and varied. One answer is that the twain do not meet. It is argued that the political orientation of the two countries and their alliance relationships make Canada and India unlikely partners. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that Canada and India are traversing a braided path, with their relations being deeply entwined. As long as the two remain federal, parliamentary, multicultural democracies, champion UN multilateralism in their foreign policies, Canada and India share the same destiny. There is much to learn from each other's developmental-democratic experiences, and to cooperate for international peace and security.

Prem K. Budhwar, who served as India's High Commissioner to Canada during 1992–97, takes the reader through the 'roller-coaster' of a relationship over the past 68 years (p. 107). The bromance began on a high note in the 1950s which was decade of a 'special relationship' marked by Canadian aid, and assistance under the Colombo Plan. Canadian aid in the field of nuclear energy was the high watermark of the period. Relations nose-dived when India exploded a nuclear device in 1974. Canada described Pokhran I as a 'breach of trust', and a 'betrayal', alleging use of the Canada-supplied uranium

in the nuclear experiment. Relations remained in deep 'freeze' - perhaps worsened in the 1980s - as 'mutual suspicion' arose with the spread of Khalistan militancy in Punjab. India complained that Canada was not doing enough to rein in the Khalistan militants operating out of Canadian soil while Canada, facing domestic demand, talked of human rights violations in Punjab. Then came one of the worst air disasters in 1985 when Air India's *Kanishka* was downed by Canada-based Khalistan elements, and Canada treated one of the worst terrorist attacks with kid-gloves.

The acceleration of the globalisation process in the 1990s raised new hopes and new imperatives came calling on a liberalising India and Canada, asking both countries to leave the acrimony of the past behind and explore together the new world of free-flowing capital and the revolution of 'new technologies'. The Liberal Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, came to 'rediscover' India in 1996 at the head of a 300-strong 'Team Canada', comprising seven premiers, scores of ministers and members of parliament, and CEOs of top Canadian companies. Once again, this proved short-lived: bilateral ties got a 'renewed setback' in the wake of the Pokhran II in 1998.

The author, however, remains optimistic; he believes that Canada and India are quintessentially *Partners in Progress*. Things are changing for the better. He sees meaningful change in the perception and appreciation of each other's geostrategic scenario and respect for differences. Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006–15) came to India twice (in 2009 and 2012), to 're-engage' with India. Among several others, the 2009 framework agreement for the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the 2010 agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, and 2012 agreement establishing an annual 'strategic dialogue' at the foreign ministers level constitute the landmarks of this changed scenario. The first India-Canada Strategic Dialogue was held in 2013 in Toronto and the second one in New Delhi in 2014, with a view to giving a long-term strategic direction to the bilateral relationship. Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister in 42 years to visit Canada in May 2015. The visit produced, among others, the path-breaking agreement regarding the sale of uranium to India. Now, relations are on the upswing, and Canada has set up a large number of trade and consular offices in India.

Whenever one thinks of Canada and India, discussions get bogged down by the subject of the Indian Diaspora. Budhwar writes an excellent chapter on the subject. However, the Indian Diaspora in Canada is a problematic that scholars and policy planners need to give lot more thought to. How does one categorise it? Is it perennial across time and generations? What does a hyphenated identity mean?

In the first place, the use of term 'Diaspora' to describe Canadians of Indian origin is a misnomer and therefore a policy misfit. Canadians of Indian origin perceive themselves, and are described by others, variously: 'Indian Diaspora', 'Punjabi Diaspora', 'Sikh Diaspora' etc. The Indian Diaspora is more than a century old, and has a strong memory of its historical experiences in Canada. It was after a protracted struggle that it had got its civil rights recognised—and only in 1940. At 1.3 million, the Indian Diaspora accounts for around three per cent of the current population. About thirty-three thousand Indians migrate to Canada every year. The Indian Diaspora is strongly territorialised; it is concentrated in the Greater Vancouver and Toronto areas; it has also been growing in cities like Calgary, Edmonton and Montreal. It is politically agile, and has been able to successfully leverage its numerical strength for political representation. The general election of 1993 sent three members of Indian origin to the House of Commons; the 2015 election sent as many as 19 MPs—four of whom are holding ministerial berths in the cabinet of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. It is to be noted that other diasporas in Canada have not fared that well.

