

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Jaswant Singh, India at Risk: Mistakes Misadventures and Misconceptions of Security Policy (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2013), 292**

Reexamining major internal and external security challenges India has faced since its independence in 1947, Jaswant Singh puts critical lens on conceptualization of security threats facing India and management of these threats by New Delhi. Being a former soldier, the politician Jaswant Singh explores national security challenges from geopolitical and operational perspectives. He underlines several crucial factors from which stemmed various security challenges, including devastating partition of India, fragmentation of territorial and strategic unity of the sub-continent, challenging tasks of nation-building in the aftermath of partition and failure of the leadership to have 'territoriality' of India recognized internationally. He differentiates between geography and territoriality and refers to the latter as the international boundaries of India. He points to the grave mistake of not instituting a strategic culture by the Indian leadership that can rise above the domestic political milieu and meet challenges confronting India as a state.

Partition of India and Chinese occupation of Tibet is at the heart of current Indian security challenges. PM Nehru's aspiration to make 20th century an 'Asian Century' unfortunately turned into a catastrophe for India. Since then India is locked between 'four lines': Durand and MacMohan Lines, the Line of Actual Control and Line of Control. This strategic imprisonment was compounded by lack of indigenous thinking to break free from these territorial barriers. Moreover, India also did not develop surplus military power in the initial decades of its independence that would have enabled it to project power beyond its borders.

After discussing the philosophical underpinnings of multitude of security challenges and Indian responses to these challenges, Singh critically analyses external and internal threats confronting India since its independence. Major portion of the book reexamines war of 1948 in Jammu and Kashmir, 1962 war with China in Tibet, stalemated contest in 1965 with Pakistan and a brief but crucial war of 1971 that led to the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent

state. In the author's opinion 1948 was an 'unnecessary war' and Nehru's decision to approach United Nations for ceasefire was a strategic blunder. Nehru again has been blamed for Indian failures during critical conflict with China in 1962. Incoherent Indian strategy led to loss of India's credibility among international community.

This gave Pakistan space to exploit the opportunity to settle Kashmir militarily in 1965, which was a stalemated contest. Next theater was East Pakistan, where India intervened militarily in 1971 during the internal political turmoil, established military superiority, and a new state of Bangladesh was born. Despite this, a political settlement of Kashmir was not negotiated, and India only succeeded in turning ceasefire line in Kashmir into Line of Control. Singh questions whether Indian intervention in 1971 was strategically wise, given the complex security threats emerging from Bangladesh, and continued conflict over Kashmir with Pakistan.

Turning to internal threats, Singh deliberates at length on the destructive decades of India of late 70s and 80s during which insurgencies in Assam and Punjab were mishandled by New Delhi. State had then resorted to force without comprehending dynamics of social and political transformation that were taking place in these regions. The third blunder of 80s was the failed Indian attempt to project power regionally in Sri Lanka. It was an attempt at coercive diplomacy but India failed to meet its objectives.

In late 90s and early 2000s, Singh was directly dealing with national security as a senior minister and developments of those years are of significant interest. Those were the years when India again tested its nuclear capability, began negotiations with Pakistan over Kashmir, military operations took place Kargil and India explored a settlement of boundary dispute with China. It also addressed challenges of terrorism. Though a brief chapter on nuclear capability justifies Indian tests as an attempt to end global nuclear apartheid and calls for universal disarmament, but it does not explain what security challenges forced India to suddenly carry out five nuclear tests and declare itself a nuclear weapon state. Dilemmas confronting the author as a decision maker are laid bare in the final chapter where he delves into details of Lahore peace process, Kargil surprise, Agra summit, and coercive diplomacy during Operation Parakaram in 2002.

The author brings the book to an abrupt ending leaving the 'rest to the gods'. The book would have been much more rewarding for the reader if he had added a few paragraphs explaining the maneuvers his government made for commencing strategic cooperation with the United States, which led to Indian inclusion into international nuclear order. Lack of critical and dispassionate review of national security challenges during his days in the government is a serious limitation of the work. Though he has raised several insightful questions and put in the dock Indian military and political leaders for the misconceptions, failures and misadventures that put India at risk in last seven decades. Yet, he fails to offer any alternate solution or roadmap that should be pursued in the future.

In his review of wars and internal crises, Singh combines history with geography and strategy from the perspectives of Indian and Pakistani commanders. He addresses the question of how these wars were fought and raises further questions on why these conflicts occurred in the first place. Though he laments lack of new strategic ideas in India, but he does not give any answers. After remaining Foreign and Defence Minister of India for several years and having been close to the corridors of power even when his party was not in power, the author was in an excellent position to provide answers to the questions he has raised. He could have included his perspective on how India can break out of its strategic chains and re-envision place in regional and global order, project power and move beyond the security dilemmas rooted in the partition of subcontinent.

The book also reveals the facts behind certain popular myths created by Indian military establishment. It is widely believed in India that Indian navy sunk PNS Ghazi during 1971 war, but Singh reveals it is factually incorrect. The Pakistani ship was destroyed by internal explosion while laying mines but Indian navy claimed the credit for it.

All in all, with eight chapters *India at Risk* critically explains perpetual security dilemmas facing India. It is a must read for all those exploring internal and external dimensions of Indian security policy making, role of Indian political figures during military crises and operational thinking of Indian military. Despite its abrupt end, *India at Risk* will remain relevant until risks to Indian state persist as it makes the reader think and ask questions.

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