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Review of "Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011: The Promise and Threat of Transformation" edited by D. Suba Chandran and P. R. Chari

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Compared to simplistic media portrayals of conflict and violence in the region, *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011* provides nuance on controversial and complex topics... [and] does well to demonstrate that there is no single story for South Asian conflicts.

Olivia Molden on *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011: The Promise and Threat of Transformation*.

Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011: The Promise and Threat of Transformation

Edited by D. Suba Chandran and P. R. Chari. New Delhi: Routledge, 2012. 297 pages. ISBN 9780415529631.

Reviewed by Olivia Molden

Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011, edited by D. Suba Chandran and P. R. Chari (both from the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi), provides an in-depth and extensive coverage of armed conflicts across South Asia. This edited collection is part of an annual series on the state of peace and conflict on the Indian subcontinent. The 2011 volume focuses on the trajectory of prior, current, and possible future armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Within the region, chapters cover specific areas, including Jammu and Kashmir, Northeastern India, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, or pervasive movements, such as religious fundamentalism and the 'Red Corridor' of Naxal violence. Between these topics, the edited collection paints a picture of dynamic and persistent conflict across South Asia.

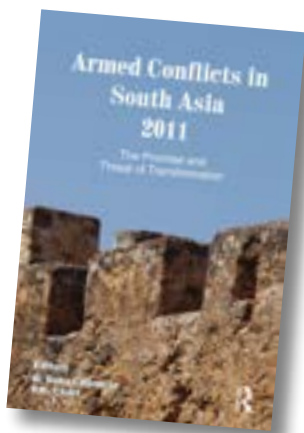
The introductory chapters for Part I and Part II, "Armed Conflicts in South Asia" by Chari (Chapter 1) and "Conflict Transformations and Early Warnings" by Chandran (Chapter 7), highlight crosscutting concepts and

issues relevant to interpreting the chapters that follow them. Between these sections, certain regions and conflicts in South Asia receive more attention, particularly those in India and on Indian borders. Kavita Suri (Chapter 4) and Ashok Bhan (Chapter 8) both question the surge of violence in Jammu and Kashmir in India and Pakistan. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman (Chapter 5) questions the peace-building process in Northeast India while Wasbir Hussain (Chapter 9) discusses the rise of terrorism in that same region. Rajat Kumar Kujur (Chapter 6) covers Naxal violence across Eastern India while Medha Chaturvedi and P.G. Rajamohan analyze the spread of Naxalite movement in the concluding chapter (Chapter 13). Radha Vinod Raju (Chapter 12) speculates the expansion of fundamentalist violence citing specific examples, many of which are based in India. The book also focuses on current issues elsewhere in South Asia. For example, Shanthie Mariet D'Souza (Chapter 2) covers Afghanistan demilitarization, Chandran (Chapter 3) discusses drone attacks in Northeast Pakistan, Nishchalnath Pandey (Chapter 10) discusses the political and economic situation in post-civil war Nepal, and N. Manoharan (Chapter 11) analyses the Sri Lankan governments post-civil war peace-building and development efforts.

Besides the introductory chapters (1 and 7), chapters follow a similar format and style. Most chapters start

with an outline of the actors involved in the conflict in question. Authors often emphasize the complexity and contradictions of organizations, armed groups, or militaries engaged in a conflict, like troops from Europe and the United States, Naga insurgents, or international Tamil Tiger support groups. Authors also explain relevant history and drivers of the conflict to contextualize the current trajectory. Chapters conclude with a future prognosis that explains possible future scenarios and potential remedies. Given the detailed content and expertise of the authors, each chapter could easily be its own book.

Within the scope of armed conflicts in South Asia, there is an overarching focus on state institutions, especially the Indian government and military. This heavy focus on the Indian state throughout the book likely reflects the interests of the Institute and the dominance of authors who are Indian-educated or who have worked for the Indian government. Within the focus on state institutions, authors discuss the ways in which specific government leaders or larger government politics influence international policies, peace negotiations, and/or economic agreements that in turn either fuel or transform ongoing conflicts. Many chapters emphasize the inability of governments to adequately address the root causes of the conflict in question. For example, Chari summarizes systemic issues common



to the region like the youth bulge, entrenched economic inequities, and “the inability of the State to ensure that all its citizens remain subject to the law” (p. 15). Meanwhile, Chandran emphasizes the current dearth of critically informed conflict alerts and warnings among government officials and civil society.

Two chapters that stand out in this edited collection are Pandey’s “Nepal: Old Conflict, New Issues,” and Manoharan’s “With Lions and Without Tigers: Conflict Transformation and the Search for Peace in Sri Lanka,” both of which explain the role of state institutions in building peace following long and bloody civil wars. Pandey discusses state restructuring in Nepal following the end of the civil war in 2006. He specifically hones in on the lasting economic impacts from the conflict and continuing political instability. He highlights major issues (which are still relevant today), namely, out-migration from rural areas to nearby cities or the Gulf and continuing caste divides, as seen with Madhesi protests in the Terai region on the Nepal-India border. Pandey concludes by warning that conflict in Nepal has merely receded, while “weak democratic institutions, myopic and selfish leadership, malfunctioning bureaucracy and pressures from various extra-regional powers compound” the situation (p. 210). In almost an opposite institutional context, Manoharan analyzes the Sri Lankan government’s steps towards

long-term peace—demilitarization, democratization, development, and devolution. Manoharan emphasizes issues with the continuing marginalization of Tamil populations, particularly in Sri Lanka’s Northeastern region where much fighting took place. Although both these chapters discuss peace building and development efforts within differing institutional contexts, it is clear that divisive ethnic politics remain a key issue.

Compared to simplistic media portrayals of conflict and violence in the region, *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2011* provides nuance on controversial and complex topics. Through the coverage of diverse conflicts over the course of thirteen chapters, this edited volume in its entirety does well to demonstrate that there is no single story for South Asian conflicts. However, there are few source citations and it is not clear how authors gathered information. Additionally, the book overall could employ a stronger conceptual and analytical framework to help readers understand how authors analyzed information, especially in terms of how authors reached the ‘alerts’ and ‘warnings’ they provide. Nevertheless, Chandran in Chapter 7 does cite broad concepts from peace and conflict studies, such as the relevance of ‘conflict transformation’ in the South Asian context; individual chapters, however, rarely reference these larger concepts.

This edited collection is best suited for readers familiar with the region. It spends little time providing basic background information, yet provides enough general context to foreground specific arguments on how conflicts are unraveling. As such, this book, and other annual volumes, can provide reading material for an upper level university course on the contemporary geography and history of South Asia. However, the cost of a new book may be prohibitively expensive for students. For readers more interested in specific conflicts, like Nepal’s civil war, secession in Northeast India, or the rise of the Taliban, this book provides a detailed account and stresses specific questions for further investigation. Beyond academic circles in South Asian Studies, Political Science, and Peace and Conflict Studies, this book will be of interest to civil servants, journalists, and policy makers.

Olivia Molden is a PhD student in the Department of Geography at the University of Oregon studying water security in the Himalayas. Her master’s work investigated the cultural politics of water infrastructure and urban development in Kathmandu, Nepal through a case study of ancient stone spouts.