The Indian government looks at the Diaspora as a strategic asset. The 2014 Election Manifesto of the ruling BJP states: "The NRIs, PIOs and professionals settled abroad are a vast reservoir to articulate national interests and affairs globally. This resource will be harnessed for strengthening Brand India." Early in his term, the Prime Minister conveyed through the social media that he wants to "make the Diaspora an integral part of our development journey." In reality, things are a lot more complex. The Indian Diaspora in Canada has its own myriad agendas to champion; besides, it makes the Canadian government take interest in issues of Indian concern. In short, there is a cost for leveraging Diaspora for foreign policy gains.

Canada is a 'settlers' society. Ethnic immigrants have followed four trajectories of 'acculturation' in the 'host' nation: 'assimilation', when a group moves away from the original culture towards the dominant culture; 'integration', wherein a group synthesises the traditional and the dominant cultures; 'separation/segregation', wherein an immigrant ethnic group holds on to its original culture and avoids interaction with the dominant culture; and finally, 'marginalisation', when a group feels alienated from both the cultures. 'Integration' best explains the experiences of the Canadians of Indian origin. A hyphenated identity is an example of 'integration'. However, this can also be problematic. Hyphens become numerous: 'Indian-Canadian', 'Sikh-Canadian', 'Indo-Caribbean-Canadian', and so on. Besides, many third and fourth generation Canadians of Indian descent find hyphens of little use in establishing their identity.

It is a 'Canada of 2015', as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has put it. The general election of 2015 symbolises many of the transformative changes that are taking place in Canada. Canada's is now a highly plural society; its democracy is grappling with issues of diversity, group rights, equity, and secularism in some meaningful ways. The current parliament has as many as 46 MPs who belong to the 'visible minorities'; six MPs belong to the LGTB group; and a record 10 MPs are aboriginals. Half of the Trudeau cabinet consists of women. The Canadian dollar bill is to feature a woman, and the national anthem has been modified to promote gender equity. And, in May 2016, Justin Trudeau tendered an apology in the House of Commons for the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914, when the boat, carrying more than 350 Indians, was forced out of the Vancouver harbour in an act of racism and discrimination by the state.

The author dabbles with the issue of nuclear cooperation; and notes that the 2013 agreement ended the embargo on nuclear trade with India. There is, however, a lot more to the nuclear exchange than what meets the eye. R. Chidambaram, a top Indian nuclear scientist, once described Canada and India as having a 'common nuclear heritage'. India continues to eye the rich quality uranium ore which comes from Saskatchewan, and to build further on the Candu-6 and the advanced heavy water reactors which, it seems, have several identical features. Prime Minister Modi's three-day visit has cleared the deck for the purchase of uranium ore from the Cameo Corporation of Canada. He described the supply agreement as a "show of faith and trust between the two countries."

However, the Canada-India relationship is more than just about the Diaspora and nuclear exchange. Prime Minister Modi alluded to this when he said that few countries can "match Canada's potential to be a partner in India's economic transformation." India ranks high in talent driven innovation; there is ongoing collaborative research in areas such as biotechnology between the two countries. There is a huge potential for cooperation in the nano sciences; and advanced collaborative research is on between the two at McGill University. India is looking for clean coal technology, and it seems that Saskatchewan has a road-map for it.

Canada holds some 20 per cent of world's fresh water. India, in particular, needs to access Canadian know-how in water conservation and water development technology. Canadian experiences in food preservation, food processing, and transportation over long distances and time are incomparable; so are its management techniques in the area of very large commercial farms. Logistic costs in India are three times the global average; and some 21 million

metric tonnes of food-grains (equivalent to the annual production of Australia) is lost due to lack of sufficient storage and distribution facilities. Canada has offered to share its knowledge and expertise in this area.

