

Peace Building in South Asia: Limitations and Prospects, Umbreen Javaid (2012), Chairperson, Department of Political Science and Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Review by

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Umbreen Javaid in her recent study seeks to explore the tremendous strategic importance of South Asia having two rival nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, and contrasts the same with this region being poverty-stricken, underdeveloped, fragile and conflict-ridden simultaneously. This work addresses the relations between India and Pakistan, marked by tensions and lack of regional co-operation thus hindering the overall growth in the region. It also discusses the prospects of peace and stability in South Asia after nuclearization of India and Pakistan. The strategic significance of this region is highlighted by the location of powerful neighbors like China and the Middle East.

It is an invaluable effort to highlight the significance of peaceful and co-operative relations between the two countries and strengthening forums like SAARC. The author rightly points towards the silver lining which is the urge on both sides to resolve the conflicting issues between them through peaceful means. The process of dialogue should continue with agreement on non-controversial issues as the starting point.

The study further highlights that the nuclearization of South Asia has been one of the key reasons to sustain interest on the part of US in the region. The resolution of the controversial issues between India and Pakistan require enhanced engagement on the part of US along with concerted efforts by the regional states. The key areas where US could help this region resolve the conflicting issues and also require the services of India and Pakistan include the Kashmir dispute, economic ties and major investments in India and Pakistan, containment of terrorism through utilizing clouts of Pakistan and India with different ethnic groups in Afghanistan, retaining US influence in Middle East for success of her strategy and safeguarding her interest in the region requiring regular consultations with the governments in India and Pakistan to take benefit of their relations with Arab countries. She discusses that the yardstick for US relations with other countries is democracy and free market these days, where Pakistan suffers due to weak politico-economic infrastructure. Thus, India will be an emerging US partner in political, economic and military spheres in South Asia.

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She points out that presently US needs Pakistan in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, but the growth of radical Islam and Islamic fundamentalism has been seen as a security threat by US and her allies, which further add to the uncertainty about future Pakistan-US relations. Thus, US has not proved a dependable partner for Pakistan as at times she has been placed this developing country on its low priority list and has been blamed for terrorism, nuclear proliferation and fundamentalism.

She discusses that the issue of granting weightage to India and Pakistan has created a dilemma for the policy makers of the US, because any tilt towards one will lead to the disliking of the other. In the long run, India no doubt seems to be more charming partner for the US but Pakistan's strategic location, neighboring Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia and China has its own importance in future also, so US will not be able to totally ignore Pakistan.

The author frankly shares that for US, India is now a partner in strategy and Pakistan a partner in exigency. Their world view, nature of economic, and types of political structures bring much in common to forge a lasting strategic partnership between USA and India and for the foreseeable future, they shall be allies. However, for the US with its sprawling interests in Central Asia and in other states around Pakistan, the exigencies may not be over in the near future. Pakistan with stronger and secure internal and external security and better performance on economic and political front will be in a position, which will not be much affected by any tilt or focus of the US towards India in South Asia.

The author suggests that Pakistan's policy makers must consider and appreciate the difference between the two approaches of US administration and US congress. While the focus of the former is on short term exigencies and its requirements, the emphasis of the latter is on long term vision of the strategic interests of US and the umbrella policy made by them forces the US administration to move in that direction. According to the US policy of enhanced engagement in South Asia, US will keep a close strategic relationship with India, but US also has to ensure an intense and long term partnership with Pakistan simultaneously.

This book provides a superb overview of the issues and prospects of peace building in South Asia. It is timely and relevant because in the emerging global scenario nations can not succeed without close cooperation in multiple fields with their immediate neighbors. In the context of India-Pakistan relations, wholesome efforts at ensuring peace building in this region is the first and the foremost starting point. This study has raised several issue areas in South Asian peace and security context for future researches to build on in future.