

BOOK REVIEW

PAKISTAN IN THE CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

*Dr. Shahid Bashir**

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Pakistan in the Contemporary International System with Special Reference to Eurasia and Afghanistan</i>
<i>Author</i>	<i>Ali Shah</i>
<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Institute of Policy Studies, NUST, Islamabad</i>
<i>Year of Publication</i>	<i>2020</i>

The book under review offers an unparalleled account and unique glimpses of the nature and configuration of balance of power in the contextual imperatives of Eurasia and Afghanistan, to the policymakers of Pakistan. Ali Syed, very scientifically, cross examines the genesis and perspectives of Pakistan's foreign policy frameworks with special reference to Eurasia and Afghanistan. He is well conversant with the contemporary methods of inquiry and research and has pedagogic approach. 'Introduction' of the book as well as 'Afterwards' cover conceptual aspects. The writer, through his truncated analysis gives compelling insight, geopolitical prognostication and analysis of decisive events of the past which were responsible for the genesis of structural changes in Eurasia and Central Asia.

The book has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter divides great powers into active and passive powers. It highlights that traditional division of powers into great, regional or middle and small is valid but it does not give deep insight to understand the forces of change which are restructuring the international political system. The main thrust of the argument is that, by understanding the convergences and divergences between great powers coupled

*Dr. Shahid Bashir is Director of Studies, Pakistan Military Academy Kakul, Abbottabad.

with their degree of national interest attached to the medium and small size states will reveal the nature of their relationship with medium/small states. Medium and small states are only used by great powers to promote their own interests as they most of the time have no “reverse influence” on big powers.

The chapter “Major Geopolitical Dyads of Eurasia” explains unique geographical features of South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia and their relevance to the peace and tranquility to the Eurasian region. Major cause of stability in Eurasian region, in author’s view, is contemporary strategic convergence between China and Russia. As the existing drivers of Eurasian states have different magnitudes, the policymakers of Pakistan while dealing this region must be objective in the decision making processes. If the policy choices developed and policy options availed at domestic, regional and international level are correct, the state of Pakistan can emerge as a great power.

In the third chapter the author notes that precipitated historical nexus between Indo-Afghan governments will remain a continued challenge and major cause of divergence and competition between Islamabad and Kabul. On the question of political economy of Pakistan’s imbalances, the author advises that Pakistan must reduce dependence on external loans and should start indigenization, which if not addressed may harm long term development of Pakistan including China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The chapter, “The Calculus of Pakistan’s Political Economy” makes an appraisal of challenges and opportunities for Pakistan in Eurasian region and China. The main thrust of the argument is that without having precipitated strong relations with China, Pakistan cannot get maximum benefits from both the corridors i.e. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC. The Chinese concept of ‘interconnected development’ has been proposed as a conceptual framework to give measured response to the challenges which Pakistan may face to promote its national interests in Afghanistan and beyond. Further, the author is of the view that apart from détente, sound rapprochement with Russia is need of the time. Good relations with Russia and China will help Pakistan to have strong footing in Central Asian and Eurasian region.

In nutshell, the author has detected three areas of convergence, i.e. economy, trade and education where Pakistan can cooperate with this region. Further, he considers that future direction of bilateral interaction should witness

mutual recognition of each others' limitations in the short, medium and long term cooperation.

In order to substantiate economic conceptual aspects, the author has detected ten weaknesses and eleven strengths of Pakistan. For economic uplift, regional cooperation is pivotal to capitalize upon the untapped potential of the region. The author argues, the geographical triangular contiguity of Central Asia, South Asia and Middle East is unique and it permits the policymakers to unlock the economic potentials of above said regions. Pakistan is the pivotal state of 21st century. Three contemporary world powers i.e. US, China and Russia are trying to influence Pakistan as it occupies a central place in their policies. If the variables i.e. Pakistan's geographical location near 'Strait of Hormuz', CPEC, triangular contiguity with Central Asia, South Asia and Middle East, nuclear power and population, are managed well, Pakistan can emerge as great power.

Finally, the author has cross examined the place of Pakistan in the contemporary international political system and has put the intellectuals of social sciences on new path of intellectual transformation. The book is highly useful for foreign policy practitioners, media managers and narrative builders as well as for academicians. This research work will stimulate the minds of experts to develop alternate model of change for Southwest Asia, Central Asia and Eurasia. The topic chosen is unique and timely and no par excellent work exists in the realm of research focusing in these areas.