

**Book Review  
By  
SAMRAN ALI**

**Chris Ogden ed. *New South Asian Security: Six Core Relations Underpinning Regional Security* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016)**

*New South Asian Security: Six Core Relations Underpinning Regional Security* is an edited volume on South Asian security by Chris Ogden. Six chapters are written by eminent scholars with an introduction by the editor. They include discussion of different aspects of bilateral relations of the South Asian states. Separate chapters cover the bilateral relations between China-India, Pakistan-Afghanistan, India-Pakistan, China-Afghanistan, China-Pakistan and India-Afghanistan. The book's introduction explains its approach to understanding South Asian security problems. Chris Ogden takes a new approach to understand the security dynamics and challenges in South Asia. It pursues the constructivists ideas of identity and norms and eschews comparison with liberal ideas of economic cooperation, multilateralism and to some extent the realist ideas of treating 'states as identical black boxes'. Instead of discussing specific issues, such as nuclear deterrence, security, terrorism and external perspectives on these issues, the author takes the region as 'co-dependent entity.' Relations between the regional powers China, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan are discussed as factors that impact the regional security. These four countries are further placed on the rise and fall spectrum i.e. China and India are dubbed as rising powers and Pakistan and Afghanistan as failing states. It tries to show through a state focused and state driven approaches, that 'security in South Asia is highly inter-connected and co-dependent in terms of provenance and orientation' and focuses on interaction among these four states through the interplay of norms under political, physical and security dimensions.

The first chapter, by David Scott discusses the norms, perceptions and how geo-politics plays out in the China-India relations, finds norms convergence between the two adversaries as both subscribe to respect for state sovereignty, principles of peaceful coexistence as well as global institutions at which states are represented. Both the states have shown clear intent of cooperating on the issues of stability of Sea Lines of Communication, climate change and international economic framework. But China and India have competing political objectives as well as national psyches driven by 'Hindutva' and 'China Dream' respectively. Also, at the regional level, geo-politics comes into play and hence the divergence, be it the border issue or Pak-China relations. However, Scott's focus on India's security concerns due to its geographical proximity with China appears exaggerated. He highlights threat posed to India by Chinese military developments and cooperation with regional states. The norm of trade is a converging point between India and China. Both are taking their economic cooperation further. But presently balance of trade is largely in China's favor.

The second chapter is on the Pakistan and Afghanistan, which the author terms cousin rivalry. Michael Semple in this chapter, points out that there is a 'far higher degree of convergence in the publicly articulated norms than two states' practice.' Historically, Afghan policy towards Pakistan is rooted in the contested Durand Line, Pakhtunistan issue and support to armed groups operating in both countries. During the initial decades after partition, Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan had been 'defensive.' The security, diplomatic, administrative, political and economic measures by Pakistan took many decades to tackle the Pakhtunistan issue. Pakistan shifted from 'close frontier policy' to 'forward policy' in dealing with threats from Afghanistan. Semple argues that Afghan Saur revolution had weakened Afghanistan, while Pakistan grew both politically and militarily during this period, enabling the later to influence events in the former. Therefore, the Taliban were 'least bad alternative to Pakistan'. He rightly points out India as a

significant element in Pak-Afghan bilateral relations and links lasting progress in their bilateral relations only when 'Pakistan sees no threats from Indo-Afghan relationship.'

The third chapter by Runa Das argues that 'Pakistan-India's historically driven norms have created a political-ideological context, within which have unfolded the re-construction of Pakistan-India's security affairs.' She divides Indo-Pak relations into five phases. The first phase marked India and Pakistan as geo-culturally/politically (Secular vs Islamic) 'incompatible states' thus defined their 'mutual insecurity profiles.' Indian Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNE) and later nuclear pursuit by Pakistan, in the backdrop of 1971 War, dominated and directed the later phases of India-Pakistan relations. The 1998 nuclear tests by both South Asian states led to further consolidating their norms of Self/Other national identities. Post-testing period led expansion of nuclear weapons and institutionalization of Indo-Pak nuclear doctrines. 9/11 ushered a new phase in Pakistan's relations with India, which is termed as 'no peace no war'. The future directions of Indo-Pakistan security relations will depend on how both use 'US-China cards.'

