BOOK REVIEW

Wolpert, Stanley. *India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?*

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The book ‘India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?’ is the latest addition to Stanley Wolpert’s works on the issues and personalities of South Asia. The book is divided into ten chapters over 126 pages. Keeping in view his vast experience and expertise of the region, this book appears to be a lucid narrative of the historical facts and incidents of distant and near past, and therefore best be seen as a routine work by an otherwise very accomplished and renowned writer.

In his introduction, the author, at the outset, declares Kashmir conflict as deadly, costly and the most dangerous of all prevailing disputes between the two neighboring nuclear states. He earnestly desires a peaceful resolution of the dispute, for which he is making contributions through his writings and organizing conferences with representations from all the concerned stakeholders.

First two chapters deal with the historical problems and the first Kashmir war of 1947-48. Wolpert begins with the narrative of the ancient Kashmir from the days of Emperor Asoka, who founded Srinagar as the capital of Kashmir during 269 to 232 BC. The author, very passionately describes the beauty of the Vale, its gardens, eclectic culture and the craftsmanship of its artisans. Islam’s entry into Kashmir in the 11th century started to change the complexion of its predominantly Buddhist population. The author remembers the Rule of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-
70) as the golden period during which Hindus and Buddhists enjoyed equal rights. Mughal King Akbar annexed Kashmir into his kingdom in 1586. With decline of Mughal Empire, Kashmir was captured by Abdalis who proved very ruthless to the otherwise generous people of Kashmir. The people turned towards the Ruler of Punjab for help, and Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh responded positively to their call. Subsequently, it was Dogra Rajput Gulab Singh who brought both, Jammu and Kashmir together as one state which proved to be the largest Indian state during the British era. However, at the time of partition in 1947, its ruler Hari Singh could not decide about the accession to Pakistan, though Muslim population of his state stood at 77% at the time. Hence began the period uncertainty, bloodshed and an unending struggle of the people of Kashmir for their right of self determination.

The author is extremely critical of Lord Mountbatton’s role in hurrying up the process of partition. Mountbatten was not aware of the history and culture of the subcontinent, and unnecessarily tempered with drawings of the partition maps by Radcliffe, who himself was a stranger to Indian conditions. Mountbatton obliged Nehru by handing over Gurdaspur district to India so that land route to Kashmir could be secured and Ferozepur for its hydroelectric generation capability. This unjustifiable action alone led to the large scale killings in the process of intra-state migrations.

The author, very ably describes the efforts of international community led by the United Nations Security Council to convince India for holding an impartial plebiscite, which failed because Nehru did not agree to any of its proposals. The author has particularly mentioned about efforts of Dr Frank Graham of North Carolina and Sir Owen Dixon of Australia. However, while writing about the assassination of Pakistan’s first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, the author has made a factual error that he was killed at Pakistan’ army headquarters while addressing its
officers corps (p.25). In fact, late Prime Minister was addressing a public gathering in the Company Bagh, later named after him, Liaquat National Park, in Rawalpindi on 16 October, 1951. The author links Liaquat’s killing with Pakistan army’s rise into state’s politics, and interestingly quotes Nehru who once said, “Most nations have an army but Pakistan’s army has a nation” (p. 26). Towards the end of the chapter, he describes how Pakistan joined the western block during the early years of the cold war.

In Chapter III, ‘The Second Indo-Pakistani War’, Wolpert describes the events related to Sino-Indian war of 1962; Bhutto’s entry into Pakistan’s establishment, Ayub’s military takeover in Pakistan, and his expectations from Nehru on resolution of Kashmir dispute. However, Nehru rejected Ayub’s offers of talks on Kashmir by declaring him, “as a ‘lackey’ of Washington, as well as the usurper of Pakistani civil power” (p.31). Ayub on the other hand, consolidated his power and improved relations with US and received lot of new military hardware, about which Nehru was assured, would never be used against India. The author then briefly writes how Bhutto convinced Ayub, after Nehru’s death in 1964 that now was the time to “take back” Kashmir - thus starting the sequence of armed engagements between India and Pakistan. Rann of Kutch in the south and ‘Operation Gibraltar’ in the north were all part of the same effort. The author, very firmly believes that the operation proved disastrous due to Bhutto’s insistence on its urgency. He also opines that the entire events of 1965 were Ayub’s most humiliating defeat, facing which he begged US President Johnson for an immediate cease-fire, who not only froze all military assistance to Pakistan but also referred the case to Russians to mediate (p. 32). Subsequently, the cordial talks were held between Ayub and Shastri at Tashkent in January 1966, in which the two leaders pledged to make a fresh start toward the peace and prosperity of their people. Bhutto being Pakistan’s foreign minister, was extremely unhappy on the outcome of the
talks and declared that Ayub had “betrayed” Pakistan (p.34). He, then, describes how Bhutto, back home, exploited Ayub’s signing of Tashkent Agreement and raised his own political party aiming to oust his master and replace him in the presidency. However, the author has wrongly referred Bhutto as ‘Quaid-i-Azam’ instead of writing ‘Quaid-i-Awam’ (p-35), probably by mistake, because the English translation ‘leader of the people’ is done correctly. Also, in the next paragraph he writes 25 March as the Pakistan Day, whereas, Pakistan Day is celebrated on 23 March to commemorate to the passage of Pakistan Resolution in Lahore in 1940. Towards the end of the chapter, he makes a mention of 1970 elections in Pakistan and the beginning of troubles in East Pakistan.

