

Book Review: Beyond South Asia: India's Strategic Evolution and the Reintegration of the Subcontinent by Neil Padukone

*In **Beyond South Asia: India's Strategic Evolution and the Reintegration of the Subcontinent**, Neil Padukone explores India's strategic thought and culture since independence, and the domestic and regional factors that have shaped it. Raj Verma writes that while the book is an easy and accessible read, it suffers from some major and minor errors which undermine its analytical rigour, and readers should be mindful of its shortcomings.*

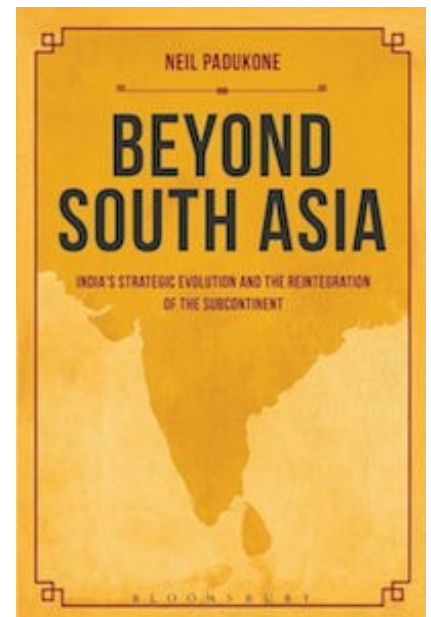
This review was originally published on [SouthAsia @LSE](#).

***Beyond South Asia: India's Strategic Evolution and the Reintegration of the Subcontinent.* Neil Padukone. Bloomsbury. 2014.**

Neil Padukone's book is dedicated to the evolution of India's strategic thought since independence. The author opines that policymakers, analysts and scholars have promulgated India's lack of a coherent foreign policy and strategic thought and culture. Some scholars attribute it to bureaucratic politics, and inertia and lack of coordination among the various arms of the government of India. The author provides a contrary explanation based on the deep-rooted Dharmic philosophy which lays emphasis on fatalism, nonlinearity and the cyclical evolution of events. He also discusses the merits and demerits of an articulated foreign policy or strategy. The author utilises different schools of thought in international relations theory such as realism, liberalism and constructivism to study the different facets of India's strategic thought and culture.

The book is divided into three parts. The chronological division is based on and explores a different era of India's evolution as a geopolitical actor since its independence. Part One deals with India's 'Monroe Doctrine' which had two specific goals. First was to keep the Indian subcontinent internally united by disallowing the South Asian countries to be autonomous. Second, to ensure that extra-regional powers did not have a presence in the region. India practised 'realism in the cloak of idealism' by using the non-aligned movement to achieve the second goal. The author then discusses the reasons for the failure of the 'Monroe Doctrine' due to internal and external factors. Domestic factors like the Naxalite Movement and Hindu majoritarianism among others weakened India domestically. India's defeat in the border conflict with China in 1962 led to national humiliation and India's image was severely affected globally. The 1971 war with Pakistan, which led to the creation of East Pakistan, witnessed US intervention and resulted in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation which effectively ended India's policy of non-alignment and of resisting external powers in the region. The author concludes that the 'Monroe Doctrine' has been a failure. This section gives a good account of India's relations with its neighbours and extra-regional powers like China and the US.

Part Two of the book discusses how India's strategic view changed due to economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. There was realisation and acceptance in New Delhi that new markets for goods and services, foreign direct investment and sources of energy were required if India wanted to achieve great power status. Consequently, India looked beyond South Asia for its strategic needs and launched the 'Look East' policy in Southeast Asia, 'Look West' policy in the Middle East and Africa and a 'New Silk Road' in Central Asia. This part deals substantially with India-



China and India-US relations. The author explicates that it is highly unlikely that there will be a border war between India and China because 'Tibet is not an existential issue for either country: its status can enhance either country's security but threatens them only marginally'. Second, although China might enjoy military superiority over India, India has a distinct advantage over China in the maritime domain. In the event of a war or conflict, India can choke China by blocking the Malacca Straits and China is cognisant of this. With respect to the US, India and the US are natural allies because there is no clash of national interest. However, the author points out four obstacles which might derail or stymie India-US partnership: the nuisance role played by Pakistan; insistence by the US that India follows the US lead on issues of global governance; Indian expectations that the US will offset China in the political realm; and the legacy of the cold war in which the governance systems in the two countries have been institutionally inclined against each other.



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Part Three analyses and predicts the perception of India's neighbours to its changed geostrategic stance. Since India's focus is on economic growth and development, it wants stability in the region and is seeking greater reconciliation and symbiotic arrangements with its neighbours. It wants to be partner in the growth proves in the South Asian countries and is not willing to take a belligerent posture. The chapter on Pakistan goes at length to explain why India does not and has not taken any military action against Pakistan or amassed troops on the border despite the Mumbai attack in November 2008.

The author concludes by highlighting the challenges faced by India's strategy in the near future. He opines that India should not seek permanent membership of the UN Security Council with veto power because rather than augmenting its power, it will curtail its flexibility. India's policy of non-interference has to change because other nations expect India to play a greater role in world affairs as India rises to take its seat at the high table of global affairs and in light of its investments and interests in other countries like Sudan among others.

The book suffers from some major and some minor errors which undermine the analytical rigour of the book. India's relations with the Soviet Union/Russia have been mentioned briefly. A chapter on the India-Soviet Union and India-Russia relations would have provided a more holistic picture and filled in some of the gaps such as the economic system/model adopted by India and Russia's strategic partnership and how Russia wants India to balance China's increasing influence in Central Asia. The author states that China has a 'string of pearls' strategy that is rudimentary

economic and trade facilities in South Asian countries which surround India. Although there are some other scholars who share the author's opinion, the majority view is that the 'string of pearls' is fiction. China is not developing a naval base in the Seychelles or in Chittagong, Bangladesh.

Additionally, there are numerous factual errors in the book. For instance, China does not have a listening post on the Coco Islands in the Maldives, India does not have a listening post in Madagascar and ASEAN plus 4 that is ASEAN and India, China, Japan and South Korea does not exist among others. Chapter Seven is too short and does not provide a detailed discussion and analysis of India's economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s and its economic growth trajectory. A detailed discussion would provide a more holistic depiction of a rising India and its strategy in South Asia and globally. Since the structure/division of the book is based chronologically, there are two to three chapters on India's relations with its South Asian neighbours leading to repetition and a lack of flow.

The book is easy to read but readers should be mindful of its shortcomings.

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Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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