

The Line of Control: Travelling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies

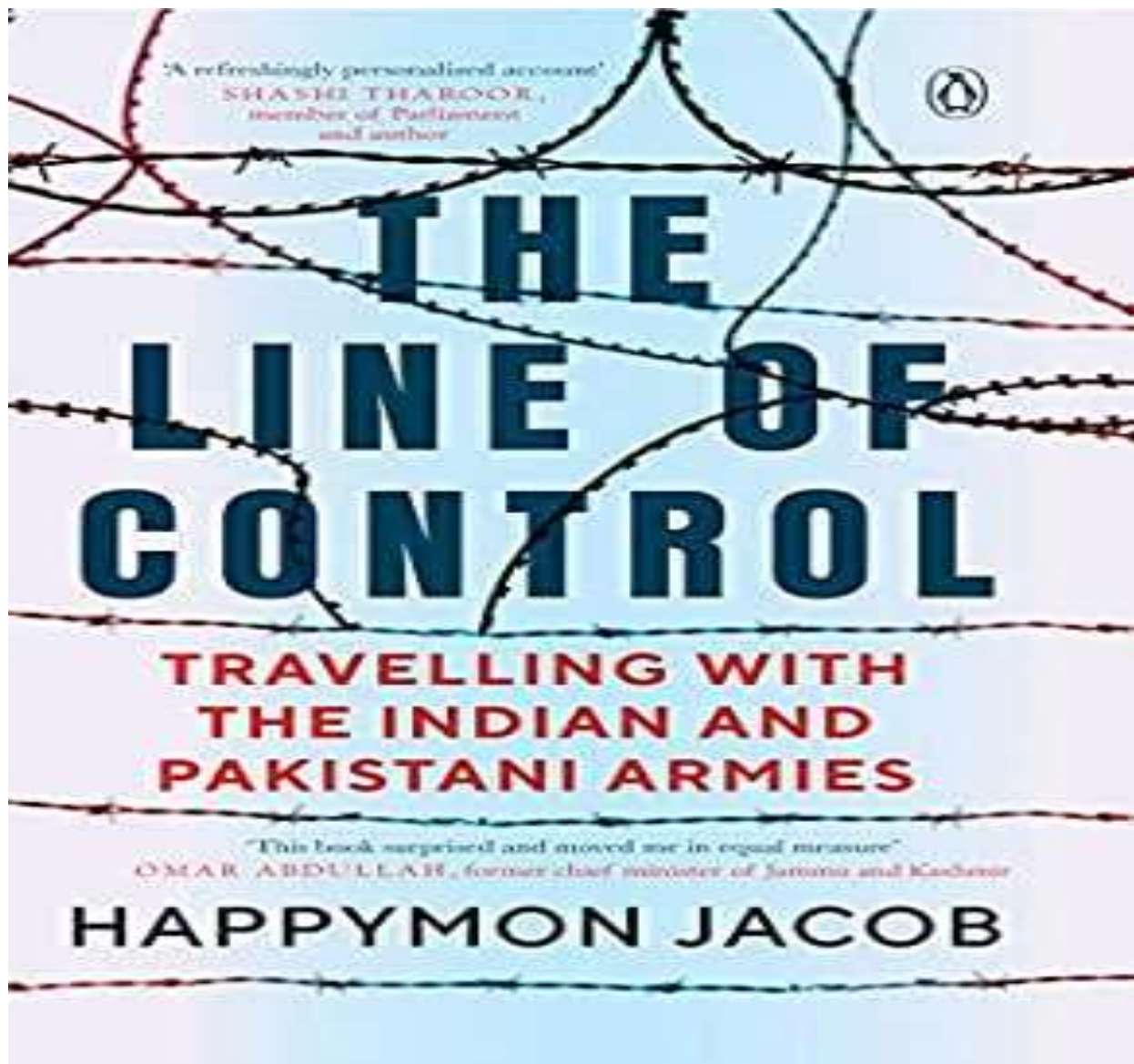
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In his perceptive and insightful observations, Professor Happymon Jacob of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, gives a detailed and poignant account of civilians' lives and the frontline soldiers guarding one of the tensest boundaries in the world, the Line of Control (LoC). Traveling with both the Pakistani and Indian armies, Jacob attempted to identify the rudimentary causes and the ins and outs behind ceasefire violations (CFVs) on both sides of the LoC. Despite the threat to his life due to such risky terrains around the ceasefire line and the intimidation of getting shot by his own army, Jacob sought to see things on the ground.