In Chapter-IV, ‘The Third Indo-Pakistani War and the Birth of Bangladesh’, Wolpert traces back the seeds of separation into the issues related to ‘Urdu-Bengali’ language. The author makes a mention of Quaid-i-Azam’s speech in Dacca during his first visit after the creation of Pakistan in which he declared that official language of Pakistan would be Urdu only. Wolpert also hints at Jinnah’s accepting divided Pakistan comprising ‘moth-eaten’ pieces offered by Mountbatten. Due to his poor health, Jinnah did not want to delay the partition any longer. The two wings got divided by votes by the people in 1970 elections, before the formal creation of Bangladesh as Bengalis voted for Mujib and the majority of West Pakistani voted for Bhutto’s newly formed Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Wolpert briefly writes about the Bhutto’s role during the 1971 crisis and India’s support to Bangladesh insurgency, which ultimately led to a full scale war culminating in the creation of a separate homeland for Bengalis. Rest of the chapter is a narrative of the important events such as Bhutto’s speech at the UN, his return to Pakistan as the new President, and Mujib’s arrival in Dacca. Wolpert praises Indira Gandhi for brilliance in diplomacy and strategic acumen during the entire episode of the creation of Bangladesh. He
concludes the chapter with a somber observation that in less than quarter of a century since its birth, Pakistan not only lost more than half of its population but also “the respect of most of the world” (p.45).

In Chapter-V, ‘From the Simla Summit to Zia’s Coup’, Wolpert explains how Bhutto recovered the defeated nation and earned massive concessions from India at the Simla summit in 1972. However, he writes about “93,000 Bihari prisoners back” (p.48), whereas the fact is that these were Pakistani soldiers who were taken prisoners of war after the tragic surrender at of Dacca on 16 December 1971. Another important feature of the summit was the agreement reached between Bhutto and Indira to “settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations” and renaming the UN cease-fire line as “Line of Control” (p.47). He observes that “no mention was made of any future plebiscite in Kashmir”, for which Bhutto was bitterly criticized at home for selling out Kashmir; a charge he vehemently rejected. Bhutto, he writes, very ably navigated the country on path of progress and in 1974 organized an Islamic summit conference attended by 38 heads of Muslim states. He goes on to write about India’s first nuclear test in May 1974, and Bhutto’s effort to match the capability by launching Pakistan’s own programme under Dr A. Q. Khan. Wolpert declares that General Zia’s selection as Chief of Army Staff (COAS) was Bhutto’s ‘fatal mistake’. Wolpert also correctly analyses the reasons of Bhutto’s ouster by his trusted General Zia, after street riots due to massive riggings in 1977 elections. Wolpert then writes about Bhutto’s arrest and his trials for the murder of one of his political opponents, and points a finger at Zia’s high court as being ‘Punjabi’. He also makes a mention of Bhutto’s writings from his cell in which prophesied that if he was eliminated ‘Sind is [will] not be part of Pakistan’ (p.52). He concludes the chapter with the remarks that Zia remained in power because of Soviet’s invasion of Afghanistan.
In Chapter VI, ‘Afghanistan’s Impact on Indo-Pakistani Relations’, Wolpert briefly outlines the historical overview of British desire and effort to reach Kabul to check invasions into India through the Khyber Pass. He also touches upon the Russian moves toward south in pursuit of the ‘Great Game’, before writing about how the Soviet forces moved into Afghanistan. Here, author makes a mention that Indira was initially reluctant in condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, until she was cautioned by her aides on Chanakiya’s philosophy that one’s “neighbor’s neighbor” was always ‘the friend’ (p.56). Moreover, she was weary of Zia’s fundamentalist approach and support to thousands of Pathan mujahedeen. He describes the happenings of Zia’s regime including his mysterious death due to tragic accident of the C-130 on 17 August 1988. He also mentions Indira’s assassination on October 1984 following Indian army’s action on Sikh’s sacred place ‘Golden Temple’ in Amritsar. In the same breadth, he very briefly writes about the Indian occupation of Siachin and its ill effects due to its location and climate. However, he does not criticize India for her actions in violation of Simla Accord. Prime Ministers Benazir and Rajiv Gandhi’s short and useful interaction is viewed positively by the author. He is critical of Rajiv’s style of leadership which lacked “initiative and energy” in crucial state affairs (p.60). Then, on he runs through two tenures of Benazir and Nawaz Sharif, Soviet departure and rise of Taliban in Afghanistan. He is critical about ISI’s role in politics of Pakistan, and also makes a mention of Benazir’s husband - Asif Ali Zardari - for being corrupt and a reason for her two time ouster from power. The author draws an interesting comparison between Benazir and Sharif on Kashmir policy observing that the former was seen as more inclined to accept LoC as international border.

