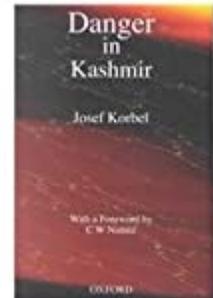




Josef Korbel. *Danger in Kashmir.* Karachi and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xi + 351 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-579781-7.



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A Shortage of Goodwill

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For over fifty years various dimensions of the “Kashmir issue” have been defined, reinvented, and exploited by those who have chosen confrontation over compromise in the Indian sub-continent and the international arena. Politicians, patriots, generals, and religious leaders have approached Kashmir as a perennial lens through which to view and argue differing interpretations of post-1947 identity, belief, history, and political destiny. Joseph Korbel’s reprinted 1954 classic study, combining sharp diplomatic analysis and Cold War polemic, reminds that the ability of the international community to discern competing notions of sovereignty and legitimacy has never meant the existence of a comparable ability to mobilize regional consensus sufficient to end state-sponsored or religion-based conflict.

Korbel’s volume offers insight into the roots of the long-term Kashmir “problem,” including details of the armed conflict between India and Pakistan that emerged with the 1947 partition of British India. Before 1947 Kashmir was a Muslim-majority “Princely State” ruled by a non-Muslim dynasty. The “two-nation theory” of

Pakistan and Muhammad Ali Jinnah claimed separate sovereignty for Muslim majority areas and the inherent justice of Kashmir becoming part of an independent Pakistan. The “theory of secularism” (p. 43) advanced by India and Jawaharlal Nehru asserted that all subjects of South Asia, Hindu and Muslim, had equal constitutional protections in an independent India. To Nehru the “accession” of princely Kashmir to India after partition was valid to the point of being emblematic of India’s modernist identity.

In 1948 Korbel served as a member and chair of the five-person United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan that achieved a January 1, 1949, cease-fire in Kashmir, though not a comprehensive political settlement. Korbel was an experienced Czech diplomat who understood the competing national visions even as he viewed sub-continental politics with a cool outsider’s perspective. Though his discussions of ethnicity and community now read as too dependent on colonial stereotypes (“stolid Sikhs”), Korbel drew upon his European experience for opinionated comparative analysis. He noted in passing the still-understudied role of the RSS

in Partition violence and Punjab ethnic cleansing. He saw the RSS leadership as “Fuehrers in the Nazi tradition” and RSS members as “trained in terrorism” (p. 52). Ever the elite diplomat, Korbelt recorded “great man” rivalry and indicated that the Jinnah-Nehru animosity was fundamental to partition. Korbelt noted that Nehru “quoted openly” a remark made to him in 1938 by Iqbal, the Muslim poet and Pakistani icon: “What is there in common between Jinnah and you? He is a politician, you are a patriot.” Korbelt dryly noted, “The open recounting of such a remark was not calculated to repair any differences Nehru may have had with Jinnah” (p. 38).

Korbelt sensed that post-1947 conflict over Kashmir was almost inevitable. >From the actual event of partition, he recognized that “two nation” demography and sensibility had determined the fate of almost every princely state, that “of the other 584 Princely States not a single one with Hindu population became a part of Pakistan even though in two cases, Hyderabad and Junagadh, they were ruled by Muslim Princes. Nor did any state with a Muslim population (with the exception of the Sikh-ruled State of Kapurthala, in which almost all Muslims were killed or expelled) accede to India. Rather, they sought integration according to their religious affinity in every case save one—Kashmir” (p. 63). Korbelt pointedly outlined Nehru’s deferral and abandonment of early support for a plebiscite to determine the political will of the Kashmiri people.

Korbelt’s rationalist sensibility dissecting the politics of nation-state, party, and personality became less detached as he considered Kashmir in a global context. Nehru was not wrong just for failing to recognize the logic of UN and international standards of conflict resolution. He also was perceived as being unable or unwilling to recognize the more pressing threat, to Korbelt, international communism. The Soviet Union was aggressive. China had fallen. South Asia was being infiltrated and processes of “communization” were under way. Kashmir’s post-1947 Prime Minister, Sheikh Abdullah, and his “New Kashmir” policies were less pro-Indian than proto-Marxist. Korbelt’s concluding chapters on the “Communist Harvest” and the “Double Shadow” reflected the author’s main preoccupation. Korbelt feared that a failure to settle the Kashmir dispute would fragment potential South Asian unity to the benefit of communist activism and potential domination.

Writing a volume of regional diplomatic history and Cold War politics, Korbelt documented the complex nuances and weaknesses of early UN diplomacy. Korbelt’s perceptions and tone were colored by his personal experience as a Czech diplomat. After achieving the January 1, 1949, ceasefire, he was dismissed from his diplomatic post and the UN Commission and exiled by a new communist regime in Czechoslovakia. It took 113 meetings with all concerned parties in 1948 to negotiate a basic ceasefire. Without Korbelt, the Commission held another 126 meetings in a vain attempt to move forward on a truce agreement and plebiscite (p. 154). Individual mediators would follow with no better success.

Korbelt’s study framed in basic outline the different roles the Kashmir issue would play in future decades. Domestic political needs and pressures would continue to too easily tempt Pakistani and Indian politicians to defend proclaimed national and ideological interests in Kashmir and avoid concessions that might bring settlement, but also charges of betrayal. Kashmir would also earn a permanent place in diplomatic and journalist discussions of “crisis points” and “powder kegs” related to the Cold War, nuclear confrontation, and, lately, “terrorism.” The utility of the “Kashmir issue” for nationalist and militarist agendas has continued, including the tragically wasteful 1999 Kargil conflict. The danger of hinting at compromise over issues relevant to Kashmir and Islamist agendas was illustrated by the late-2003 attempts on the life of Pakistan President Musharraf.

Focused on great men and high diplomacy, Korbelt closely tied the Kashmir impasse to Nehru’s later conditions and concerns that diffused his early commitment to a plebiscite. Fifty years later Kashmiri self-determination remained subordinated to nation-state ideologies and identities. Today, though many rejected the “two nation” theory as disproved in 1971 by the fragmentation of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, victims of violence in Kashmir continue to suffer. They wait for the expression of the necessary “good will” found wanting by Korbelt for resolution of the dispute, “Without it, even the most ingenious proposal is condemned to failure” (p. 197). In the 1990s Korbelt’s daughter, Madeline Albright, had no better success mediating the impasse. Bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, lately proposed for 2004, remain an apparent necessary first step towards genuine resolution of the conflict.

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