

Book Review

Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics

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INTRODUCTION

In spite of being a very critical issue, as such there has been a dearth of literature on the civil military relations of Pakistan. Most of the existing scholarship that exists in the field is by established writers such as Hasan Askari Rizvi, Saeed Shafqat, Muhammad Waseem, Ayesha Jalal or Khalid Bin Sayyed, who have covered the complete gamut of the complex militarization of Pakistani politics, or what in other terms can be said politicisation of military. However, there have been but few and sparing studies on specific military regimes, with next to nothing on the very crucial eleven years of Zia-ul-Haq. Of late, several books have come out which cover the Musharaf regime, but remain largely focused on the War on terror during his time period. Amongst these, the most coveted remains his biographical sketch. The book under review, by Dr. Rajshree Jetly, is a bold and comprehensive attempt at covering the crucial political, economic and strategic aspects of the Musharaf regime, especially at a time when many of the facts and issues are still unfolding.

Dr. Jetly, a research fellow at the National University Singapore, has major publications in the field of regional politics, as well as ethnicity and nation building in South Asia, with a specific focus on Baloch nationalism, Khalistan movement and dynamics of Tamil politics on state building. The book under review is her seminal attempt at covering one of the most crucial time frames of Pakistan's contemporary political history, whose effects and repercussions are still resonating strongly. The theme of the book evolved out of a conference held at the Institute for South Asian Studies (NUS), and this edited volume centres around four broad areas authored individually by eminent writers in the field. The first part looks at the global political developments immediately after the 9/11 terror strikes and their impact on the domestic and foreign policies under Musharaf. The next set of chapters deal specifically with Pakistan's external policy outlook, as to how Pakistan balanced its relations with two most important strategic players, namely USA and China in the changing political environment. This is followed by chapters analysing the rise of extremism and

fundamentalism in Pakistan, and lastly the issues pertaining to economic development and growth of the country during Musharaf time.

Introducing the theme, Jetly outlines three major challenges that had a corresponding impact both on global and national politics, which in turn shaped Musharaf regime's policy perspective. Giving a broad assessment of the country's geopolitics during this crucial time, Jetly not only reviews Musharaf's overall performance, but also the challenges that the regime faced. These namely: terrorism, nuclear stability and regional security. These challenges were two pronged, at one hand they affected the internal stability and security of the country, and on the other hand, they cast a major imprint on the security of international community, thus creating a very complex web, which was difficult to ascertain. How the regime handled this and managed to balance these two mutually exclusive yet interlinked scenarios has also been elaborated in the proceeding chapters. 9/11 provided Musharaf's regime with the much sought for legitimacy at the international level, which otherwise remained elusive. Ironically, after the initial shock of the event settled in and the US military action initiated in Iraq and Afghanistan, at the domestic level, General Musharaf started to lose the popular support which he had garnered in his first three years of technocrats' government.

What made the previous military regimes different from Musharaf's initial peaceful and rather popular ingress to power were their invocation and proclamation of martial law. However, once established in office, Musharaf's actions were no different. Banning of major political parties and their respective leadership, suspending the constitution, curbing all sorts of political activity at first and declaration of the state of emergency were followed by a typical oligarchic approach towards running the country. The National Security Council being one example of that. Musharaf's rule which was then and even now criticised by the religious interest groups as being too Westernised and liberal, in comparison to Zia's invocation of rigid puritanical version of Islam, proved to

be a complete charade, as on one hand he strived towards banning militant outfits, and religious hardliners, sympathetic towards the variants of Taliban and Al Qaeda. On the other hand, in a bid to gain popularity and mass support, he embraced and emboldened religious cadres, whose vote bank traditionally would not extend beyond single digits during the past democratically elected governments.

The first two chapters penned by Amin Saikal and Selig Harrison, thematically cover the Musharaf regime's responses during the War on Terror, the policy overtures made both at the international as well as the national level, and how these two concerns were fused together by the regime to seek legitimacy both home and abroad. Although Saikal's analyses that Musharaf was insincere about restoring democracy stands true, however one could also view the elections under his rule as a necessary pre requisite towards seeking popular support and legitimacy, a pattern that has so often been followed by military rulers. Each of the past military rulers, whether, Ayub, Zia and then Musharaf restored their version of democracy, which in turn eroded and affected the political process beyond repair. Like any military regime, Musharaf's concept of a „reformed“ democratic system by seeking revival of civilian rule, albeit led by a coterie of handpicked political actors, entailed an initial cabinet of technocrats, a mock referendum, implementation of new political formulae, replacing the district management bureaucracy with a local governance system primarily in a bid to seek grass root support in the longer run, move towards seeking a graduate – assembly, increasing the number of woman parliamentarians in the legislative assembly, and lastly banning of the two main political parties from the electoral process. This act proved extremely damaging, as the vacuum created by this forced exit, empowered religious as well as hard-line elements, to rapidly fill the gap and claim the political space thus provided.