The Line of Control elucidates that the Kashmir dividing line, archaeologically, is the result of the first Indo-Pak war over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-1948. The position of troops in 1947 became the ceasefire line, which consequently turned into the LoC in 1972, as it is well known today. Unlike the international border, the LoC is the mutually agreed line between Pakistan and India which is merely delineated on a map but not demarcated on the ground. Such demarcation in some areas has created ambiguity for both armies that led to numerous standoffs and variances between both states. While one of the sides constructs a bunker where they think their territory lies, the other side fires at them because they claim the same as their land. Hence, ceasefire violation crops up there. Weather diversity, territorial rains, snowfall, and soil erosion can also make an obscure situation that causes a lack of lucidity on the LoC.

Sometimes ceasefire violation transpires as a result of “gamesmanship and mirth”. Soldiers fire for fun while seeing visitors like senior officials, students, and even families. During such puerile occasions, forces want to show them live fire, and thus they initiate a CFV accordingly.

Known as heavily armed, well-disciplined, and highly organised forces, militaries of both the arch-rivals on the border deem themselves dominant against each other. High morale is one of the preeminent factors of troops' audacity that has pivotal importance in uplifting the courage of the armed forces on frontiers. However, the moral ascendancy of both the defence forces on the LoC is directly proportional to the military's courage, exuberance, and willingness to endure the hardship at the LoC. Each side considers itself the better and dominant army in terms of high morale, capability and training against the other.

The book explores common perceptions about soldiers' lives; how they perform their responsibilities on such a treacherous spot? How do they operate during times of heightened tensions? And how do forces defend themselves while in a clash with the opponent? A bunker on the LoC serves the crucial aim of defending the line. In dicey terrains and geographically disadvantaged areas, troops "behave themselves" and refrain from any misadventure to defend their soldiers and as well as the civilian population. Most notably, a fear is instigated not to get shot by the enemy. Forces knowingly keep that disadvantaged places quiet, because the slightest disturbance may lead to CFV. There is a "delicate balance of terror" in the times of operation in those areas.

No mishap or aggression on the LoC goes un-responded. If there are no good targets on the adversary's side for befitting response, the brigade commander will choose to respond where they have a whip hand. Shelling by the Indian army in the Rajouri sector on the Pakistani side of the LoC could be responded to by the Pakistani army in the Poonch sector. It is not essential to be respond to every misadventure in the same area from where the initial firing took place, rather often retaliation occurs where other side has an advantageous position. Both sides have proper earmarked places for retaliation, nothing goes un-responded. So, there is a perfect symmetry of retaliation.

Life on the LoC is like living under the shadow of swords. Ceasefire violation on the LoC immensely impacts the lives of the local populace. When cross-border aggression between the two countries spikes and fire starts, it causes civilian casualties. The locals get intimidated because of firing and are traumatised routinely; even they keep crying about their fate. Both the states use anti-personnel landmines in unsafe terrains on the LoC. Sometimes, old mines blow up as a result of environmental factors such as numerous incidents that have happened because of heavy rains that dislocate mines, making the management of mines problematic. Frequently, the innocent civilians and their livestock become the targets of such drifted mines. As a consequence, the suffering villagers either lose their lives or get crippled. As per a landmine report monitor, "around 2 million mines were laid from December 2001 till mid-2002." Likewise, Landmine and Cluster-Monition Monitor, in a report, claimed that "1074 people were killed and 2068 were injured by the end of 2012 in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir due to several mines related incidents." Nevertheless, unauthorised border crossing of civilians repeatedly prompts gunfire

between the two sworn enemies. Both armies surely do not know them, as who they are? In times of high levels of infiltration, it is very difficult for the forces to recognise that whether they are genuine villagers pursuing the cattle or infiltrators holding on AK-47. Such indistinctness often leads to shooting of the innocent people.

The narrative in the book would have been enriched with analysis of the factor of terrorism due to which skirmishes take place and consequently lead to crop up CFV. Also, Professor Jacob mentioned some of his conversations' held abroad which is not part of his traveling history to the LoC. Bringing international attention to the issue needs to be a priority for mitigating the ramifications of CFVs on innocent Kashmiris who have grown in a violent fatigued society for a long time. If the rest of the world's people were instead of them, the situation would probably change. Hence, it is imperative to mention that members of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) would be freely permitted to visit both sides of the LoC to monitor or investigate and report any ceasefire breach. Constraints over UNMOGIP's officials should be avoided, as India has been discouraging UNMOGIP's work in the area since Narendra Modi took charge of the Indian government.

What makes this book distinct from other books on the issue is the author's personal visit to the LoC to asked questions from several military officers and collect the views of both sides to analyse in a proportionate way, not to take one's side. It has contributed a comprehensive overview on CFVs between both nations to the literature of war and conflict studies. Besides, the writing style and the language of the book is not difficult to understanding.

The Line of Control: Travelling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies is an informative read for the student of International Relations, Defense and Dtrtagic Studies, Peace and Conflict studies and other security and war cources to understand the LOC, CFV, factors behind CFVs and how and why things flare up on such hazardous frontline.

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