

Book Review

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*How can India balance the Pakistan-China Nexus, edited by Rajesh Bhaskar, National Book Trust
India, January 2022, Pp.186, paperback edition*

“When it comes to Pakistan, the first word that comes to the mind of the Chinese is ‘iron brother’. To us Chinese, Pakistan is always a trustworthy friend who is as solid as iron.”

— **Li Keqiang**

Pakistan and China have professed to the world their long-standing & all-weather friendship. The bonhomie has, in the recent past, developed into a strategic nexus between the two, with geopolitical ramifications. This relationship has continued to grow since the 1960s furthering China’s strategic interests in the region while fulfilling Pakistan’s defence needs and the requirement for diplomatic support internationally.

This book studies the contours of the nexus between Pakistan and China and its effects on India. The book focuses on the various measures across the spectrum of local, regional and global engagement that India can take to balance and counter the effects of the strategic nexus.

The book is in three main parts. Part 1 deals with the collusion between China and Pakistan; Part 2 highlights the effects of the Pakistan-China collusion; and Part 3 brings out the various measures that can be taken to balance and counter the collusion.

The central theme of the book revolves around India's rise to regional and global power is synchronous with its growing economy and soft power internationally. In this Journey, India has had to counter two antagonists- Pakistan and China. Each of the antagonists has, time and time again, put India under duress through acts of war, simmering tensions along border areas and pursuing policies detrimental to India's interests. Both Pakistan and China have found in each other a perfect partner with the singular interest of stymying India and have thus colluded to perpetuate their aim.

In the context of the effects of the Pakistan-China collusion on India, The author argues prior to drifting away from India's neighbours towards China, it was India's geostrategic location and economy that gave it the advantage in the region. With China's economic rise and military strength increasing, it is but a natural shift of nations towards China. Thus, the long term solution to India is to ensure economic growth and to build matching military strength. However, in the short and medium term, India can leverage its strength through strategic partnerships to stem the rise and influence of China in the region. With China focussing on trade, energy security and containing Islamic influence in Xinjiang along with strengthening its military, India can look at these very aspects to upset the rise of China while leveraging the goodwill it has to ensure its own rise.

The author suggests in order to counter the Pakistan-China Nexus, India has to stress upon the factors that can spike the problems in the Pakistan-China relationship. For that, the author describes diplomacy as an important tool as a part of "Comprehensive National Power" (CNP), and it can be leveraged to play an important part in countering China, Pakistan and the nexus between the two. Both Pakistan and China have international compulsions which can be brought to bear on them via other countries or organisations of countries to benefit India. India will have to ensure that it continues to maintain friendly relations with these countries and organisations so that they are receptive to India's demands and sensitivities. India must leverage its soft power to diplomatically solve issues, which can cost her dearly in terms of growth and economy if the issue escalates to the military domain.

This book gives a comparative analysis of India and China in terms of economy, differential levels of development in China and India, the financial measures adopted by their governments from time to

time and the pressure points to maintain peace for India, for example- Tibet, Balochistan, Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), Durand Line.

Moreover, the book gives an interesting analogy of India's Foreign policy. The best India can hope to do is to deter China from engaging in military aggression. It is India's national aim to achieve economic development without compromising its security and strategic autonomy. To this end India must avoid war to enable India to achieve its aim of economic development. This is only possible with an assertive militarily backed diplomacy.

While delving deep into the complex tapestry of India, China and Pakistan interactions, the author skillfully navigates the geopolitical landscape, offering readers an enjoyable and nuanced understanding of our neighbours.