Border management has grown to become a major issue. For instance, the management of the movement of people, goods and vehicles, and business across the border with Nepal, Bhutan, and also Bangladesh are problematic. However, some four hundred thousand people as well as goods and services worth US\$2 billion cross the world's longest 'undefended' Canada-US border every day. Surveillance, in-time exchange of information, and the maritime 'joint riders' agreement (where extradition of a suspect is done on the spot), have kept the Canada-US border secure after 9/11 while allowing the smooth movements of people, goods and services.

Not many countries match Canada in distance education, health care and providing security and infrastructure in sparsely populated areas. India needs all these. India is on course to building one hundred, digitally-driven, 'smart cities', five new Indian Institutes of Technology and five new Indian Institutes of Management besides four new All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Canada could help in building and connecting the IITs and AIIMS with Canadian universities and hospitals.

A sticking point in the present international financial system is its inability to complement areas with high rates of savings with regions that require investment. One of the main purposes of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Canada was to invite Canadian pension funds to invest in his 'Make in India' programme. Canada is an urban, middle class society with an ageing population. It has some of the largest pension funds which are looking for long-term and secure investments with decent returns. India's annual need for investment in infrastructure is estimated at US\$200 billion. The bilateral Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPPA) is pending for approval since 2007. Canadian pension funds reportedly want some certainty on their returns, while the Indian side has objections to the clause on international dispute settlement. Likewise, negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) have remained tepid since 2010; the ninth round of negotiations was held in March 2015.

Canada also holds prospects for India's energy security. The tar sands of Alberta have dramatically changed the global energy scenario and flow of energy. Canada holds the third largest reserves (after Saudi Arabia and Venezuela) of oil and gas. These are estimated at 173 billion barrels of oil reserves, and 1300 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Canada has increasingly become a petroleum economy; fossil fuels accounted for 40 per cent of its

exports in 2014. With Russian gas pipelines going towards China, Canada is eyeing India as a potential large market for its gas export. Once the 4600 kilometres 'Energy East' from Alberta to New Brunswick gets completed, Canadian energy could flow to India as early as 2018. The shortest route to ship LNG from North America to the west coast of India is the LNG terminal at St. Johns in New Brunswick; and both Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Reliance have reportedly mapped the logistics of bringing Canadian gas to Indian shores.

Canada is a great free and fair trading nation. As far back as 1940, it had proposed an International Trade Organisation to make global trade rule-based. However, bilateral trade between Canada and India remains disappointingly low. Total trade between the two countries in 2014 was at C\$6.4 billion. India accounts for only 0.6 per cent of Canada's global trade. India imports pulses, newsprint, wood pulp, asbestos, potash, ore etc. It exports gems, jewellery, garments, textiles, and organic chemicals etc. to Canada. The cumulative Indian FDI in 2014 was C\$3973 million as against Canadian FDI of C\$1128 million in India. Indian FDI has increased in recent years, especially in IT and natural resource sectors, while Canadian firms have come in strongly in power and energy, oil and gas, telecommunications, and the financial sector.

In fact, trade has remained largely a neglected area. In the halcyon days of the 1950s and the 60s, trade was tied to aid. Almost a third of Canadian aid came to India; and Indian public sector undertakings (PSUs) made large purchases of food grains and minerals by paying in Indian rupees. This made bilateral exchanges high: for instance, seven per cent of Indian imports came from Canada in 1971. The socialist economy of India was closed to foreign equity participation; Canadian firms with competitive advantage in power, telecommunications etc. could not take advantage of the Indian market. Trade became the victim of the 'distrust' that set in after Pokhran I.

Moreover, there are other problems too. Corporate Canada remains strongly oriented to the large American market, and this explains some three-fourths of Canadian trade being with the USA. On its part, Indian business too remains oriented towards USA and Europe. The truth is also that the Indian Diaspora has not done enough to catalyse bilateral commercial exchanges.

