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Tanvi Madan. *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War.*

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Fateful Triangle is a must-read for scholars of foreign relations history, policy analysts, policymakers, and anyone seeking to better understand the role of India and China in the world. Tanvi Madan's painstakingly researched and accessibly written book challenges received wisdom about the U.S. government's approach to South Asia during the Cold War, and Indian policymakers' responses to US actions. She foregrounds the role of China in U.S.-India bilateral relations, emphasizing the significance of that "fateful triangle" over the hyphenated U.S. policy toward "India-Pakistan."

Madan forcefully argues and successfully demonstrates that "China's role in the US-India script was as a leading actor and not in the form of a cameo or guest appearance" (6). Beginning in 1949 when U.S. policymakers' anxieties over the 'loss of China' to Communism influenced their policies toward India as a democratic non-Communist counterweight, the book calls upon scholars, students, and analysts of Indian and U.S. foreign policies to understand U.S.-Indian relations in the context of Asia, and not merely that of the South Asian subcontinent.

Based on multi-archival research and spanning over thirty years of Indian foreign policy (1949–1979), *Fateful Triangle* offers a roadmap to understand Indian policymakers' geopolitical choices from their past actions. The book thus skillfully straddles the often-partitioned worlds of policy and history to shed new light on India's nonalignment, its diversification of partnerships, and the dynamic nature of U.S.-Indian relations.

For Madan, historical actors' individual preferences mattered, but structural factors of "high (geo)politics" had an overwhelming influence on individual preferences. Across eight chronologically organized chapters, she shows how Indian policymakers made two geopolitical tilts, one toward the United States in 1962–63, and another toward the Soviet Union in 1971, both in response to their perceived threat from China. She argues that the United States and India have historically come together against China only when both countries have agreed on the nature and urgency of the Chinese threat as well as how to deal with that threat. In *Fateful Triangle*, Madan thus generates important policy insights based upon meticulous historical research, which makes the book a significant piece of scholarship for present and future generations of scholars and analysts studying U.S. foreign relations, India's foreign policy, and the geopolitics of Asia and South Asia.

Fateful Triangle stands out for at least three key reasons. First, it adds to the corpus of new diplomatic and political histories of South Asia.¹ This is important because post-1947 India is often understood through theoretical lenses of political science/international relations or economic models of development. Empirically rich accounts of India's past since its

¹ See for example: Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Bérénice Guyot-Réchar, *Shadow States: India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2016); Pallavi Raghavan, *Animosity at Bay: An Alternative History of the India-Pakistan Relationship, 1947-1952* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

independence from British colonial rule are wanting. Inaugurated by Srinath Raghavan's masterpiece, *War and Peace in Modern India* in 2010, diplomatic and political histories of South Asia have witnessed a steady growth in scholarship over the past decade.² Madan adds to this thriving body of scholarship, thus paving the path for future scholars and students of international and transnational histories of South Asia after the formal end of European colonialism.

Second, the book adds to the body of scholarship on India in the global Cold War, which has witnessed a spurt in recent years with pathbreaking studies such as David Engerman's *Price of Aid*, Paul McGarr's *The Cold War in South Asia*, and Manu Bhagavan's volume, *India and the Cold War*, among others.³ These, of course, build on earlier historical works by Robert McMahon and Andrew Rotter.⁴

Third and finally, Madan's emphasis on Indian policymakers' pragmatic approach to foreign policy sheds new light on the meaning of India's nonalignment. Given the overemphasis on the ideational dimension of New Delhi's foreign policy choices in the extant scholarship, India's nonalignment has remained a poorly understood policy.⁵ It is frequently equated with Indian policymakers' quest for status or prestige. Madan effectively shows that nonalignment was a strategic response to the global Cold War. It was not an absence of alignment, but a diversification of partnerships with multiple alignments that ebbed and flowed based on the circumstances.

In other words, *Fateful Triangle* is a rich historical analysis of the China factor in past US-India relations with an eye to inform present and future policy. It should be a required reading for scholars and policymakers alike.

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² Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010).

³ David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Paul McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Manu Bhagavan, ed., *India and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁴ Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁵ See for example: Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *Wronged by Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Rohan Mukherjee, "Nuclear Ambiguity and International Status: India in the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, 1962-1969," in *India and the Cold War* edited by Manu Bhagavan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 126-150.