



## The difficult politics of peace: Rivalry in modern South Asia

Review of Christopher Clary, New York, Oxford University Press, 2022, 336 pp., \$29.95 (paperback), \$99.00 (hardback), cloth, ISBN-10:0197638414.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Review of Christopher Clary, **The difficult politics of peace: Rivalry in modern South Asia**, New York, Oxford University Press, 2022, 336 pp., \$29.95 (paperback), \$99.00 (hardback), cloth, ISBN-10:0197638414.

In this path-breaking volume, Christopher Clary proffers his *leader primacy theory* to explain the domestic political circumstances under which Indian and Pakistani leadership chooses peace building. Clary's theory posits that leaders cannot respond to existing strategic incentives for peace until 'they have consolidated authority over foreign policy within their governments' (p. 3). A key insight of this volume is that whereas much of the international relations scholarship dilates upon how rivalry transforms inter-state relations, Clary explicates how politics within rival states are transformed by rivalry, noting that this 'transformation of domestic politics is a principal reason why rivalries, once they emerge, become intractable' (p. 3).

To test this theory, Clary conducts a systematic evaluation of the universe of cases during which India and Pakistan chose paths of conflict or cooperation since both became independent states in 1947. There are two significant advantages to this approach. First, it permits him to empirically exploit the significant heterogeneity in outcomes with respect Indian and Pakistani leaders' choice to pursue peace despite similar international incentives to do at various points in time. Second, by examining the universe of major crises, Clary avoids the myriad selection biases that arise from selecting a particular subset of cases or a particular time period which have characterized prominent studies of this rivalry.

At its basic formulation, leader primacy theory argues that two conditions must be met simultaneously for peace building to occur. First, strategic incentives to build peace must exist. Second, there must be leaders in both states who have primacy in their domestic political structures that allow them to sideline hardliners. Clary tests the predictive utility of leader primacy theory against other explanations that have been proposed for inter-state relations including those that contend that the 'emergence of nonrival threats', 'shifts in relative power', 'successful democratization in both states', and 'growing economic interdependence' galvanize greater cooperation between rival states (p. 18).

To test his theory's performance as well as those of rival theories, he mobilizes a vast collection of under-utilized Indian, American, and British primary-source materials to conduct his analyses rather than rely upon a well-tread body of secondary literature. Pakistan has demurred from declassifying important historical records than has India and this unfortunate fact is reflected in the citation base. Consistently, leadership primacy performs better across the universe of cases.

Clary's volume is arranged chronologically. This is incredibly helpful because, as Clary himself notes, scholars of South Asia must meticulously assemble a library of the

extant literature on specific crises or sets of crises. Clary has done yeoman's work in putting together a user-friendly, concise yet scrupulous, account of all 'major crises, wars, conciliatory initiatives, and peace processes in the India-Pakistan rivalry' (p. 5). Clary exposition is refreshingly jargon-free which makes this volume accessible to scholars situated across disciplines at all levels of professional development.

In the first chapter, he lays out the motivations of this study, the various competing theories he tests as well as the empirical strategy he adopts to do so. In chapter two, he provides a concise discussion of the origins of the rivalry. In Chapter 3, he studies early efforts to resolve the so-called Kashmir dispute under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan between 1948 and 1954. In the fourth Chapter, he examines the important conciliatory initiatives that occurred between 1955 and 1960. As he notes, if the Pakistan army is existentially committed to conflict with India for institutional, material, or strategic cultural reasons, Pakistan's first military dictator – Ayub Khan – would have been unlikely to pursue peace. Yet Ayub and Nehru were able to forge the most enduring bilateral agreement to date: the Indus Water Treaty. In the fifth chapter, he explains why peace-building in South Asia was transient at best. This chapter traces the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan, a pivotal actor in Pakistan's effort to wrest Kashmir from India in what became the war of 1965, and the desultory post-war process at Tashkent.

In Chapter 6, Clary continues focusing upon Bhutto and the catastrophic domestic politics that culminated in the Bengali rebellion in East Pakistan in the spring of 1971 and India's entry into that rebellion, resulting in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. That conflict concluded in December 1971 with the emergence of an independent Bangladesh from erstwhile East Pakistan. Despite Bhutto's hawkishness, he was able to work with several Indian counter parts to pursue peace which may well have contributed to his Bhutto's fall in a military coup after which Bhutto was killed. Chapter seven focuses upon the bilateral relationship in the 1980s and 1990s, principally under the leadership of Pakistan's military leadership Zia ul Haq and India's strong-woman, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Despite strong leaders on both sides, peace building did not occur because of the paucity of strategic incentives. Instead, the region saw a major crisis in 1990 and a limited war in 1999, a year after both states acquired overt nuclear capabilities. Chapter eight focuses upon the unexpected peacebuilding efforts that occurred under the tenure of Pakistan's most-recent overt military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, and Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee, of the Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party, and Manmohan Singh from India's Congress party. He concludes this volume with an extended discussion of the implications of his arguments both for understanding interstate rivalries generally and this rivalry in particular.

Unfortunately, Clary's theory and the empirical evidence for it explains why peace in South Asia has been so elusive and why it is likely to remain so.

One can quibble with some elements of Clary's historical accounts. For example, Clary downplays the role of the nascent Pakistani state in what became the first India-Pakistan War of 1947–48.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Clary generally refrains from

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, Shuja Nawaz, 'The first Kashmir war revisited', *India Review* 7/2 (2008): 115–154. In writing this article, Nawaz exploits material which he accessed from the Pakistan army itself using his personal connections stemming from the fact that his brother died while serving as the army chief. This archive is not available to scholars otherwise.

articulating the well-documented relationship between Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies and numerous Islamist and non-Islamist terrorist groups operating against India at the behest of Pakistan. Notably, Clary likely understates the role of Pakistan's intelligence agency in aiding, training and arming the Sikh terrorists who demanded that an independent state of Khalistan be formed from India's Punjab from the late 1970s through early 1990s (Chapter 7). Similarly, Clary abstains from articulating Pakistan's relationship with major Islamist militant such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammad (among others) whose attacks in India have brought the countries to the precipice of war on numerous occasions. In turn and on a far less documented scale, India is accused of supporting ethnic insurgents in Pakistan. This omission is important because this sub-conventional crisis space is an arena in which both states can signal a commitment to peacebuilding or conflict. One important – but much bemoaned example – is the decision of India's Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, to shut down covert operations in Pakistan after becoming the prime minister in 1997 as a demonstration of intent in his own efforts to pursue peace with Pakistan's prime minister, Nawaz Sharif.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these nitpicking objections, Clary has contributed enormously to our understanding of one of the most intractable rivalries that perdures as both countries continue to develop the quality and quantity of their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems as well as concomitant doctrines that may dictate their use.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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<sup>2</sup>Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (Oxford University Press 2017).