
Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv's new book on Kashmir deals with the problem in 12 chapters (exclusive of the "Introduction" and the "Conclusions"). The book also contains maps and related documents in the Appendix.

Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv, like Lord Kinross, for instance, is greatly successful in bringing together history and geography, presenting them in the best literary style.

Professor Ataöv's book came out in late-summer 2001 at a most opportune moment, not solely because India and Pakistan recently made a joint - albeit fruitless- attempt towards a rapprochement aimed at solving the age-old Kashmir question. The greater reason for the timeliness of the book is its publication only about three weeks prior to the deplorable terrorist attack upon the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001.

The terror in New York which killed hundreds of innocent people - of American and about 80 other nationalities- turned the attention of the world to that region ("Kashmir and Neighbours" as mentioned in the title of the book), Afghanistan, in particular.

Professor Ataöv says in his Preface: "Blood-soaked episodes compel me to probe the Kashmir issue, especially in the light of
terrorism, not unmindful of the role played by the infamous
Taliban-at-arms" (p. xiii.). Dr. Ataöv also adds on p. 4: "This book
aspire to review terrorist activity carried out ceaselessly and
systematically in one of the most otherwise alluring spots on our
planet. The rise of militancy...is related also to analogous
belligerency in and around the borders of Pakistan and
Afghanistan."

Dr. Ataöv later dwells upon the relationship between
democracy and terrorism. He says on p. 103: "No matter how
composite it may look, however, democracy is incompatible with
terrorism."

It is, indeed, an irony of fate that both Pakistan and India,
which have inherited the parliamentary system from the British
colonial rule, have, despite many setbacks, generally fared well in
democracy and have yet not prevented terrorism. Professor Ataöv
justifiably says on p. 104: "One needs to be distrustful of sweeping
generalizations... Terrorism occurs in democracies perhaps more
than in authoritarian regimes." Also, on p. 203: "...No matter what
their motives are, the terrorists everywhere, including India and
Pakistan, undermine the democratic process. Seeing a 'Rambo
inside Hamlet' in he mind's eye, violence based on... vengeance
[should be] deplored...their activities should be described as
assaults on the democratic traditions... [However] the democratic
system may also cause conflict, since each compromise may be
used by groups for new demands through violence."

The pages 149-151 in Dr. Ataöv's book are especially very
informative, indeed almost foretelling the 11 September 2001
terrorist attack in New York. For instance, on p. 149: "...Bin Laden
calls for attacks on American targets from his hideouts in
Afghanistan, frequently changing his sanctuary from Jalalabad to
Khandahar or from Khost to Nangarhar. Having generously
distributed charities to Afghani orphans, refugees and widows, and
having stood up against the world's only super-power, he is a
popular man in Afghanistan and even a hero to groups of Muslims
elsewhere."

Dr. Ataöv's following comments in his Conclusions (p. 204)
are of great significance in shedding weeks beforehand light upon
the post-September 11 developments in the word: "Some
governments declared virtual 'war' on terrorism and engaged in repression at a human and political cost... this approach may well be counterproductive since it will generate additional support for terrorist groups, which will reappear as soon as repression comes to an end. Moreover, 'declaring war' on terrorists may give them some 'legitimacy', taking them out of the classification of common criminals. Further, a number of liberal societies do not wish to throw out the baby with bath water; they stress the need to deal with terrorism only within the confines set by respect for democratic values."

As to the main subject of the book, Dr. Ataöv discusses possible solutions to the Kashmir question and arrives at his own (pp. 208-209): "The last option is to formalize the status quo leaving with India the portion it now administers and allowing Pakistan to hold whatever it has... Both regions, administered separately by the two neighbours, may enjoy maximum autonomy with soft borders. A harmonious balance may be struck between the need to integrate J&K [Kashmir] within the national mainstream and the installation of autonomous self-governance. What is meant by the last concept is good governance or accountable political machinery, stable economic infrastructure and even-handed as well as effective judiciary ... one may conclude: "Let us not lose ourselves in light!"

Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv's book about a region which generates more heat than light, is certainly a great contribution to all of us who neither want to "lose ourselves in light" nor "be found in the dark".

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