

BOOK REVIEW

How Does the Asymmetric Relationship Between India and New Zealand Make Sense for Today's Indo-Pacific Region?

Rajaram Panda and Pankaj Jha (Eds.), *India and New Zealand: Emerging Challenges*. New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2010, 177 pp, INR500, ISBN: 9788186019825.

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This book has been published from the New Delhi-based Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), which is claimed to be an Indian leading think-tank on regional security research. With unconditional support by the Wellington-based Asia New Zealand Foundation, as well as advice and encouragement from many concerned people, the volume has actually emanated from a two-day "Track II Dialogue" (held in December 2009 in New Delhi) not only among university scholars and policy researchers but also senior diplomats and military bureaucrats in addition to independent consultants from India and New Zealand.

Divided into six sections (with two essays in each), this co-edited book aims to encapsulate both developments and challenges in the international stage in relation to India and New Zealand. Although the study looks for the cutting-edge economic aspects to enhance the bilateral relationship between India and New Zealand, the emphasis has been given on the convergence in political and strategic issues

within the multilateral institutionalism of East Asia, the evolving regionalism of Asia amid the role of the United States (US), and particularly rising influence of China in the world's most complicated but dynamic Asia Pacific region. According to the editors, New Zealand and India, through their comfortable and warm relationship despite their lack of a historically deep link, could be closer partners not only in sharing values about the regional order in transition, but also in working together to help shape the functions and agenda of new global institutions.

After giving a succinct overview of the entire volume, I would now like to enumerate its major weaknesses and limitations. As the editors have not asserted any intrinsic argument that can be challenged, it is better to provide my critical feedbacks about every individual chapter. The book's first section's first essay written by the first editor Rajaram Panda says, "The paper argues that a universally acceptable definition of East Asia remained blurred and for all practical purposes, the whole of Asia Pacific makes

East Asia. Indeed, this definitional blurredness made East Asia a region where multiple types of political processes existed and strategic choices exercised” (p. 13). Clearly, the book has been developed in line with a framework of the East Asia Summit (EAS), a forum held annually by leaders of 18 countries in the greater East Asian region where both India and New Zealand hold membership. However, some analysts might treat the editors’ idea as ill-conceived, criticizing that they did not adopt an eclectic “Asia Pacific” approach. Probably, the editors did not find such an approach suitable, because India is neither a country of the “Asia-Pacific” (with a hyphen used between Asia and Pacific) region nor it is a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). It is quite unclear why they have completely neglected the “Indo-Pacific” as a new terminology for which time has come to quickly define the global events. Besides, this section views, “As the countries in the region get increasingly interlocked by linkages in multiple areas of economic activities, they find themselves confronted with challenges to manage strategic complexity” (p. 14). Thus, the “introductory chapter” should essentially have included a skeletal theoretical structure for “international political economy,” rather than just providing the chapter outlines. About the second essay in this section, innumerable studies have already been done on the promises and pitfalls of Asia’s nascent regionalism, and nothing here seems to be pretty innovative.

The second section is concerned with the global financial crisis and it examines how India and New Zealand position themselves to cope with the hurdles resulted from the contemporary economic meltdown. But it does not see how the success case of New Zealand, which is ranked 53rd among the global economies in terms of nominal gross domestic product (GDP), can distinctly be compared with India as the 10th in the ranking list.

Regarding the first essay of the third section, it identifies some justifiable reasons (geographic proximity, economic interconnectedness, cultural affinity, etc.) as to why the South Pacific matters to New Zealand, with its long-term destiny lying in Asia. However, it has not presented any analytical evaluation on Wellington’s promising contribution to the Pacific Islands in terms of international

humanitarian assistance, by admitting that New Zealand is a global leader in the food safety field. In this connection, it may be mentioned that New Zealand’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working offshore, and they were involved in the deadliest 2004 Indian Ocean quake-triggered tsunami. The second essay, which is on the political developments and security issues in South Asia, has no relevance to New Zealand or the paradigm of India–New Zealand relations. Rather, it should have answered a crucial question whether India is really committed to materializing the vision of a dispute-free South Asia in order to wage a joint fight against poverty that the countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are confronting acutely.