In fourth chapter, Jingdong Yuan discusses the once limited but now growing China-Afghan relations. Uncertainty in Afghanistan and opportunities for development bring both China and Afghanistan together. China fears militancy from Afghanistan spilling to its Xinjiang region and threats to its investments which it has made in Afghanistan in the last few years. The norms of non-interference and peaceful coexistence dictate the Chinese policy towards Afghanistan. China has rejected any military options in Afghanistan and instead focuses on the dialogue and social development. It has made contacts with several militant groups within Afghanistan, in author's opinion, to influence them to join the national reconciliation process. After a long war and ISAF withdrawal, Kabul is seeking a 'foreign policy that balances between major powers but,

sees a greater role for China.’ Similarly, China’s Afghanistan policy is showing signs of adjustments from ‘caution to greater involvement.’

Andrew Small in the fifth chapter, points out that there are not many normative associations between Pakistan-China ties. Both differ in political systems, international status and cultural mores. Despite these divergence, their relationship has been resilient, reliable and consistent. The existence of a common rival in India has created a ‘bond and pattern of cooperation’ which is itself a ‘powerful norm.’ He goes on to argue that as Beijing is well on the road to becoming a great military and economic power, it finds in Pakistan the most ‘trusted partner.’ Historically the Sino-Indian 1962 War and Indo-Pakistani 1965 War played a major role in cementing this ‘all weather friendship’. India’s war with China made India wake up to the possibility of a two-front war in future. It also led Pakistan and China to resolve their border issues in 1963. During 1971 War China provided military and economic aid to Pakistan. The other areas of cooperation have been in the field of the peaceful use of nuclear technology and dealing with threats of extremism in China’s Xinjiang province. China still relies heavily on Pakistan for political settlement in Afghanistan and stability in South Asia.

In the sixth and final chapter, Avinash Paliwal and Harsh V. Pant search normative sources of Indo-Afghan bilateral relationship. They identify ‘democracy, tolerance and territorial integrity’ as a base for stable Indo-Afghan relations. However Indian engagement in Afghanistan also elicits ‘great game’ analogy which seeks ‘material interests, managing security threats and waging proxy war against Pakistan.’ Both India and Pakistan inherited British security legacies along with their borders with China and Afghanistan respectively. India develop a non-intrusive vision on Afghanistan, which was opposite to Pakistan’s view on Afghanistan (discussed in second chapter). In the initial years after its

independence, India supported 'socialist ideologies' and enjoyed warm ties with socialist groups in Afghanistan. Today India enjoys strong relationship with Kabul mainly because it supported the Northern-Alliance, who have hold on power in Kabul now, during the Jihad against the Russian Forces. Kabul also seeks Indian 'political and psychological support' due to 'political convergences.' The authors also mention cultural affinity an area of convergence between them, but this assertion would not be supported if closely scrutinized. Afghans have greater affinity with Pakhtuns living in Pakistan.

In concluding part, it is argued that it is the 'norm of trade and development' that is desired by all regional states including Afghanistan and Pakistan. But there are 'more negative strains permeating their bilateral relations.' these include border issues and activities of non-state actors. India and China, in author's opinion, ought to determine their own strategies as both are best placed to promote stability in their neighborhood. Chris proposes a 'Council of Neighbors' framework for stabilizing Afghanistan. Alternatively, SCO can also act as a suitable platform for regional cooperation.

Although, the authors have tried to cover all aspects in detail, but few things require more discussion. In first chapter, David Scott discussion of Indo-US strategic partnership appears superficial. Without taking into account the deeper implications of US influence in the region, the discussion of Chinese and Indian security relations is less fulfilling. In the sixth chapter the Indian role in Afghanistan is largely discussed under the norms of democracy and non-interference, ignoring Indian role in supporting insurgents operating from Afghanistan against Pakistan. As far the labeling Pakistan as failing state is concerned, the book was written and researched before 2016, since then much has changed in Pakistan. It has overcome the challenges of terrorism and instability to a great extent in the last three years. Overall, the book is a good addition to

literature on bilateral relations between six countries and an important contribution to understanding norms and identities factoring these relations. The reader gets the sense of history, future trajectory, commonalities and differences of their bilateral relations. The language of the book is academic and scholarly and sometimes complex.

*Samran Ali is a  
Research Assistant at CISS*