In Chapter-VII, ‘Pakistan’s Proxy War and Kashmir’s Azaadi Revolution’, Wolpert focuses on Kashmir’s Azaadi (freedom) movement for which he points a finger at Pakistan’s ISI. However,
he does trace back the unrest to Indira’s tenure, during which Indian troops were amassed in the Vale. He also writes about Kashmir elections and Governor Jagmohan’s iron rule of the state in 1990, who believed that the “bullet was the only solution for Kashmir militants” (p.66). Yet, he reminds the readers about ISI’s role in supporting the uprising by Kashmiri youth as well as the role of Lashkar-e-Taïyba (LeT). He is of the view that because of Jihadi outfit’s involvement, Azaadi revolution turned into terrorist movement due to which an “estimated 130,000 people migrated to Jammu” (p.68). India, he writes, launched an aggressive counter insurgency “catch-and-kill” strategy in the Vale due to which tens of thousands of young Kashmiris “disappeared”, a majority of whom were taken away by LeT and “ISI-trained group Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM)” (p.68). By mid 1995, he views that the Azzadi movement had “cooled down” and the state government organized the elections in September 1996, in which Farooq Abdullah became the Chief Minister again.

In Chapter-VIII, ‘Recent Attempts to Resolve the Escalating Conflict’, the author writes about the nuclear tests by both nations, after which the entire international community got extremely concerned about safety of over one billion people of the region. He is appreciative of all the major world leaders who made sincere efforts that proved fruitful. Prime Minister Vajpayee’s visited Lahore where a landmark agreement ‘Lahore declaration’ was signed calling for mutual cooperation and bilateral dialogue on all issues including Jammu and Kashmir. However, the process was derailed by events in Kargil, where Pakistani troops had occupied Indian empty posts on the LoC. He writes that Vajpayee protested to Sharif and President Clinton strongly advised Pakistan to withdraw from the Kargil heights. Sharif surprised everybody when he revealed that his army chief General Musharraf had acted at his own. Subsequently, Sharif accepted Clinton’s advice of pulling back his troops. Musharraf, he writes, did not swallow
Sharif’s surrender under Clinton’s pressure and overthrew him in October 1999 to become country’s Chief Executive. Sharif was arrested on charges for treason, but was allowed to leave the country for ten years to Saudi Arabia. At this stage, Wolpert draws a brief comparison of the two countries political culture; India’s robust democracy and Pakistan’s comfort under the military dominance. He believes that Pakistan needs Indian democracy’s assistance to fight the menace of extremism and terrorism. He also refers to common calls by influential leaders on both sides of the divide to go for “preventive war”, even under nuclear overhang. General Sunderji’s, referred as the India’s boldest chief of army staff, ‘Exercise Brasstacks’ is seen an effort in this context. However, military engagement was averted with due diligence and restraint. Wolpert, reminds his readers about Musharraf’s initiative in Kargil in 1999, which could only be averted with active intervention by US President Clinton. Subsequently, he quickly narrates 9/11 incidents, Musharraf’s decision to side with US in war on terror, US decision to move to Iraq rather prematurely, Indian Parliament attack on 13 December 2001, and a long stand-off between the two armed forces until US declared the place too dangerous for the American citizens to travel. The author bitterly criticizes that billions of dollars donated by the US for institutional capacity building were spent unaccounted for and Pakistan continues to slide deeper in despair for lack of security and deteriorating of law and order in the country.

