

Pakistan-Sri Lanka Relations: A Story of Friendship

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Despite geographical and religious barriers, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have always been trusted-partners of each other with historical linkages dating back to the period of Gandhara civilization, from the first to seventh-century AD. Their friendship strengthened during the war of 1971, when Pakistan's jets were allowed to refuel on Sri Lankan territory despite Indian furore. The equation of trust and friendship further developed during the crisis of Jaffna, when Pakistan obliged to Sri Lankan request for military aid and airlifted Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs) in an emergency from Karachi to Colombo. This helped the Sri Lankan military to push back LTTE rebels and secure Jaffna. This shows that both countries not only share cultural heritage, but also have a shared history of internal instability created by the actives of non-state actors. This, as a result, gives both nations an insight to each other's problems, stemming from internal and external players. Historically, Sri Lanka has never wanted India to dominate the region, both economically and militarily. Thus, the resilient nature of both states in face of adversities and shared objectives makes them natural allies.

The current dynamics of shifting of power-centres places much focus of the international community on Asia. With the strategic location of Sri Lanka, as the East-West sea corridor link, and Pakistan, as the conduit for world economies via CPEC, both countries are poised to become international trading hubs. The formation of new alliances in the region to maximise power of states provides new opportunities for both countries to join hands and integrate with the world as leading economies.

This book, *Pakistan-Sri Lanka Relations: A story of friendship*, is an effort in the same direction and has been published by the Institute of Strategic Studies Research and Analysis in order to harness the full potential of relations and growth between both states. It is thematically sectioned into the historical, geostrategic and defence, economic and socio-cultural perspectives. It breaks new grounds being the first publication that has documented relations between both countries beginning

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from the pre-partition days and provides an in-depth analysis of the culmination of relations with time.

The opening theme of the book provides a detailed narrative of historical events that have shaped the current dynamics both nations share. The authors have highlighted the inherent role of *regionalism*, *pan-Asia*, and the *Indian-centric* approach of South Asia in the unfolding of events over the decades. The neutral role played by Sri Lanka between India and Pakistan during times of crisis has been pivotal in maintaining the delicate balance of peace and regional stability, thus, showing the significance of India in Sri Lanka's and Pakistan's policy contours.

The geostrategic and defence dimensions deal with the various facets of foreign policies of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, hedged on the premise of national security, overlapping economic interests, preservation of ideology, peaceful coexistence, Non-alignment, bilateralism and support to the UN charter. The era wise description of political relations between the two states not only provides with an in-depth description of the shared strategic interests of both nations, but also makes it easier for the reader to simultaneously compare, analyse and relate the regional and international political developments of that particular period.

The authors have been able to aptly demonstrate the significance of geopolitics in Pakistan and Sri Lanka relations, thus, illustrating the dependence of each country on itself and each other. A detailed analysis of Pakistan and Sri Lanka approaches towards regionalism highlights the evolution of the foreign policies of both countries and interests in the fields of access to energy resources, countering terrorism and facilitating trade.

The deliberation on naval power by using the Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory on elements of sea power highlights the significance of navy in geopolitical strength of a country. Later in the chapters, the authors have discussed how enhanced mutual cooperation in the realm of defence and counterterrorism can be used by each state to not only learn from each other, but also maximise its power and influence.

Despite the robust nature of Pakistan-Sri Lanka political and military relations, both countries lag in the realm of the economic affairs. The third theme of the book consists of two chapters, discussing in detail the economic relations from both Sri Lankan and Pakistani perspectives. These chapters discuss at length the current volume of trade, trade potential that exists and needs to be exploited, main trading items, loopholes in the trade agreements especially the free trade agreements between both countries, market dynamics of both countries, the customer psyche, and other trade dimensions.

Lastly the book discusses the socio-cultural aspects of Pakistan-Sri Lanka relations and lays emphasis on people-to-people contact. It highlights the similarities and differences in culture, traditions and thinking of both nations, thus, giving an understanding of the psyche of people on both sides. The authors manage to move beyond the conventional interactive techniques and focuses on informal contact between the public of both states via sports, education, music, cinema, religion and cultural interactions.

The way forward at the end provides an objective and comprehensive conceptualization of relations that are the requirement of current times in order to help promote cooperation and collaboration at all levels between both nations.

The book is written by authors of both Sri Lankan and Pakistani origins, thus, quelling bias in the presentation of perspective and narrative. Also, the perspective from both sides helps the reader understand all facets of the relationship between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, which can prove to be of much importance to matters of policy. The authors have been able to comprehensively construct the perception of both states not only towards each other, but also other states, especially India. This helps the reader view relations in the broader spectrum of regional and international politics.

The tone adopted by the authors is both descriptive and engaging, which keeps one riveted from beginning till the end. The description of relations is objective in nature and is a direct reflection of issues both countries face both at micro and macro scale, while, simultaneously indicating the necessary steps required to overcome them. The pictures, tables and charts create visualizations that help the reader manage, incorporate and analyse the data with ease. The book, however, lacks in quoting relationship glitches and difficulties, which would have provided the readers a better penetration into the friendship story of Pakistan and Sri-Lanka, thus, allowing readers to learn from past mistakes and establish ties based on non-repetition of past behaviours.

This book serves as a communication link not only for government institutions, but also the public of both countries hailing from all backgrounds. It will help both nations build stronger ties through areas of mutual cooperation in all spheres of development. This book can also be used as a reference for academic research in this field.

Reference

Imran, Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad, and Bhagya Senaratne, eds. *Pakistan-Sri Lanka Relations: A Story of Friendship*. Islamabad: National Defence University, 2017.