



Book Review

Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 359 pages, ISBN 9780230242159, Price 72,99€.

For 17 years Jawaharlal Nehru served as the first prime minister of newly independent India. Being one of the most prominent figures in India's history, a large number of books have been written on Jawaharlal Nehru's life and his political rule. Raghavan's *War and Peace in Modern India* falls within the second category and presents a historical study of Nehru's foreign policy, "concentrating on matters most related to the fundamental questions of war and peace" (p.3). A former Indian army officer who obtained his Ph.D. from the renowned Department of War Studies at King's College, London, Raghavan is indeed a very suitable candidate for this endeavour. Through skilful use of untapped archival material located both within and outside India, Raghavan reconstructs crucial events in the aftermath of India's independence with the aim to understand Nehru's crisis management and foreign policy strategies. Giftedly recreating the intellectual and political environment of the Indian political policy establishment at the time, Raghavan shows how Nehru's key advisors helped in shaping and implementing his foreign policy in the wake of crises.

Focusing on the period from 1947 until 1962, Raghavan examines and compares seven key crisis situations Nehru faced as prime minister of a new state that came into being amid the bloodiest partition in history: the disputes over the accession of the princely states of Junagadh in 1947, Hyderabad in 1947-1948, and Kashmir both in 1947-1948 as well as post-1951; the refugee crisis in East and West Bengal in 1950 and resulting tensions with Pakistan; and, finally, the border dispute with China from 1948-1960 and the Sino-Indian war in 1962. Criticising common accounts of these events as failing to take into account the particular political and historical context in which they occurred, Raghavan compellingly illustrates how they would have appeared at the time and reveals the rationale behind Nehru's strategic choices, influenced not only by ground realities but also by his own political ideology.



Presenting them as interlinked rather than separate events, Raghavan compellingly draws out the ways in which lessons learned during each crisis influenced the handling of subsequent ones.

The book is divided into eight chapters and begins with a brief outline of Nehru's personality and his political ideals shaped by liberal realism and coupled with an aspiration to create a distinctive international personality for India – the latter most commonly associated with his non-alignment policy during the Cold War. Though being profoundly influenced by Gandhi and having been a key member of the non-violent movement that led India into independence, Nehru was also influenced by realist thinkers and their belief that the use of force was an unavoidable element in the relations between states. As Raghavan points out, in contrast to Gandhi, Nehru had an instrumental understanding of non-violence as a limited policy and method for the achievement for certain ends. Yet, Nehru "constantly recoiled at the prospect of war and sought to minimise the possibility of escalation to full-scale hostilities" (p. 19). In reference to Nehru's autobiography of 1936, Raghavan shows how this very mixture of liberal values and realist outlook made Nehru follow coercive rather than consensual or controlling strategies in his foreign policy. These coercive strategies were characterised by the willingness to use force with the purpose to build up pressure on the opponent and influence his range of choices and actions.

In a detailed analysis, Raghavan in the subsequent chapters outlines the major dilemmas Nehru faced when dealing with the evolving crises in the three princely states of Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir that had to decide their political status in the aftermath of British colonial rule. As Raghavan points out, the decisions of the princely states with their important geopolitical location were not only of high significance, but inherently interlinked as the response of one state would have consequences on the others. Matters were complicated due to the particular political make-up and demographics of these princely states: While in Junagadh and Hyderabad a Muslim king ruled over a Hindu majority population, in Kashmir, it was the other way round. Nehru, who emphasised the importance of taking into account the wishes of the population, repeatedly urged for referenda to be held in Junagadh, Hyderabad, and Kashmir. This was, however, not in line with either the general position of the ruling Congress party or Jinnah, who was Pakistan's first Governor General at the time. The Congress favoured accession of the princely states to India, with powers over defence, foreign affairs and



communication to be held by the Centre in Delhi. Jinnah, on the other hand, promoted either their accession to Pakistan or full independence. It was within this context that Nehru had to manoeuvre for a resolution of the crises.

The Junagadh crisis was the first international crisis the Indian government was confronted with. When Junagadh decided to accede to Pakistan, the Indian government responded with the deployment of the military at the state's borders. However, Nehru sought to avoid armed confrontation and used all diplomatic channels at hand to resolve the crisis peacefully. When the besieged government of Junagadh invited India to take over the administration, a referendum was held and the crises ended without an escalation into war. As Raghavan argues the Junagadh crisis "showcased themes that would recur" such as Nehru's concerns about domestic opinion, his attention to the stance of external powers and international norms, and his concern of the vulnerability of Muslims in India (p. 64). As such, it fashioned Nehru's stance towards both Hyderabad and Kashmir as well as having long-term effects on his approach to crisis management, which came to be characterised by attempts to control the situation to prevent further escalation, deploy the military to demonstrate resolve, and at the same time explore diplomatic options to avoid full-scale armed confrontation.

