

Book Review
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Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and Sino-Indian War* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2015) 231.

JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, The CIA, And Sino-Indian War by Bruce Riedel is a comprehensive piece of history which provides perspective on the 1962 Sino-Indian war and the crisis it had unleashed. Bruce Riedel is a 30-year veteran of the CIA, and has served as an adviser to four US presidents on US foreign policy, including President Barack Obama. Riedel is an outstanding scholar of both the Middle East and South Asia. He puts Sino-Indian war back in focus which had been overshadowed by Cuban Missile Crisis. Along with that, the book explores the forgotten role of CIA in Tibet. In October 1962, Kennedy had to deal with both the Cuban Missile Crisis and a war between China and India. After almost half century, the Sino-Indian crisis has developed its own legacy including the border dispute and growing arms race. Bruce Riedel argues that Sino-Indian war had as much impact on US policy as the Cuban Crisis.

JFK's administration is mostly remembered with reference to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Times were tougher for JFK when he took over as president because of the Bay of Pigs disaster in Cuba, which took place soon after he took office. It was inarguably a huge success, when he was able to force removal of Soviet nuclear missiles from Cuba. Meanwhile, the South Asian pot was still boiling. The iconic success in Cuba has screened from the public eye the fact that JFK also had a deep interest in South Asia particularly India, in the context of China as a growing power.

The author illustrates Kennedy's interest in India by his decision to send Averell Harriman as a special envoy to India. Riedel calls Harriman "an icon of American diplomacy" because of the role he played, in London in 1941, during the Battle of Britain where he was sent by Roosevelt. He was also chief negotiator with the North Vietnamese at the Paris peace talks. Riedel convincingly draws the conclusion that sending Harriman during the Sino-Indian crisis was significant in terms of Kennedy's interest in resolving it.

The US ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith also played an important role during Sino-Indian war. While Kennedy was deeply involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis, he placed great trust in Galbraith's judgments with regard to American policy towards India. Galbraith directly communicated with the president without the involvement of the State Department. It was Galbraith who urged a quick response resulting in airlift of military equipment and dispatch of carrier battle group to Bay of Bengal which signaled to the Chinese that the Americans might actually intervene militarily to rescue India and they were therefore deterred from further escalation, according to Riedel. Galbraith openly opposed the CIA's covert operations to train Tibetans in the US and drop them back by parachutes using Pakistan's airports, calling it an insane enterprise. Later, it was Galbraith again, who facilitated the joint Indo-American clandestine operations to recruit and train Tibetans in India to revitalize the Tibetan force in Mustang in Nepal.

The book explores the role of individual's efforts and the input that they provide to shape policies. For instance Nehru's political understanding and the differences between Eisenhower and Kennedy have something to tell about how it affected the relationship between America and India.

Riedel gives an interesting account of how close the US and India came to what might even have resulted into a military alliance. The book provides a detailed background how Kennedy and Nehru, were brought closer by their country's interests to work together in the wake of the Sino-Indian war in 1962.

Riedel also rationalizes Kennedy's support to India and claims that, had PLA not decided to withdraw from Indian Territory in 1962, Kennedy would have accepted Nehru's request for the US Air Force to send fighter aircraft to defend Indian airspace.

Riedel argues that it was Chinese invasion which brought the Americans and the Indian to work together in Tibet which was greatly disliked by the Chinese.

Riedel's book is myth busting in many ways. One of which is a widely held view in academia, common discourse and TV talk shows, that Pakistan was never promised by the US to be consulted before providing military aid to India. The author confirms what the Pakistani officials have been saying for years that the US had promised to consult Pakistan before giving military equipment to India even if attacked by China. The second myth busted by Riedel's book is regarding impeccability of India's non-aligned stance. Pakistan, has been much maligned by India for joining US led security arrangements, SEATO and CENTO. When India itself faced the threat from China, Nehru

didn't hesitate to ask for US military support. His secret letters to Kennedy, which were also mentioned by Altaf Gouhar in his biography of Ayub Khan (Gauhar,1993), and have since been declassified, were extensively consulted by Riedel. Nehru had not only asked for military equipment from the US but also US military forces to fight against China. In his second letter Nehru requested for "some 350 combat aircraft and crews: twelve squadrons of aircraft with twenty-four jets in each and two bomber squadrons. At least 10,000 personnel to staff and operate the jets, radar and logistical support for the operations" (Page 138). Since Pakistani government was focused on threat from India, Ayub Khan felt that the United States' help to India would result in developing a stronger Indian military which it would use against Pakistan. This led Pakistan to look for more reliable allies against a more powerful enemy. Riedel explains that that was the time when Pakistan had started drifting towards the Chinese. He goes on to argue that the geopolitical alignment created by the Sino-Indian War was the single event which continues to affect South Asian political setting to date.

Riedel's book has numerous insider accounts about personalities involved in geopolitics at that time, from the White House to Indian government and their Pakistani counterparts as well as the Chinese. These details at times, make the book's narrative a little plodding but also helps us understand the individual's thinking and behavior and how it affected the crisis.

Riedel's book emphasizes the crisis management skills of a president who brilliantly performed to avert a crisis which had potential catastrophic consequences despite military experts pushing him to take action in Cuba. Against this approach he allowed experts on India more independence of action and delegated them authority to signal America's intent to China. Riedel's book being an account of war from a different perspective makes it an interesting read. The account of war, diplomacy, CIA's covert operations, and acts of espionage all at the same time with an exclusive focus on Sino-Indian situation help the readers to have an inside account of JFK's forgotten crisis.

The book also highlights particularly Galbraith's unwillingness to bring up Kashmir issue during the Sino-Indian war and President Kennedy's inability to persuade Jawahar Lal Nehru to settle it with Pakistan.

The author's writing style is simple and engaging. His ability to put problems in simple language helps the reader easily understand complicated diplomatic issues. The sources of Riedel's information and analysis contain the declassified letters of Kennedy, first hand personal accounts from the diaries and memoirs

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of the people directly involved in the crises which makes 'JFK's Forgotten Crisis' an authentic source of information.

The author could, however, have paid more attention to detail. In the prologue of the book, he mentions Gen. Ayub Khan's daughter's name as Begum Nasir Akhtar Aurangzeb. Her name actually was Begum Nasim Aurangzeb. An error which could have been avoided by the author.

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