Chapter-IX is titled as “The Stalled Peace Process”. In this chapter, author briefly describes Vajpaee-Musharraf efforts to improve bilateral relations from the SAARC platform by launching a number of confidence building measures (CBMs), most noteworthy amongst them being the ‘Peace Bus’ between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar, dialogue on Siachin and Sir Creek. At this juncture, the author writes a page on the most uncalled for political unrest due to Musharraf’s gravest error of his tenure; removed of the Chief Justice of Pakistan from his office
on charges of corruption. This took the country by storm and Musharraf’s efforts to patch up with Benazir and removal of his uniform to serve as civilian President could not save him for too long. Benazir’s coming back home was short-lived and she was assassinated on 27 December 2007, at the same stadium in Rawalpindi where the first Pakistani PM Liaquat Ali Khan was killed. Yet, the elections were held in Pakistan under Musharraf. PPP rode on the sentiments of the people after the killing of their beloved leader Benazir. However, her tragic death paved the way for her husband - Asif Ali Zardari - who was once referred as ‘Mr 10 percent’ for his corruption. Military actions in Swat also find a mention in this chapter. Rest of the chapter is narration of terror incidents in Pakistan, including Marriot bombings, attack on Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore. After the terror attacks in Mumbai by Lashkar affiliates on 26 November 2008, the tension between the two states rose to newer heights. On the other hand, President Zardari resisted to popular calls for restoring the Chief Justice but succumbed to Nawaz-led long march for his restoration. At this stage, the author turns his attention to some of serious issues in India; like ‘Babri Masjid’, the rise Hindutva during BJP rule, and Gujrat massacre of the Muslims for which he puts the blame squarely on Chief Minister Modi. The author turns toward Kashmir where the movement erupted again in June 2008, when the Congress-led state government tried to appease the Hindus by offering land to Amarnath Shrine Board, a decision which had to be reversed under mass protests. The author ends the chapter with the observation of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that, ‘the Kashmir question…..of nearly six decades will not go away and an effort is urgently required to resolve it” (p-93).

Chapter-X, titled as ‘Potential Solutions to the Kashmir Conflict’, is by far the most interesting chapter of the book. Here, he makes an attempt to outline possible solution which unfortunately is not new. Vajpayee-Musharraf effort of 2004 is referred as ‘last try’, which primarily was the
acceptance of present LoC as the international border. However, Pakistan’s ‘Punjabi military’ did not support the idea and Musharraf had to regress. Wolpert is of the opinion that Pakistan is internally so weak that it cannot effectively provide support to Kashmir cause. His support for statuesque should not be taken as approval of Indian atrocities against the poor Kashmiris who have suffered immensely in last six decades. He praises Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s effort for the solution through bilateral dialogue; however Mumbai incident is seen as the major impediment. Wolpert proposes the creation of ‘Pakistan Quaid Service Corps’ on the pattern of ‘AmeriCorps’ to build their capacity and contribute for nation-building. Author describes an ordinary American’s frustration on the internal situation in Pakistan with regard to terrorists’ acts and their desire of lasting peace in the country. Towards the end, he writes about some of the Jehadi outfits which are actively involved in extreme acts of violence in the country. He also makes a mention of Mumbai trials and its adverse affects on the ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

Wolpert’s book, ‘India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?’ attracts attention of the reader due to author’s huge experience, and expertise in the context. I must admit that Wolpert has reported nearly all events and incidents of the past and near past to keep his work relevant. Surprisingly, there are mistakes which do not go with the author’s or publisher’s name well.

It is with great authority and passion that he has concluded that Pakistan is internally too weak to support the Kashmir cause. Both, India and Pakistan, are nuclear weapon states, but India’s status has been accepted, and concessions have been made after the Indo-US nuclear deal. At the same time, Pakistan continues to struggle for its recognition; primarily because of its failure to deal with extremism, and terrorism as per the demands of the international community. Pakistan,
despite being the frontline state in war on terror has not been able to gather enough support for
the just cause of Kashmir, whereas India has successfully projected Kashmiris’ struggle of self
determination as acts of terrorism. I partially agree with Wolpert’s conclusion that Pakistan has
not been able to effectively project, and protect the interests of the Kashmiri people since the
Kargil episode, and than in the post 9/11 environment, particularly since the attack on the Indian

Wolpert supports the idea of converting the LoC as the new international border between India
and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute is not new. This is puzzling for the reader because it
comes from a person who has been so intimately involved with this particular conflict, and had
made so much effort to highlight the plight of the Kashmiri people. Perhaps, he too is losing
hope. However, his proposal to invoke the forum of SAARC for the support to resolve the
Kashmir issue is noteworthy.

In my opinion, this book is one time read for the students of history to refresh the historical
aspects of this ‘hate-hate’ relationship between the two nuclear neighbors, and remain abreast
with the evolving situation. Also, a useful read for the policy making elite and the strategic
community in Pakistan. However, as student of strategic studies, I had expected to learn
something new and different from the author who is considered an authority on the political and
historical dynamics of the area.