

Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics

Reviewed by Fareha Iqtidar Khan

Jacob, Happymon. *Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019. 401 pages.

The book furnishes an extensive understanding of the dynamic forces at play across the Line of Control (LoC), between Pakistan and India. It attempts to debunk prevalent ideas regarding the reasons of ceasefire violations (CFVs) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). *Line on Fire* problematizes prevalent wisdom about crisis escalation and establishes a causative linkage between CFVs and India-Pakistan escalatory dynamics.

Happymon Jacob in this broad study adopts an objective approach and gauges the ingrained stances and attitudes with pragmatism and reason. He has examined vital facets within the context of the predominant subject of Kashmir. The author has deliberated on the causes of the breakdown of the ceasefire. His visit to Pakistan gave him a refreshed perception, allowing him to refine his viewpoint and opinions. Jacob is an academic and teaches disarmament studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. His participation in numerous closed-door track-two dialogues on CFVs and escalation dynamics persuaded him to further investigate the matter.

The book is based on the postulation that incorrect identification by New Delhi and Islamabad about the reasons of CFVs and the link between CFVs and escalatory dynamics have resulted in the adoption of flawed policies by the two sides for catering to

frequent CFVs and worsening relations. Such an incorrect identification is brought about by the insufficient understanding of the grounds of CFVs. The book provides an array of substitute reasons of such susceptibility to failure of the ceasefire. Jacob questions the prevailing understanding regarding crisis escalation in the region and also gives an outline of the evolving border amid India and Pakistan through history. The main study however is delimited from the year 2003 to 2017. The 2003 ceasefire agreement was different from the earlier two since it was not a war-termination agreement rather a consensus between the two sides to avoid firing. The book explains why the agreement dismantled every once in a while.

The author has divided the book into seven chapters including the chapters of introduction and conclusion. The second chapter furnishes a theoretical basis for the book. It closes by emphasizing the capacity of CFVs to elicit escalation on both sides of the LoC. The third chapter studies the managing of the boundary running across J&K. The fourth chapter presents an analysis of CFVs, based on statistics and history. The fifth chapter is relatively lengthy. It reveals various triggers of CFVs in J&K which have not been examined previously. Political influences and autonomous military factors (AMFs) are investigated in further subsections. The sixth chapter provides empirical data to indicate how India-Pakistan escalatory dynamics and CFVs in J&K are interrelated.

Jacob points out how the existing conventional literature about escalation follows remarkable events, and the subsequent collective national choices regarding undertaking or forsaking escalation, degree of escalation and time of retreat and negotiating peace. He however focuses on the ability of AMFs to cause the crisis to escalate, at times in the absence of an approval from the political leadership in both the states. The analysis is thus ingenious in numerous ways. Besides, despite the fact that the conventional justification provides a rather orderly archetype to decipher escalatory undercurrents, the description in this book rather complicate the regular rationalization.

Another aspect further worsening a crisis situation between Pakistan and India is the piercing narrative espoused by the political leaders in both the countries, in the case of violations of the ceasefire line. The statements made during such a scenario usually hint at a nuclear standoff. The political standpoints of both the states regarding the disputed territory and the resulting clash are practically manifested in the happenings along the control line. In the view of New Delhi, such cross-border skirmishes allow Islamabad to infiltrate terrorists across the Indian border. From the standpoint of Islamabad, New Delhi violates the armistice and undertakes escalation causing diversion from the matters of global concern that meanwhile take place within Indian-held Kashmir. Besides, the national atmosphere in the two states is wrought by jingoistic narratives and media propaganda, affecting the policies. Stabilization of the conflict turns out to be an issue much less managing the conflict or working to resolving the matter.

The conflicting political dynamics and subsequent CFVs result in escalation which may spiral drastically into inadvertent consequences. The recent Pulwama attack in Indian-occupied Kashmir and the crisis that ensued could not be reckoned by the international powers. The undervalued danger of CFVS to lead to alarming levels of escalation further elucidate the importance of understanding the escalation dynamics between the two nuclear powers. Such an understanding might facilitate policymakers in the two states to decide to solemnize a wide-ranging ceasefire agreement.

In such a scenario, the absence of a formal ceasefire agreement (CFA) between Islamabad and New Delhi is highlighted by the author. He has defined escalation as “sudden intensification of political, military, and diplomatic tensions between countries in general atmosphere of adversarial relations that may or may not lead to a war.” The definition allows the reader to consider escalation taking place as a result of autonomous military factors.

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These factors range from personality features of military leaders to emotional condition of the forces on duty. The role of such factors is vividly analysed with the help of interviews with military individuals from both the countries. Jacob suggests that political leaders have permitted AMFs along the LoC to turn into the primary reason of crisis escalation. He also vouches for a resolution in the form of a formal ceasefire agreement, compounded with improved interaction between the two militaries. Such an agreement will also help in facilitating the bilateral dialogue process.

Line on Fire is based on exhaustive research as the author benefitted from field trips and meetings with pertinent civilian and armed personnel belonging to either side of the boundary. The book is a must-read for anyone in search of an impartial insight on the situation of armistice alongside the LoC and the manner it affects the scenario of skirmishes eclipsing Islamabad and New Delhi.