

POLITICS

CRITICAL ISSUES IN INDIAN

INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

A Reader

edited by

Kanti P. Bajpai and Harsh V. Pant



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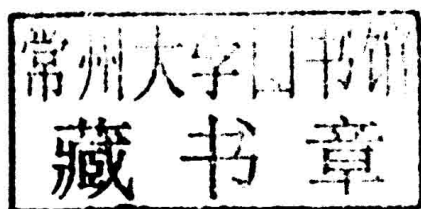
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Critical Issues in Indian Politics

General Editors

FRANCINE R. FRANKEL, ZOYA HASAN, AND KANTI P. BAJPAI

Critical Issues in Indian Politics is a series dealing with decisive events, processes, and institutions in Indian politics. It focuses on the ideas, events, decisions, and social forces, which underlie key debates and complex changes that have transformed India in the past two decades. The volumes serve both as unique introductions and comprehensive discussions aimed at undergraduate and graduate students in India and abroad who specialize in South Asian and comparative politics. They will also interest advanced researchers and scholars in the field, policymakers, and informed general readers.

Francine R. Frankel is Professor of Political Science and South Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and Founding Director of Penn's Center for the Advanced Study of India.

Zoya Hasan is Professor of Political Science at the Centre for Political Studies and former Dean of the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Kanti P. Bajpai is Professor and Vice Dean Research at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

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Introduction

KANTI P. BAJPAI AND HARSH V. PANT

In November 2008, Mumbai, the financial capital of India, was struck by terrorists who, as Indian (as well as American and British) intelligence later confirmed had been trained by the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, or Army of the Pure.¹ Given the sophistication of planning and execution and the physical evidence that came to light, it was clear enough that the operation had been planned in Pakistan. Although India concluded that the new civilian administration of President Asif Ali Zardari was probably not behind the outrage, elements of the army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) were seen as the main culprit.² Public outcry in India after the Mumbai attacks was strong enough for the government to consider retaliating militarily against Pakistan. It was quickly apparent, though, that India did not have the capacity to punish Pakistan.³ This underscored not only the changing nature of the threat to national security, but also underlined fundamental weaknesses in Indian national security policy.

National security is a contested term, 'an ambiguous symbol meaning different things to different people', according to Arnold Wolfers.⁴ As a consequence, what is considered a security threat varies across time and cultures. However, during the Cold War, the overwhelming understanding of the meaning of the term 'security', both within policymaking circles and large swathes of academia, was fairly clear. The all-consuming nature of the Cold War agenda seemed to demand that security was understood by the main contestants very much in ways that were consistent with the realist approach to international relations.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a re-evaluation of the understanding of security. This was because at the time of its collapse the Soviet Union had the second most powerful military in the world. It collapsed because of a failure of its domestic institutions and economic

weakness rather than a deficit of military power. After the Soviet Union's demise, both academics and policymakers moved to broaden the conception of security. A bewildering array of issues, including demographics, resource scarcity, and global warming were now seen as having security implications. In addition, most of the large-scale violence confronting the world after 1989 was intrastate as opposed to interstate violence, and for a significant portion of the world's population the state was the main source of insecurity. Beginning in the mid-1990s, attention turned increasingly to individual (or human) security, and, therefore, both the range of threats and possible policy remedies were quite different from those that featured in the realist conception.⁵

However, we conceive of security in a fairly traditional, narrow sense, focused primarily on 'the threat, use and control of military force' both externally and internally.⁶ Despite the ferment about the meaning of security in the 1990s, most states, including India, continue to wrestle with the complexities that arise from how force can be made to achieve the goals of policy. As India has risen in the global hierarchy over the last two decades, its national security policy, much like its foreign policy, has started to attract attention. This volume is an anthology of writings on India's national security published over the past 15 years with a focus on contemporary challenges. India's foreign policy is the subject of a companion volume in this series.⁷

