

**Open Skies: Transparency, Confidence Building, and the End of the Cold War**, by Peter Jones, California: Stanford University Press, 2014, pp. 244, Rs 3,060

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The Cold War period has been significant in international history as well as politics. The two power blocs were never at open war but much went on as part of propaganda against the other. Within this struggle between two ideological teams were also efforts, however ill-conceived, to reduce suspicions and build better relations with the hope for a more secure environment. 'Open Skies' is one of such initiatives that have in fact barely been comprehensively recorded until the release of this book. Peter Jones's *Open Skies: Transparency, Confidence Building, and the End of the Cold War* is among those rare works that one finds on negotiations about a treaty which has great implications for confidence building and transparency in international relations and yet is not too well known across signatory states themselves.

Peter Jones, a scholar on war studies and international affairs, served as a senior security analyst in Ottawa. As a visiting fellow in Stanford University since 2011, he began work on conflict resolution and track II diplomacy. During this time, the hushed-up tone of the Open Skies Treaty inspired him to make known the history, politics, implications and scope of it in the form of the book, which got published in 2014.

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The book contains eight short and crisp chapters that are briefly introduced along with the concept and need for having an aerial monitoring system that underlies the essence of the idea behind Open Skies. This introduction is followed by documentation of the evolution of the Open Skies Treaty initiative that was first proposed on 21 June 1955 by President Eisenhower. The titles of the chapters bring out the chronological temper of the book. Chapter 1, 'From the First Open Skies Initiative to the Stockholm Conference' and Chapter 2, 'Open Skies Reborn', emphasise on the initial rejection of the idea by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the preliminary talks for a treaty, till its relaunch in 1989 by President H.W. Bush. 'The Issues Explored' (Chapter 3), the 'Interim Negotiations' (Chapter 5), two major conferences and rounds that finally culminated into the so-called 'End Game' (Chapter 7) are vividly discussed in the book and take the reader through the whole process of the negotiation with all the glitches that delayed the process to the final enforcement of the Open Skies Treaty only in 2002, 10 years after its ratification (when the Cold War and USSR ceased to exist).

The Open Skies concept is explained as short-notice, 'cooperative' over-flights over each other's territory with unarmed surveillance aircraft. The themes of reducing fear of a surprise attack, boosting arms control measures and transparent confidence building that benefits even smaller nations without national technical means (NTM) have been reiterated as the purpose of Open Skies, but Jones suggests that it was also a 'propaganda victory' for the United States (US) who wanted to test Soviet's willingness to such openness, with hopes of exposing its communist enemies (after all with Cold War at the backdrop). Similarities of motives behind the proposal of 1955 and that of 1989 have been noted along with the fact that hindrances continued throughout due to imposition of a 'top down approach' upon a reluctant US bureaucracy, who were to actually work out the details later for the treaty to become functional. This indeed led to further intra-agency divergences as mentioned in the book.

After an initial red signal by USSR for the 1955 proposal, some progress towards Open Skies was made with Canadian (and Hungarian) efforts from 1989 onwards. By then the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), nearing its fortieth anniversary, desperately hoped to be able to present something to gain goodwill of the public. Open Skies looked like the perfect fit and was thus relaunched, now

taking note of the strategic changes that ensued glasnost. NATO then presented a Basic Elements Paper (BEP) by February 1990, before the first formal conference in Ottawa. Engrossed with only 'intra-alliance' issues, NATO continued to debate and somewhat overlook many technical and political differences among themselves over aircraft ownership, sensors, data sharing, timelines, quotas, membership and whether Open Skies be seen as part of a larger Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty or not. Similarly, inconsistency reflected in the BEP presented by the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) alliance as well, over which much of Soviet hegemony had clearly declined by late 1989 and early 1990. A communiqué was to be outlined and 'inter-alliance' grievances discussed, but it was not too fruitful. The working group formed during the April conference at Budapest was also not very successful. Soviet position on having simultaneous 'Open Seas' and 'Open Space' was put on hold as well, though its military's opposition persisted along with other problems. However, what worked better were the informal talks that were held during the inter-session period, a point noted well in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, which facilitated a 'Grand Compromise' between the two blocs.