Canada is more than a potential trade and investment partner. Since the signing of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (C-USFTA) in 1989, manufacturing giants have used Canada as a foothold to enter the burgeoning North American market. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is truly North Americanising the continental economy and culture. Today,

Canada is the top export destination of 33 of the 50 American states, and leverages this relationship with Washington, D.C. NAFTA has changed the decision-making terrain as well. The Business Council of Canada (BCC), which represents the top 150 firms, is dominated by American CEOs who have access to the power corridors of Ottawa.

However, one needs to build on the many positives that Canada and India offer to each other. A lot has to be done. The author states that “much more heightened awareness” of each other - especially at people-to-people level - is needed to realise the full potential of the Canada-India relationship (p.155). The book has as many as fourteen short, crisply written chapters, with the first eight presenting a panoramic view of Canadian history, politics etc., and the remaining six covering the entire gamut of the Canada-India relationship. Some useful information is listed in the ten annexures, followed by a brief but relevant bibliography. In the Prefatory note, K. Natwar Singh rightly says, “This book was waiting to be written”. Kudos to the author: it is a must read for scholars and students of Indian foreign policy and international studies.

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Kishan S. Rana, *Diplomacy at the Cutting Edge* (New Delhi, Manas Publications, 2016), Pages: 371, Price: Rs 595.00

The author, a prolific writer, and teacher of diplomacy of international renown since retiring from the Indian Foreign Service in 1995, needs little introduction to the readers or to the general public interested in diplomacy. This latest book is his memoirs written in his inimitable style, combining brevity and felicity of expression. This book had been in his mind since 1998.

The Indian Foreign Service was the career choice of the author even before he completed school in 1954. He had made one more choice: to know more about China. “A higher destiny” as he puts it, fulfilled both the ambitions.

This meticulous author has given a chronology of his assignments, starting from May 1960 to July 1995 when he retired as ambassador to Germany.

Reminiscing about his Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) interview, Rana tells us that K. M. Panikkar, the famous historian and former envoy to China, asked him about the country of origin of coffee. Rana had opted for Geography as one of his subjects in the UPSC exam. His reply was that the place of origin was South America. He had confused coffee with cocoa. Panikkar said that the candidate was inventive, but coffee originated in Arabia. Rana without losing his cool admitted the error, adding that there was a variety of coffee called Arabica. "The result: I scraped through with the minimum pass mark of 140 out of 300", he adds.

Chapter 1 is about his last posting titled "A Crowning Finale: Germany (1992–1995)". When Rana went to Germany, India had commenced its economic reforms, Germany had been since unified after the end of the Cold War and Chancellor Kohl had established a close personal rapport with Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao when he visited that country in 1991. Rana took full advantage of the favourable setting.

The Narmada Project was facing fierce opposition from NGOs in India. India had sought some funding from the World Bank. German NGOs stepped in and urged their government to deny funds for the project. Rana decided to take on the German NGOs and to ensure German support for the project at the World Bank. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) did not want to get involved in a campaign abroad. Rana was not deterred. He got publicity material from his home state, Gujarat. He invited several NGOs to a four-hour discussion at the embassy. The NGOs stood their ground, but one of them told Rana that had they known months ago all that they were told at the embassy, they might not have embarked on such a campaign to deny funds to India. However, having taken a position in public, it was difficult for them to go back. Rana kept up the pressure on the Ministry of Economic Cooperation. Days before the World Bank was to meet to take a decision on the funding of the Narmada project, Rana learnt that Germany was going to vote against India. The MEA got similar messages from a few other European capitals and the right decision was taken to drop the request for funds - that in any case accounted only for 10 per cent of the total cost.

Rana worked hard and was successful in attracting investments from Germany. He identified 300 companies, visited 150 of them in three years, and carried the message with apostolic vigour. In 1993, he suggested to Daimler-Benz to open a research centre in India. Next year, they opened one in Bangalore.

In short, the reader can get to know what it means to be at the “cutting edge of diplomacy” as practiced by Rana. The chapter ends with an interesting revelation: Three years after leaving Germany, Rana learnt that his Pakistani counterpart, General Asif Durrani, former head of ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence), had in 1994 complained in writing to the German Foreign Office that Dr. N. Holl, head of the South Asia division in the German Foreign Office was “pro-Indian”. The German Foreign Office had ignored the complaint.