As in the companion volume on foreign policy, our choice of readings has been guided by the fact that the *Critical Issues in Indian Politics* series restricts itself to materials published in English in the past 15 years. We were also constrained by various practicalities: materials that had only recently published were excluded for obvious reasons as also those for which we were unable to get permission to republish. The writings here are scholarly in the sense of being descriptive and analytical rather than prescriptive. As in the foreign policy volume, we make no pretence to cover the entire spectrum of intellectual approaches or policy issues. Clearly, there are materials which could be classified as falling into critical, Marxist, and historical streams in security studies which we have not included—we refer readers to our introduction to the foreign policy volume for references to authors working within those streams.⁸ Nor does the volume delve into non-traditional security areas such as energy security, environmental security, food security, human security, water security, and other related notions.⁹ Once again, our plea is that we have focused on mainstream issues, namely, internal security from insurgency and terrorism and the role of nuclear weapons in India's security. We have also included a fine essay by Anit Mukherjee on defence reforms—on the various reforms that have been proposed, the progress or

lack in reforming India's defence system, and the factors that influence the nature of the system and the prospects for further reforms in the years to come. Mukherjee's piece can be read with profit in concert with the piece by Daniel Markey on the need to reform India's foreign policy structures, which features in the *Indian Foreign Policy* volume.

A brief word on the organization of the volume is in order here. The first part deals with the issues of insurgency and terrorism and the responses of the Indian state. The second is concerned with the evolution of India's nuclear policy. The third turns to the debate on the impact of nuclear weapons on strategic stability in South Asia. Finally, the fourth part focuses on defence policymaking, specifically the problems that continue to plague the policymaking process.

AN OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

The rapidly evolving security environment facing India continues to pose significant challenges to the nation's policymakers. A combination of internal and external as well as state and non-state-based threats have emerged that have complicated Indian security. Internally, Indian security is challenged by a plethora of insurgencies which are a product of a range of factors including a desire for greater autonomy and resentment over inequality and injustice. Externally, India's immediate neighbourhood continues to be the theatre of the most serious challenges.

Scholars of Indian security have for the most part focused on India's external threats, especially from China and Pakistan. A rapidly rising China may pose the greatest military threat to India if relations with it do not continue to improve and if, in the long run, the two countries cannot come to an agreement on the border, on the future of Tibet, and the sharing of river waters. In addition, as their economies grow, the two Asian giants could find themselves in competition over international status and over key resources including food and energy. With Pakistan, India has already fought four wars (1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999) and has been involved in a series of crises (1986–7, 1990, 2001–2, and 2008) under the shadow of nuclear weapons. The quarrel over Kashmir remains live; the two countries are increasingly worried about the sharing of river waters; there are unresolved conflicts over Siachen, Sir Creek, and India's water projects on the Indus river; and Pakistan continues to be a haven for terrorists who want to attack India.

The other significant challenge externally is the turmoil around India's periphery. Instabilities within Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh,

Burma, and Sri Lanka impinge on India's security. A policy of 'splendid isolation' is not an option in this environment, and India's strategic community recognizes that India must engage its immediate neighbourhood more meaningfully and become a net provider of security. How this is to be done, on the other hand, is less clear. Over the past two decades, as India's economy has grown and as the country has invigorated its relations with the United States, South East and East Asia, Africa, and even Latin America, it has neglected South Asia—a neglect that could come back to haunt it.

However, the most vital threats to Indian unity, stability, and well-being are internal. Internally, the Indian state is witnessing a gradual collapse in its authority and control. New Delhi has to deal with at least three challenges. The first is right-wing Islamic and now Hindu terrorism. The second is left-wing Maoist revolutionary violence in central and eastern India, especially in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. The third is separatism in India's borderlands. While Sikh separatism in the Punjab was stamped out by the mid-1990s, Kashmir and various states in northeastern India continue to be sites of separatist violence led by well-armed and elusive insurgent groups.

India has been a target for Islamist extremism for the past decade, with some estimates suggesting that at the height of insurgent activity in Iraq from 2006 to 2008, India was second only to that unhappy country in the number of lives lost to terrorism.¹⁰ In the initial years after the events of 11 September 2001, the Indian government and the Indian media had claimed that no Indians were linked to al-Qaeda or any other Islamic groups plotting terror. This myth was soon exposed with the revelation that every major Islamist urban terror cell in India since 1993 has had a preponderance of Indian nationals. India is clearly both a target and a recruitment base for organizations like al-Qaeda.

Much like al-Qaeda, the most prominent terrorist group in India today, the Indian Mujahideen, is a loose coalition of jihadists bound together by ideological affiliations and personal linkages, with its infrastructure and top leadership scattered across India.¹¹ Indian security forces are increasingly focused on terrorists operating in the major cities. If recent events are anything to go by, India's fight against religious extremists may soon be considerably complicated by the rise of shadowy right-wing Hindu terrorist groups.¹²

The Maoist insurgency too has spread from a marginal, containable threat to one that has been identified by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the 'greatest internal security threat' facing the nation.¹³ The Maoists—

aka Naxalites—have taken the fight to the vast hinterland of impoverished villages in central and eastern India. The Indian Home Ministry lists more than 150 districts as being ‘Naxalite-affected’ and the combined force of the Maoist insurgents has been estimated as somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 armed fighters plus at least 50,000 active supporters.¹⁴ The Indian government has made some significant gains in the military fight against the Maoists, but is still struggling to come up with a comprehensive response.