Its fourth section indicates, “China seems to be cautious on major initiatives in the region and wants to continue to focus its efforts on great power relations and relations with surrounding countries” (p. 17). More explicitly, this section ferrets out the key objectives of rising China in the Asian region with a focus on the security dilemma in East Asia beyond the US–Japan Alliance. Again it is a question whether and how New Zealand’s “middle power” diplomacy matches the practice of “great power” politics in the Asia Pacific, especially when Wellington strongly tries to maintain its “independent” foreign policy. Nevertheless, the book has rightly mentioned, “Size alone means Delhi and Wellington will have different ambitions and a different approach to regional security issues” (p. 49). Rajaram Panda, who is basically a Japan expert, does not accordingly observe that Japan is at the heart of India’s “Look East” policy, granted that Japan is also a major import and export partner of New Zealand. Although the contributors’ discussions in this section have appropriateness for India to some extent, it has obviously no connection with New Zealand.

Furthermore, the fifth section dissects the most recent orientation of US policy toward the East Asian region under President Obama’s dispensation. But none of this section’s two episodes has demonstrated any analysis with regard to India or New Zealand. In this connection, the study has disregarded the fact that the European Union (EU) and New Zealand are

like-minded partners, and India's partnership with the EU on the toughest global issues is considered very important at the same time. Frankly, it was very boring to read this 15-page long section (pp. 126-140).

I was particularly disappointed with the last section that had dwelt on the bilateral issues. The first essay here with many "bullet points", which has been written by New Zealand's High Commissioner to India, lacks any analytical rigor or research precision. According to him, India has enormous potential sectors (mainly agribusiness and tourism) in New Zealand than New Zealand in India. He also believes in a truism that New Zealand is embarrassingly a late player but is trying to catch up lost ground in India, and the relationship between these two nations has developed through various gears over the last decade. Evidently, India is New Zealand's 13th largest export market, while India is New Zealand's 2nd largest and fastest-growing source of international students in addition to India's large diaspora community in New Zealand. Nonetheless, he has suggested that the onus is on both countries to move their mutual ties forward rapidly for increasing the tempo of engagement as well as for adding breath and depth to those points of involvement. But this diplomat said nothing about why New Zealand has yet been able to construct a cemented partnership with India, even though New Zealand is the world's most business-friendly country. The second essay by the book's second editor (Pankaj Jha), who has extensively written on terrorism in Southeast Asia, is neither thoughtfully researched nor properly organized. As he has given a long list of both conflicting issues and complementary areas of bilateral relations between India and New Zealand, he with only a 3-page (pp. 168-170) coverage on "Trade and Economic Relations" discussed that New Zealand had a weak record of attracting investment from India, while New Zealand also failed to enter India's huge consumer market and lucrative services industry. He has cited the following quotation by Anand Satyanand, Governor General of New Zealand (2006-2011), "New Zealand is very conscious of India's emergence as a nation of global significance and I was able to register the priority we attach to our relationship with India and our desire to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship" (p. 161). But he

could tell us how New Zealand as an alternative to Australia is perceived in India, because the Indians are most often interested in doing "cricket chat" about these two countries.

Anyway, the volume's most serious problem is that it possesses many overstatements with unrealistic optimisms. Any intelligent reader could simply ask why this book has been written, since there are countless volumes already available on alignment and realignment of the great powers in the Asia Pacific region. To be more specific, while the editors say "The book creates awareness about the developments in the periphery of the two countries and how the two nations are catering to the increasing demands of active participation at the global stage" (p. 19), they do not consider India's widely asymmetric relationship with New Zealand. Indeed, many scholars are not convinced how New Zealand, because of its powerlessness, particularly as a non-member of the G20 (Group of Twenty) major world economies, is able to actively play its role in building the greater Asia Pacific regional architecture let alone Wellington's ability to help reform the global governance system. Hence, it would have been purposeful if the editors had undertaken the approach of "bilateralism" in contrast to "multilateralism", by recognizing the relative merits of bilateralism in the process of "multifaceted" relationships between India and New Zealand. In short, this IDSA-endorsed publication, due to its bias for military and strategic studies, might not be qualified to deserve many curious readers' attention.

