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Book Review

Neighbours in Arms: An American Senator's Quest for Disarmament in a Nuclear Subcontinent

Larry Pressler

Penguin/Viking, India; 2017, 288 Pages
\$20.51, ISBN-13: 978-0670089314

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Larry Pressler, a U.S. Senator since 1979, is famous in South Asia for being an influential legislator who has performed crucial work as the head of the Senate Arms Control Subcommittee. He advocated for the Pressler Amendment of 1990—intended to deter Pakistan from acquiring nuclear weapons by blocking aid and military sales to the country. His recent book, *Neighbours in Arms: An American Senator's Quest for Disarmament in a Nuclear Subcontinent*, opens wounds of that past era.

The book is a tale of the conflicted Pakistan-U.S. relationship spanning many years. Lacking the citations of scholarly writing, the book reads, rather, as a memoir of the author's personal experiences and observations. The account is segmented into thirty parts, most of them telling the history of nuclear weapons development in South Asia, challenges to nonproliferation efforts, and lessons learned. Pressler presents Pakistan as an unstable country which secretly obtained nuclear weapons in the 1990s while being a Cold War partner of the U.S. Another of the book's themes is Pressler's love for India and his argument as to why it should be regarded as a crucial partner of the U.S.

While Pakistan considers nuclear weapons as integral to its national security and survival, the U.S. has typically been a fairly self-serving partner, assisting Pakistan only when U.S. security interests benefit from it. Though Pakistan has remained a close ally of the U.S. for decades, the U.S.'s interests have been shifting more toward support for India in recent years, and such is the context in which Pressler constructs his story. And the U.S.'s relations with Pakistan have taken an even steeper downturn in the past year, as the book has been published. *Neighbours in Arms* terms the military industrial complex and bureaucratic establishment as an "Octopus," which, according to Pressler, controls significant aspects of the American presence in the Indian subcontinent. The Octopus enabled Pakistan to become a nuclear weapon state, thus putting the Pressler Amendment on the backburner.

The U.S. continued to provide Pakistan with military and monetary assistance until 1990 when President George H.W. Bush could not certify that Pakistan was not developing a nuclear weapon. Aid and military sales to Pakistan were thus blocked, including a consignment of F-16 fighter aircraft, forever altering the tenor of U.S. relationships with Pakistan and India (and rendering Pressler as generally unpopular in Pakistan). Later, the Pressler sanctions were largely lifted by President Clinton.

In *Neighbours in Arms*, though, Pressler neglects that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear device in 1990; and in 1998, the country's nuclear weapons testing was a direct response to Indian nuclear weapons tests. The book reads as an attempt to direct blame toward Pakistan for the current shortfalls in relations between Pakistan and the U.S. and India. Nevertheless, Pakistan-U.S. relations have been mired with a trust deficit since 2008, when the U.S. remunerated India with a superior atomic arrangement known as the Hyde Act.

While discussing Indo-U.S. relations, Pressler argues that promoting Indian interests globally is the best avenue forward for the U.S. He explicitly states, "I strongly believe we need to do more to promote India's interest worldwide." He believes that to the U.S., India is "a natural economic and geopolitical ally for the future," while Pakistan must be treated as "an irresponsible, dishonest, rogue state." Describing U.S. foreign policy toward Pakistan during last twenty years as a "disaster," Pressler warns the State Department that the "worst [is] still to come." Still, though India may be an important ally for the U.S. to achieve its geostrategic objectives by counterbalancing China's growing influence in Asia, Pakistan—a major non-NATO ally and strategically located—may actually be more important for the U.S. in attempts to achieve its objectives both globally and in Asia; yet Pressler doesn't argue toward any such end.

Pressler appears upset that Pakistan, through "blackmail," circumvented his honorable goal of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. While stressing that Pakistan must be pronounced a rogue and terrorist state, he neglects to mention that the U.S., itself, still possesses a substantial nuclear weapons arsenal and associated delivery systems (and has for decades). Indeed, the U.S. is one of the five nuclear weapon states recognized by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Thus, his judgment of Pakistan, which has lost more than 50,000 civilians in the U.S. War on Terror, appears unjustly critical.

Neighbours in Arms is well-narrated, and it does adequately combine the current Pakistan-/Indo-U.S. situations with historical events. The book's text is lucid, functioning like a mirror for looking into the influence of lobbying on foreign policy, not only in developing but developed states. Thus, the account presents a call for America to return to a focused and forward-thinking direction. The Pressler Amendment, Octopus, and the Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement are referenced by Pressler as anchorages throughout. And the book suggests that the Pressler Amendment, by prohibiting aid to Pakistan if it was determined to have nuclear weapons, reduced nuclear tension between India and Pakistan.

However, the book is unable to shed light on several pertinent questions. For example, considering the American goal of nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia and the existing Indian threat, would it have been rational for Pakistan to abandon its efforts to develop nuclear capability? Other such questions are either subjectively considered or generally passed over. Viewed in such light, *Neighbours in Arms* serves as a well-narrated personal account of possibilities for Indo-U.S. relations, but its presentation of the nuance and complexity of Pakistan-U.S. relations is flawed.