One deadline had been missed for signing the treaty on 12 May 1990, but the 'hiatus' that followed enabled parties to reach a consensus through informal consultations on many issues. With the completion of CFE treaty, NATO's Open Skies position was also redefined with compromises, facilitated more by smaller European nations than the US. Hungary and Romania demonstrated the feasibility of such a treaty by signing one bilaterally. Domestic reasons are cited for a delayed and lukewarm Soviet response to agree to the Vienna round of talks scheduled for September 1991 that further saw no progress. It was only during the November talks that a decision was taken to put down signatures for the treaty, positively by 24 March 1992. Alliances were redefined by then into two groups: Neutral and Non-aligned (NNA) and Western European Union (WEU).

By January 1992, what Jones calls the 'end game' had begun. The USSR had disintegrated giving rise to new nations, whose membership question became a grave issue. While France longing to see Open Skies as a part of a larger Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe regime equated the membership of both, Turkey hoping to block Cyprus's entry called for individual admission that could be vetoed. With some give and take, a three-staged expansion process was arrived at. Since

most delegates were familiar with the issues by then, many matters, especially of technical nature about sensors and timelines, were resolved. Yet substantive issues were left to be detailed still later by the Open Skies Consultative Committee. Jones considers this as a drawback of the entire process, though he agrees that there is merit in fast-tracking things to meet deadlines which otherwise become almost unachievable.

Jones, through his simplistic writing, brings forth all problems of the Open Skies diplomatic negotiations that were implicitly a part of Cold War politics. There is a lot to learn from his book about managing in-group partners and smoothening differences amongst participants in a multi-party treaty. As one reads on, it becomes evident that no matter how well the talks go at the negotiating table, there are always problems that emerge at the operational levels.

It took a while to get everyone on board, but Jones emphasises that the speed with which a 'vague' non-pre-negotiated idea managed to be formulated and readied for signature by March 1992 indicates some procedural ignorance and the symbolic importance attached to having the treaty dot on time. Thereafter, efforts were made for finally consulting actual flight operators, establishing operational units and conducting 'mock' certification exercises. The entry into force clause could not be fulfilled for long due to Russian and Ukrainian non-ratification, which eventually worked out. Open Skies became an operational reality in 2002 with 34 member nations.

In the concluding pages of the book there is reference of the two Open Skies Review Conferences that have been held so far (2005 and 2010). The author agrees that formally expanding the scope of the treaty to other regions as part of confidence-building measures (CBMs) is untenable at the moment, though cooperative aerial monitoring could help reduce tensions. It could nevertheless find application in environmental monitoring and improving verifiability for arms control regimes. However, the need to reinvigorate the process of Open Skies is put forward. The US could take the lead and begin by upgrading sensors like Russia who, interestingly, has made the most use of it. Indeed, with 'cooperation, equality and sharing', much can be made out of a hopeless situation.

Peter Jones's 'Open Skies' stands unique in itself for dealing with a subject inconspicuous to most. To sum up the treaty, the following can be noted:

any signatory can, on about three days notice, fly a sensor-equipped airplane (carrying cameras with a resolution of no greater than 30 cm and synthetic aperture radar with a resolution of no greater than 3 m) anywhere over the territory of another signatory. Any signatory can then acquire the images from that flight, regardless of whether or not they were involved. The intrusiveness is the whole point behind the treaty as a ‘confidence-building measure,’ since it signals that signatories have nothing to hide.<sup>1</sup>

The book breathes fresh with its idea of renewing the treaty, pushing it forward and delving into expanding the scope of Open Skies in other contexts, though more positivity needs to be hoped for than does Jones’ when it comes to its viability in the West Asian or Indo-Pak context. It is true that the idea of open skies as a CBM has never been part of the region except in terms of commercial and civil liberalisation.<sup>2</sup> But the ultimate success of the Open Skies Treaty is what we can learn from it and try to implant that in the Indo-Pak context—a CBM which today might look unthinkable but may yet reap fruit some day. The lessons enumerated in the concluding chapter could prove very important for scholars and practitioners of negotiation alike. This book would be satisfying experience for all those who wish to know about an old and silent CBM of aerial monitoring that, with its cooperative feature, came to be known as ‘Open Skies’.

#### NOTES

1. ‘Evaluating Open Skies’, *The Devil of History*, 3 March 2015, available at <https://devilofhistory.wordpress.com/2015/03/03/evaluating-open-skies/>, accessed on 2 February 2016.
2. Open skies is understood only in the sense of being part of civil transport regimes allowing freedom of the air for another country or when a bilateral/multilateral air transport agreement has been negotiated by two or more states and put into place.