Even if we accept the editors' main thesis, it is still confusing whether India and New Zealand would be in a position to reap a considerable benefit from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)+6 (Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand), because the ASEAN+3 (Japan, China, and South Korea) is arguably more organized and effective than the ASEAN+6. When some further proposed that East Asia must strive for a single free trade agreement (FTA) based on the ASEAN+3, the inevitable question is how far a cohesive partnership between India and New Zealand "within" or "without" the EAS grouping could solve the "Emerging Challenges" (as the book's sub-title

stands) regionally and globally. Aside from that, the title of the book does not sound impressive. As the phrase Emerging Challenges has been used, it is vague what the editors have wanted to mean by the term “Emerging”, and whether the challenges are “global” and/or “local”. Indeed, the book has mostly covered traditional security issues facing the Asia-Pacific but not the region’s most pertinent “human security” agenda as part of non-traditional concerns. In addition to a number of omissions of fact, this volume is not richly structured with sufficient supporting documents. Seeing that it has several methodological shortcomings, this uncautiously edited book suffers from inconsistency in the stylistic presentation of reference sources with none in the Hindi language.

Lastly, the editors should have offered a chapter with overall conclusions by reviewing their study’s major themes and findings. I think that this publication would have been more appealing to us, if the editors had given their wise responses to the following important questions (at various levels) that still remained unanswered: (1) Global: How could New Zealand as the most peaceful country in the world be an exemplary role model for others, while India’s nuclear weapons threaten global peace and it continues to remain one of the Asia Pacific’s most terrorism-afflicted nations and dangerous places? (2) Multilateral: Is India’s international collective diplomacy really effective as it is still struggling hard to get a permanent membership at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), scrutinizing the evidence that New Zealand’s international image is still negatively affected by its involvement in the First World War? (3) Regional: Why is there an urgent necessity for India and New Zealand to come together in a sincere effort to resolve the most pressing sustainable development challenges in the South Pacific, viewing the fact that China is stepping up its courtship of Pacific island nations? (4) Bilateral: What are the practical ways for diversifying and deepening the mutual economic ties between New

Zealand and India, especially when Australia has made a “China Choice” in Canberra’s newly unveiled “Asian Century” slogan and also China intends to get even closer ties with New Zealand? (5) Local: What could India valuably learn from New Zealand as the world’s least corrupt country in some of its selective good governance domains, because India is today ranked 94th in the World Bank corruption index?

Regardless, the key goals of the project have somehow been accomplished. On the whole, the book is a veritable goldmine of information, and I have come across some unknown facts about today’s era of global interdependence and regional integration through capital flows from this compiled volume. In particular, I have learned how New Zealand despite its smallness (e.g., similar in size to Japan), geographic isolation from the vibrant world, as well as its principled and pragmatic diplomacy apart from cultural soft power strategy confronting the financial globalization catalysts has strengthened its links not only with India but also with Asia as a whole. The work at the same time has showcased how India with its increasing economy, which has consistently emerged from the global recession beyond the country’s growing geopolitical weight, has expanded its openness to the rest of the world. In the world of scholarly publishing, there are actually very few books on the similar title. But when this title (edited by two experienced researchers at IDSA together with some noted persons from both India and New Zealand) is compared with those publications, it offers a rigorous and apparent perspective on the subject. Very briefly, it not only helps bridge the understanding gap between the Indians and the New Zealanders, but also helps facilitate connections between the two continents. By doing so, this volume on such a concurrent and fascinating topic will definitely contribute to the understudied body of works in international relations, global political economy, regional multilateralism, Asian Pacific studies, and so forth. Audiences whom I believe might benefit from reading the book include postgraduate students, university teachers, foreign policymakers, as well as other relevant stakeholders.