Chapter 2 is on the training in India and his subsequent stints in Hong Kong and Beijing, covering the period 1960 to 1965. This chapter contains an interesting story of a proposal to purchase a residence for the Commissioner of India, Hong Kong (as the Indian envoy to the colony was then designated), in 1962. As India was short of foreign exchange, the commissioner had arranged for a bank loan, the monthly repayment for which was almost the same as the monthly rent for the then residence. The MEA rejected the proposal. In 1970, the mission sent another proposal to buy the same property at HK\$5 million, 15 times the 1962 price. The MEA turned it down once again. Finally, an apartment was bought at HK\$30 million in the 1980s. By then, the market value of the villa that was rejected in 1962 was HK\$100 million.

In the same chapter that covers the author’s tenure in China, one learns with shock and sadness that the then Charge d’Affaires in China, PK Banerjee, was not “seemingly much trusted by New Delhi”. He was in China from the middle of 1961 to the end of 1963. Rana’s first ambassadorship was to Algeria in 1975 when he completed 15 years in service.

The story of EIL (Engineers India Limited) getting a contract is worth recounting. Rana visited the port city of Arzew where two massive gas liquefaction plants were going to be established. Rana told the Director of SONATRACH (the public sector undertaking formed to exploit hydrocarbon resources) about EIL with its 1,000 engineers. The Algerian said that he had never heard of EIL. He used to put out his tenders in *Le Monde*, which EIL never read. Finally, the EIL got the contract.

In January 1977, Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi addressed a conference of India’s ambassadors. She defended the Emergency that was “forced” on her by the opposition. Invited to state their concerns, Rana recalls an ambassador, probably Ashok Chib, pointed out the difficulty in successfully projecting the official line and the desirability of an early election. Three or four others spoke in support of Chib, but rather elliptically. Indira Gandhi listened and in reply asked whether she should announce the election at that

conference. As it happened, the election was announced on the last day of the conference.

Rana was joint secretary in the PM's Office in 1981–82. He was ambassador in Prague when the foreign secretary asked Rana whether he would accept to be Joint Secretary (PMO). Rana came to Delhi, had a brief meeting with Principal Secretary PC Alexander and a ten-minute meeting with the PM. Alexander asked Rana, "What did she say at the end?" and Rana replied, "Nothing, Sir". Alexander said he would find out from the PM. Later, Alexander asked Rana to return to his post. But, after four months, Rana was asked to join the PMO. Rana has given us a detailed account of the way Indira Gandhi's PMO worked. This account will be of interest to historians.

Rana has recounted two incidents that preceded his exit from the PMO. When the PM was returning from Saudi Arabia, a journalist was left behind; the plane was taxiing; an Air India official told Rana that the missing journalist had just reached the airport. Rana said, "I guess it is too late now to turn back". The plane took off. When Alexander came to know of it, he rebuked Rana for not bringing up the matter to his notice.

Another incident, that Rana considers almost an act of *lese majeste*, was that after hearing the PM repeat to visitors that she was baffled to see prices going up, though the economists told her that inflation was coming down, the teacher in Rana explained to her the difference between inflation and price rise.

Rana has more stories, always interesting, to tell us of his postings in Kenya, San Francisco, and Mauritius before he set out to Berlin.

The last chapter 14 titled *Career Conclusions* brings out the scholar in Rana. He starts with a quotation from Churchill, "The further backward you can look, the further forward you are likely to see". There are eight conclusions, reminding the reader of Buddha's Eightfold Path.

The author hopes, "... this work transmits to readers, including new diplomatic service entrants some of the passion that this profession can engender, and *encourage others towards this career choice*". (Italics added). He has succeeded brilliantly in what he wanted to do.