The situation in Hyderabad was somehow different. Unlike Junagadh, Hyderabad opted for independence, unwilling to join either India or Pakistan. After unsuccessful rounds of negotiation that also involved issues concerning Kashmir and Junagadh, in 1948 the Government of India launched Operation Polo and Hyderabad's forces surrendered within five days, resulting in the merger of Hyderabad into India. Describing the diplomatic negotiations between India, Pakistan, Britain, and Hyderabad, Raghavan finds, however, that: "The Hyderabad crisis demonstrated the limits to the exercise of power and the need for ever more circumspection" (p. 100). In light of violence against Muslims in the wake of India's annexation, the Hyderabad crisis reinforced Nehru's concerns about communal relations in the subcontinent. The acknowledgement of the limits of the use of force and the adverse effects it could have on communal relations ultimately shaped Nehru's response to the Bengal crisis of 1950, as elaborated later in the book.

Though being extensively studied both by scholars as well as policy-makers, and despite early UN involvement, the Kashmir crisis prevails to this date. Both now and then the Kashmir crisis involved a combina-



tion of geopolitical and ideological interests of India as well as Pakistan. In 1947, Pakistani groups entered Kashmir with the aim to liberate the majority Muslim population from the Hindu rule. Unable to defend the princely state from invasion, the Maharaja of Kashmir signed the Instrument of Accession to India to gain India's military support. The situation escalated and resulted in the First Indo-Pakistani War that lasted until 1948 and ended when India took the issue to the UN Security Council. In analysing the events of 1947-1948 and post-1951, Raghavan's focuses on the question to what extent the Kashmir crisis shaped Nehru's political thinking and foreign policy. He convincingly shows how the experience with Kashmir and the first Indo-Pakistani War reinforced Nehru's preference for the limited use of force or threats of force and his favouring of coercive over-controlling strategies in his foreign policy. According to Raghavan it is this strategy that not only shaped Nehru's approach towards the Bengal crisis of 1950 and Indian defence policy towards Kashmir post-1950s, but has become the cornerstone of India's policy in relation to Kashmir ever since.

The book's most original chapter deals with the 1950 Bengal refugee crisis that almost resulted in another war between India and Pakistan and that has largely been ignored in the literature. For Raghavan, the Bengal crisis is instrumental for understanding Nehru's crisis management strategy that combined the adherence to idealist values with a realist assessment and understanding of the situation. When Hindu refugees came in large numbers from then East Pakistan to West Bengal, communal tensions heightened. Though there was widespread domestic pressure on Nehru to go to war against Pakistan to protect the Hindu minority in East Pakistan, Nehru was convinced that the use of force would only intensify inter-communal tensions and would not make any strategic sense. As Raghavan shows, his concern about inter-communal relations made Nehru opt for coercive diplomacy, as previously applied in the case of Kashmir.

In response to the growing communal tensions, Nehru proposed to the then Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan an Indo-Pak joint enquiry, which was however met with reluctance by Liaquat Ali Khan. Both back-channel diplomacy involving the British and Americans as well as pressure from the Indian government failed. Yet, as Raghavan points out, Nehru's persistence in resisting the pressure to use force and his continuous diplomatic efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict ultimately resulted in the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact. This



Pact presented an important diplomatic breakthrough and led to a de-escalation of the situation. The successful handling of this crisis consolidated Nehru's crisis management approach – to balance domestic and international pressures and to combine military and diplomatic means. The same coercive strategy was subsequently, though less successfully, applied in Nehru's handling of the border dispute with China.

In his discussion of Nehru's handling of the border dispute with China in the final chapter, Raghavan reveals Nehru's failure in interpreting political developments at the international level that ultimately led to India's defeat in the Sino-Indian war of 1962. Particularly, he failed to adequately assess the importance of the China-Soviet détente and to foresee Chinese course of actions in 1962. Contrasting domestic opinion with Nehru's own view of international politics, Raghavan explains the motivation behind India's forward policy in the North Eastern Frontier Areas that involved the placing of outposts along the border and the reasons behind India's military defeat in 1962. Nehru's handling of the China crisis, Raghavan argues, was influenced by his experiences from the management of previous crises. Erroneously, he believed the same strategy would resolve the dispute in India's favour, without having to resort to the actual use of force. However, India was defeated by China and the crisis of 1962 led India to enhance its military capabilities and resulted in India's military dominance in South Asia.

