

Review

SAVING 'PRIVATE' RYAN TO SECURE BIG MONEYBAGS

BY SAIF SHAHIN

THE DEFENCE industry is the tail that wags the dog of national security. Common sense may have led you to believe arms and ammunition are produced or procured to make sure your country remains secure. But shun common sense, and replace it with commercial sense — which works in the exact opposite manner. National security concerns ensure that the defence industry remains prosperous.

Long before he propounded the clash of civilisations theory, Samuel Huntington had made a name for himself by arguing that maintaining a large and fully equipped military was imperative for the United States even during times of peace. His book, *The Soldier and The State*, came out in 1957, when liberal Americans were wondering why they should be spending millions on the military when not even the tallest among them could spot war clouds.

Huntington suggested that American society needed to transmute itself and turn conservative *en masse*, because liberalism would weaken national security. Some gall, you may exclaim, but Huntington's thesis proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Cold War followed, Americans did become more conservative and supportive of an imbecilic arms race, and militaries and military pacts grew and grew in size. Along with them grew and grew the coffers of the defence industry.

The Harvard professor returned at the end of the Cold War to suggest that a civilisational clash was on between Islam and the West. It was yet another self-fulfilling prophecy, which had the familiar effect of boosting the fortunes of the defence industry in another hour of crisis. *Clash of Civilisations* made Huntington a celebrated thinker worldwide, but it was only giving new direction to a movement spawned by *The Soldier and The State*. That movement was to turn the utterly counter-intuitive notion of sustaining and expanding armies and arsenals — even when you don't need them — into a *sine qua non* for every modern state.

Deba R. Mohanty's *Arming the Indian Arsenal: Challenges and Policy Options* treads the path laid out by Huntington. A senior fellow at the Reliance Industries-linked Observer Research Foundation, Mohanty trains his guns at the bureaucratic morass that has prevented the Indian defence industry from fulfilling its potential. The author enumerates the challenges to Indian defence: the low level and quality of public private partnership (PPP), a rigid bureaucracy, absence of self-reliance in military technologies and the need to involve "all stakeholders" in outlining defence policy.

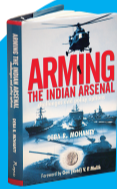
All roads lead to PPP, where the middle P is first among equals. The demand for private participation in defence began to grow in the 1990s, with industry bodies such as CII and FICCI stepping up the pressure. Then in early 2001, the government opened the floodgates, allowing 100 per cent equity to private players and up to 26 per cent FDI.

For good measure, he trashes the ossification of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, which was set up in the 1950s to help the country become self-reliant in defence. He believes that "India can easily create a handful of defence multinationals that are more cost and quality competitive than their counterparts elsewhere in less than a decade."

Magnanimously, Mohanty suggests that India does not keep the benefits of PPP to itself but share it with the world at large by facilitating the export of defence equipment produced privately. He also redefines diplomacy, hitherto a means to avoid war, as a tool to promote arms deals.

India has seen, on average, a double-digit growth in military expenditure, calculated in terms of current prices, over the past decade. But Mohanty rues this "nominal" growth, mainly because it is still less than 2 per cent of the \$1-trillion global spend on defence. *Yeh dil mange more*.

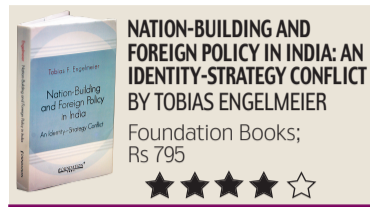
Like the stuttering of a sten gun, Mohanty talks in every chapter about the golden years of the Cold War, the crisis of the early 1990s, and the consolidation and regeneration of the past decade. Don't expect your wars to end anytime soon.



ARMING THE INDIAN ARSENAL BY DEBA R. MOHANTY Rupa & Co; Rs 595

★★★★☆

A realist-idealist duality explains the seemingly idiosyncratic foreign policy inconsistencies



NATION-BUILDING AND FOREIGN POLICY IN INDIA: AN IDENTITY-STRATEGY CONFLICT BY TOBIAS ENGELMEIER

Foundation Books; Rs 795

★★★★☆

By Manoj Joshi

IF YOU want to know why India waited 34 years after China's first nuclear test in 1964 to do its own weapons tests in 1998, or why India won a famous victory against Pakistan in 1971 and then chose to give away the peace at Simla in 1972, you'd be advised to read Tobias Engelmeier's book, which has sought to examine the country's foreign policy behaviour through a study of India's identity formation process.

For some time now, people have sought to explain the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of India's foreign policy. Some have argued that the reason for this resides in our culture; others believe it is driven by our strategic community. On the other hand, some of our adversaries think it is just a devious tactic.