The third great internal challenge is separatism, and here the insurgencies in Kashmir still stand as the biggest threats to Indian unity. The Kashmir problem, from the point of view of India’s security managers, has risen and fallen. From 2002 to 2009, it would be fair to say that local disaffection and insurgent violence abated. In addition, there was a feeling that India and Pakistan were inching towards a resolution of their conflict over the state.¹⁵ That assumption was not an altogether idle one. The governments of India and Pakistan were in regular dialogue over Kashmir not just formally but also informally in the so-called backchannel talks between high-level envoys. President Pervez Musharraf publicly made a commitment to the international community on ridding his military and intelligence services of the jihadi elements within them. Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed two reasonably free and fair elections. Tourism, particularly internal tourism, moribund since the early 1990s, resumed, and the separatists found themselves isolated.

This rather idyllic period was replaced with an intensification of instability in the Valley. In 2009, a minor land dispute in Kashmir drew in the various state and national political parties, convulsing the streets. The Hindu nationalists whipped the Hindus of Kashmir into a frenzy, leaving the field wide open for separatist rabble-rousers. The government responded by saturating the streets once again with security personnel. Tragically, some young Kashmiri men were killed in the ensuing turmoil, leading to further protests, which proved difficult to manage.

While Hindu nationalists stirred up trouble in Jammu, further widening the chasm between the religious communities in the state, some members of the liberal intelligentsia in New Delhi wondered if the time has not come to let Kashmir go.¹⁶ A sense of fatigue and moral doubt over keeping Kashmir in the union by force prompted suggestions that Kashmir be allowed to secede. Writer Arundhati Roy famously concluded that ‘India needs freedom from Kashmir as much as Kashmir needs freedom from India’.¹⁷

There was by 2009, therefore, a convergence of separatist views and some liberal opinion in India on the question of Kashmir’s separation. Clearly, however, no Indian government is in a position to allow Kashmir’s secession

from India for fear of triggering further separatism in a multiethnic, multilingual nation and for fear that Hindu–Muslim relations in the rest of India would be dealt a body blow. Indeed, Indian democracy, beset as it is with various ills and weaknesses, could hardly survive the conflagration that might result from Kashmir's secession. The situation in Kashmir, therefore, continues to be an uneasy stalemate.

The problems of India's northeast also continue to be stalemated. Insurgencies and violence continue to disrupt daily life and governance, particularly in Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland in spite of both counterinsurgency operations and negotiations. As in Kashmir, alienation from the rest of India culturally, a feeling of neglect economically, political resentment, malgovernance at various levels, sub-ethnic conflict within states (with local majorities and minorities in contention), and of course the collateral and sometime direct violence associated with the military's counterinsurgency operations, all these continue to bedevil the northeastern states. Insurgency is helped by administration that does not penetrate the countryside, by terrain, by easy access to small arms, and by refuge in neighbouring countries.

The continuing turmoil in Kashmir and the northeast underscore the fragility of India. The Indian media and elite prefer to focus on India's rise, ignoring the parlous state of the domestic realm given the growing threat of Islamist (and now Hindu) extremism, Maoism, and separatist insurgency. The Indian state's writ does not run over large chunks of territory, and the very idea of India is in question.¹⁸ Law and order, which must be the substructure of a just and liberal democratic order, degrades by the day. Frustration with poor governance is at an all-time high. Amidst the growing ferment and upheavals, the Indian state often stands as a mute spectator, unable to act against violence and those who perpetrate it.

Maladministration, dithering and incompetent leadership, and an uncivil civil society are making large parts of India ungovernable. According to the latest Corruption Perception Index, the country has become more not less corrupt over time, with politicians, police, and lower judiciary playing a large role in the decline of public standards.¹⁹ Corruption is having a corrosive impact on the social fabric of Indian society by undermining the trust of ordinary Indians in their nation's laws, institutions, and government. At the same time a dangerous perception is gaining ground among the religious minorities—Muslims and Christians above all—that the state stands against them. The government and the majority of Hindus have not comprehended the degree of alienation that has set in. This can only add to India's internal incoherence.²⁰