In his original analysis of Nehru's crisis management in the aftermath of independence, Raghavan goes beyond the prevailing polarising accounts of traditionalist and revisionist scholars of Indian history. According to traditionalist historians, Nehru was a naive idealist whose policies on Kashmir and China were "flaccid and inept" (p. 2), responsible for the persistence of conflict in both cases. Revisionist historians, on the other hand, depict him as "a mindless and arrogant hardliner" (p. 2) who was all too ready to use force in handling these crises. Both accounts criticise the lack of realism in Nehru's foreign policy. Raghavan challenges these two competing accounts, arguing that it was the combination of liberalism and realism that shaped Nehru's sophisticated crisis management strategy. This strategy relied heavily on the ability to understand the roots of each crisis, the evaluation of the interests of all concerned, and the options available to them. Placing it within the framework of strategic analysis, the author argues that the mixture "[...] of liberal values and realist outlook predisposed Nehru to favour coercive rather than controlling strategies" (p. 19).



Raghavan's attempt to theorise Nehru's foreign policy is an important contribution to both the disciplines of history and international relations. Thereby, a conceptual framework of how actors make strategic choices guides the analysis throughout the book. Following a widely used classification of the various ways of exercising power in the Social Sciences, Raghavan distinguishes between consensual, controlling, and coercive strategies, whereby "[...] the difference lies in the degree of choice available to the adversary" (p. 6). Nehru's liberal realism, Raghavan argues, made him favour coercive strategies involving threats of force or the limited use of force against opponents rather than consensual strategies not including any force or controlling strategies involving the overwhelming use of force.

Unfortunately, the discussion of the conceptual framework remains rather short and the book lacks an in-depth discussion of the relevant literature in international relations and strategic studies with its heterogeneous body of literature and positions. In international relations theory, liberal realism presents a fusion of two key schools of thought, namely realism and idealism, and has its origins in Greek and Roman political thought (Drinkwater 2005). Today, liberal realism is generally associated with the so-called constructivist English School that follows the Grotian tradition to seek a middle way between power politics (realism) and utopian idealist (liberalism) (Wight 1977; Bull 1977). Reference to these key concepts of international relations theory and belief systems behind them would have strengthened the theoretical weight of the book. Likewise, Raghavan's discussion of liberal realism does not engage with recent scholarly debates in international relations that problematise assumptions about the very dichotomy of 'liberal' and 'realist' traditions (Pettman 2008; Herz 1981). The same applies to his determination of consensual, controlling, and coercive strategies in foreign policy. Considering the fundamental role of the conceptual framework for the analysis and findings of the book, further engagement with the relevant literature and justification for the use of the particular conceptual framework would have been necessary. This lack of theoretical reflection is present throughout the book, which no doubt makes a superb use of archival sources and provides a detailed account of each crisis, but fails to theorise the findings accordingly. In failing to do so, Raghavan misses an opportunity to contribute to international relations theory.

On a different level, the very selection of cases requires further jus-



tification to avert a selection bias that distorts the research findings. For instance, while it is not questioned here that both the Congo and the Goa crises present rather different cases, their ruling out is insufficiently justified. Including other cases could have either supported Raghavan's argument or called into question any generalisations and consistency of Nehru's crisis management approach.

None of this critique, however, lessens the value of Raghavan's book, which presents an excellent historical account of Nehru's strategy and foreign policy in the initial years after independence. The book successfully illuminates the rationale behind the strategic choices that Nehru undertook as the first prime minister of independent India, highlighting his "willingness to communicate with adversaries and search for acceptable compromises" (p. 314). By offering a brilliant account of the events and experiences that shaped Nehru's strategic thinking and approach to crisis management, it offers a constructive contribution to the growing literature on the making of India's foreign policy. Most importantly, *War and Peace in Modern India* calls into question the dominating and polarising accounts of Nehru's foreign policy that portray him either as a naive idealist or ruthless realist. In a balanced and professional analysis, Raghavan reconciles these extreme positions and shows how Nehru himself was torn between ideology and realism. In Raghavan's view, what is striking is not the occurrence of crises, nor the use of force, but the fact that only few of them escalated into war. Thus, Raghavan emphasises Nehru's achievement to avoid war without jeopardising India's core interests.

The book, with novel and thought provoking content, provides an important insight into the strategic thinking and crisis management choices that Nehru adopted in response to a number of crises that easily could have destabilised the entire region. In light of on-going crises in the Subcontinent and the legacies of Nehru's foreign policy in modern India, the book's original findings are of particular interest and high relevance to historians and scholars and students of international relations and politics alike.

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