

India at Risk by Jaswant Singh, New Delhi: Rupa, 2013, pp. 289,
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The book covers reflections of a soldier-turned-politician on the security challenges faced by India since her independence. The author has covered major events like the 1947–48 Kashmir War, the 1962 India–China War and the 1965 Indo-Pak War (the two operations in which he participated), besides the 1971 War for Liberation of Bangladesh and other events till the 1990s, based on research material.

His analysis of the events of the 1990s (the nuclear explosions of 1998; the famous bus yatra of the Indian Prime Minister [PM] to Pakistan in 1999; the Kargil War of 1999; the terrorist attack on the Parliament in 2002; and the crisis resulting from hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC 814) is based on notes he kept as Foreign Minister in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, as are his views of the failed visit of General Parvez Musharraf to Agra in 2001.

Highlighting the relationship of geography and history to security events in the Indian context, in chapters 1–3, Singh states that the Congress government (or Pandit Nehru), from 1947 to 1964, failed in carrying out a realistic analysis of the threat from the newly created state of Pakistan and was influenced by the British rulers. Later, Nehru failed

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to identify the Chinese threat and did not give priority to resolving the border issue, which resulted in the 1962 debacle. During the 1965 war, while PM Shastri did give the armed forces a free hand to conduct the war, he was influenced by foreign powers and thus agreed to the Tashkent Agreement, which was not to India's advantage.

The chapter covering the crisis in East Pakistan—'resulting in the influx of nearly 9 million refugees into India'—which finally led to the 1971 Indo-Pak War, has been covered objectively, and the author gives due credit to Mrs Gandhi's policies and leadership. However, he is critical of the Shimla Agreement, where he feels that she let Bhutto off the hook by not insisting on converting the ceasefire line (CFL) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into a permanent border, and settled for the Line of Control (LoC).

In chapter 6, titled 'India's Destructive Decades', the author lists important events and gives his comments on the Emergency of 1975, Operation Blue Star of 1984 resulting in the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, faulty dispatch of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the kidnapping of Rubia Syed, and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He also blames the centre for mutinies in the Punjab, J&K, Assam and the North-East, and blames Mrs Gandhi (and then Rajiv Gandhi) for mishandling the situation.

Hereafter, he covers the events mostly under his party, BJP. Chapter 7, titled 'The Nuclear Conundrum of the 21st Century', states that the events of 11 May 1998 (when India carried out the nuclear tests) and 28 and 30 May 1998 (when Pakistan conducted her tests) became important events that changed the strategic environment in the region and the world. Giving due credit to PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee for taking the bold step, he stresses India's nuclear doctrine of 'no-first use', and covers the still-outstanding issues for global disarmament (like Global Zero).

The last chapter, 'Challenges of the New Millennium', covers events with which the author was deeply associated. These include: the historic Lahore bus journey undertaken by PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee on 16 March 1999; the Kargil War (May–July 1999); the hijacking of Flight IC 814 on 24 December 1999; the Agra Summit from 14 July to 16 July 2001; the bomb blasts in J&K Assembly on 1 October 2001; and the attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001. He has briefly covered the background to these events, their political, national and international implications, and the actions by the political hierarchy of India. While narrating the events, he has relied on his diaries. He highlights the idea

behind undertaking the bus journey to Lahore, the role played by the United States (US) in resolving the Kargil conflict, the compulsions for releasing militants for rescuing the innocent civilian passengers of hijacked Flight IC 814 and the reasons for the failed Agra Summit, and the two terrorist attacks—first, on the Legislative Assembly in Srinagar and second, on the Indian Parliament in Delhi. To support his narrative, he has given references and messages he exchanged with foreign officials.

The epilogue covers issues of governance, non-proliferation, terrorism and economy, aspects which pose indirect threats to India's security, which sums up his views on actions which India needs to take in the future.

Considering that Singh was an important minister in the BJP-led NDA government, one hoped that he would critically and objectively examine their policies and make suggestions for the future, but he does not do so. While he has been analytical and critical of the government in chapters 1–7, he does not throw any new light on the erstwhile NDA government's decision-making process and performance in the above-mentioned vital security events of national importance.

The book is well researched and written in simple language, and makes for interesting reading.