Engelmeier accepts that other countries would have been unlikely to react the way India has on the nuclear issue or Kashmir and Pakistan in similar circumstances. He terms this as an "inflection" from a theoretical norm. His basic thesis is that India's idiosyncratic behaviour arises from a tension between an idealistic framework in which its national identity is being shaped and the realpolitik demands of foreign policy.

Though India is an ancient civilisation, it is a relatively young nation. The republic that was established in 1950 was based on a compact — that this nation-state would be federal, secular and democratic. This was as much an expression of the idealism of the nation's founding fathers, as the pragmatic requirement to hold together a country with an enormous diversity of faiths and ethnicities.

In India, national identity remains a work in progress. The last 30 years have seen the emergence of new fissures based on, say, caste, and religion. But we can also see some of these fissures closing. No doubt, some more newer fissures will emerge in the years to come.

Engelmeier is right when he says the success of the national project requires an ability of the political entrepreneurs to create a sense of national unity. This requires a certain interpretation of the past and its propagation through nationalism. As he points out, the national identity of the Gandhi-Nehru mould has taken root in some places, and it remains to do so in others. It could have been easier, as Engelmeier proposes, to construct a divisive and simplistic identity. And we know there are powerful forces that have sought to do so. But really, is there a choice? In fact, what he calls the value-based, abstract approach to national identity is a pragmatic solution to India's reality.

YET, the value-based 'Indian' nationality is still to take hold. The reason for this is twofold. One is the accentuation of ethnic and caste identities propelled by the need for political mobilisation. On the other hand, as Andre Beteille recently pointed out, it is because we have a class of political entrepreneurs that has ceased to observe constitutional morality.

The insistence on constitutional morality goes back to Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who had pointed out that it is not a natural sentiment. "It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic," he had said.

Engelmeier's analysis is subtle. He sees exactly why India had developed a strategic cul-



QAMAR SIBTAIN

Tobias Engelmeier offers a sharp biopsy of our evolving nation-building project, a project that we know is quite far from being completed.

The Limits of Idealpolitik



The Simla agreement was a case of Indian idealism trumping reality

ture that supported "an idealistic inflection of foreign policy," but yet one that constantly suffered from the tension between the work-in-progress growth of the Indian national ethos and the realpolitik demands of foreign policy based purely on concerns about national interest.

It is true a study of Indian foreign policy in the last 60 years reveals a tension between idealpolitik and realpolitik. The issue of nuclearisation, as

Engelmeier points out, is one such instance. Another is the way in which India allied with the Soviet Union through much of the Cold War.

A third instance would be the manner in which India has dealt with Myanmar. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it supported the democratic movement in Myanmar vociferously. When the military hardened its stand and managed to control the opposition, New Delhi

shifted its stance. It was also driven by the evidence that China had gained ground at its expense.

Yet, and this is one of the inflection points, India's policy differs from that of China. I agree with Engelmeier that the realist-idealist duality is real and cannot be wished away. Its roots lie in our Constitution, which, in turn, is a compact with the diverse Indian people.

The value of this work goes beyond its intrinsic merits. What it does is offer a sharp biopsy of India's evolving nation-building project, a project that we know is quite far from being completed.

The value of this study emerges from the fact that it comes from a foreigner. There are times when our own understanding of national pride or values cloud our judgment, especially when we seek to analyse the ways in which they impact our foreign policy. Engelmeier, who has lived and worked in India, provides the requisite objectivity, as well as a distinct empathy, in dissecting the duality and providing an explanation of the way we are.

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HUNGOVER WITH THE RECESSION

The recession seems to be well and truly over, but the publishing industry is still not in a mood to party. Take for instance the scaled-down sales conference Penguin had this week. Used to flying abroad or heading off to some exotic holiday destination in India, Penguin staffers remained flightless this year, and confined themselves to the Sheraton in Delhi. Could its record advances made

WHISPER WORDS

NEHA TARA MEHTA gets the dope from behind the scenes in the high-octane world of big-ticket publishers and their high-profile authors

for acquisitions this year — Vikram Seth for Rs 13-14 crore; Sarita Mandanna at

an undisclosed amount that is reportedly the highest-ever amount paid to a debut novelist; and of course, Rs 97 lakh to Ramachandra Guha — have anything to do with a watered-down event? HarperCollins India staffers, incidentally, fared much better, and have just returned from three days of intense confabulations and hard partying at Goa's Taj Holiday Village. The Hachette team, too, was at Goa's Fort Aguada for its sales conference this July.