KPFABIAN

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Shaida Mohammad Abdali, *Afghanistan Pakistan India: A Paradigm Shift*, (Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2016), Pages: 195, Price: Rs 995.00

The 'Great Game', which was played out between Imperial Britain and Czarist Russia, is still being played out today, but the actors are different. And embroiled in the centre, once again is Afghanistan. The contours of that game have been expanded upon many a time by various authors, but rarely have such perspectives come out from within Afghanistan.

What makes this book special is the fact that the author is the current Afghan Ambassador to India. He had earlier served as Special Assistant to the President of Afghanistan from 2001 to 2008 and thereafter, served for four years as the Deputy National Security Advisor to the President. The book is hence an insider view of the events that have shaped Afghanistan, from a person who had a ring-stand view and saw those events unfold.

The first of the six chapters of the book is devoted to the recent history of Afghanistan. The author traces the compulsions which led the Soviet Union to exert its influence in Afghanistan culminating in invasion, the civil war that followed, the emergence of the Taliban and its overthrow and the present turmoil in the country. The leitmotif of the book as stated by the author, is to substantiate that Afghanistan's ills are due not so much to 'conflict of interests', but rather to an inability to identify common interests and a sound political and socio economic paradigm to bring about a positive change. This appears to be more of an idyllic stance as it would be hard to disassociate conflicting interests from the equation. Nations, after all, are not inherently altruistic beings and look primarily at their own self interest. This was evident soon after the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Najibullah Government. A peace agreement had been hammered out in the Peshawar accord, which envisaged a power sharing agreement between the various warring factions, but this was scuttled by Pakistan which wanted Hekmatyar to be the sole ruler of Afghanistan. The accord collapsed and it led to civil war, followed thereafter by the arrival of the Taliban. Pakistan seeks its security interests in a pliable Afghan leadership which is susceptible to its will. The Afghans obviously do not see it that way.

The second chapter of the book deals with factors of instability. Internal factors leading to instability have been well covered. Externally, three factors leading to instability have been highlighted; Afghanistan's geo-strategic location,

the role of Pakistan and various extremist groups and the contentious Durand Line. These factors have been analysed in depth and the author's analysis deepens one's understanding of the interplay of various interests which have kept the region in turmoil. The Durand Line has never been accepted by Afghanistan and rightly so, for it divided the Pashtun people and was simply meant to keep Russian influence away from the doorsteps of the British Empire. At some point, this artificial barrier dividing the Pashtun people would have to go. However, the author's contention that the Line marked the territory leased by the then Afghan ruler Amir Abdul Rahman to the British for a hundred years in 1893 is not borne out by documents, none of which make any mention of a limiting clause of one hundred years. Nevertheless, the validity of the Durand Line is suspect and needs to be renegotiated to unite the Pashtun people.

The third and fourth chapters make interesting reading, as they delve into Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan and India respectively. Chapter three gives a detailed perspective on the various actors at play in the new great game that was played out between the United States and the Soviet Union. Pakistan's role as a frontline state became all important and Afghanistan became the battlefield. The author throws up an interesting thought, suggesting that Pakistan and Afghanistan could form a federation - a common rule over Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In chapter five, the author looks into the role of the Afghan factor in India-Pakistan relationship. He lays emphasis on economic and energy corridors to build trust and promote cooperation between the three countries. This is possible in an idyllic world, but would require much more than words to get a positive outcome. India's outreach to Afghanistan, centred as it is on economic and social planks, is seen favourably by the Afghans, but has created deep apprehensions within Pakistani minds of possible Indian intentions. The challenge, as pointed out by the author, is to achieve cooperation between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. That is easier said than done, because the military establishment in Pakistan finds legitimacy in toeing an anti-India line. A rapprochement with India would render infructuous, the huge powers that the Pakistan military has arrogated to itself.

The book however enhances understanding of a complex problem, where many players have different and divergent stakes. This book is well researched and written with a depth of understanding that only a few people possess. It's editing and quality of production by Pentagon Press is world class and adds gravitas to what is undoubtedly a very fine piece of work. This book should

be read by diplomats, academics, researchers and policy makers across the world, who seek a solution to the knotty problems that beset the great Asian Roundabout.

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