However, Saikal's assertion that Pakistani government used extremism as a tool of external policy articulation and regional manipulation is somewhat overstretched. Also the assertion that ISI alone was the main force behind the Afghan jihad of 1990s, and then the rise of the Taliban, with Washington and its intelligence outfits, totally oblivious of the post Cold war scenario. Truly that 9/11 incidence provided Musharaf with the same level of legitimacy as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had accorded Zia, but neither then, nor this time, all sanctions and conditionality for providing military aid were lifted. The military aid that given to Pakistan was entirely for counter terrorism activities. The trusted Non NATO ally status was of little significance to an average Pakistani, who gradually saw the level of insecurity and domestic unrest owing to encroaching militancy and terrorism from the Western frontier robbing their lives and means of sustenance.

In the latter chapters, S Akbar Zaidi, Arsalan Razmi

and Imran Ali not only carryout a thorough study of the economic dimension of the Musharaf regime but also how the country's economic profile shaped over the decades. From laying the foundation, to marking the decade of 1960s as that of economic development, the authors give a thorough analysis of the policies pursued by various civil military regimes that cast an affect. The turnaround in development indices post 9/11 proved beneficial for a country which ranked pitifully low in the human development index whether judged by its income status, performance in the social sector, per capita GNP indicators, gender related development index, education or literacy. However by year 2002-2004, Pakistan had managed to reach the medium human development stature, in comparison to its past practices. Dubbing the decade of 1990s which saw four rapidly transiting democratic governments, as the „lost decade“ in turn of economic progress, Zaidi concluded the argument by stating that the zia and then Musharaf's military regime both were marked by very generous amount of financial and military aid by international donors and specifically US. 9/11 proved highly beneficial for Musharaf, given this fragility in its foundations, spurt of excess liquidity, increased remittances and transfers, debt write-offs, have been completely aid related short term gains, which carry long term consequences whose effect the nation now amply feels.

The book, not only tries to cover the economic and political developments during the Musharaf time, but also other critical aspects, such as the prospects, challenges and issues related to Pakistan's nuclear assets, the safety and security dimensions, the new nuclear environment, and strategies and steps taken by the establishment in dealing with and strengthen national as well as international level security measures covered by Pervaiz Cheema in his chapter. Pakistan's move from a deliberately contrived strategy of ambiguity to that of deterrence occurred when it conducted a series of tests reactively to Indian second round of testing in May 1998. Where at one hand, this open declaration minimised the likelihood of an all out war between the two neighbours, it also exposed their conventional vulnerabilities, and the Western world reacted to any related developments with a highly alarmist perspective. The post 9/11 environment affected this bilateral equation, by introducing new scenarios of nuclear theft, strategic arsenal falling in hands of non-state actors and their usage in acts of terrorism, proliferation concerns specially after the exposure of the international network which besides many others included Dr. A Q Khan, the strategic partnership between India and US culminating in a bilateral civilian nuclear cooperation deal, defying and overriding all and any safety nets raised to protect proliferation, export and purchase of fissile material and nuclear technology. This deal not only upset the carefully balanced nuclear deterrence between the two neighbours, but marked the de-hyphenation of US policy

towards South Asia, and brought about no relief of alternate energy sources for the energy deficient Pakistan.

Kanti Bajpai drew a realistic picture of the real politics that dominated much of Pakistan US relations, which necessitated during Zia's time to look over the nuclear question, but invoke related sanctions and punitive measures, if compliance is not ensured by Islamabad in its anti-Soviet operations in Afghanistan. The post-cold war detachment from Pakistan and then re-engagement in the shape of a strategic ally and front line state in fighting terrorism post 9/11 has held few dividends for Islamabad. Though with very little option at hand, but to side with the US during this phase, the myth that Pakistan benefitted greatly both in the economic and military field remains untrue. Also that Musharaf and Pakistani establishment has been accused time and again for not yielding fully to the American demands, which was but natural, given the circumstances. On the other side, Pakistan had not only the US to deal with as a neighbour in Afghanistan, but also balance its relations with Beijing.

Robert Wirsing, in his chapter on India-Pakistan détente, outlines the critical issue of Kashmir which gained a new salience post 9/11. Also that where Kashmir alone does not weigh in as a central element to the India Pakistan rivalry, over the decades; new intricacies have complicated the bilateral relations, which do not find cooperative tendencies to counterbalance. Prof. Ishtiaq Ahmed, traces the entire spectre of Islamic fundamentalism and slipping of Jinnah's Pakistan into a highly radicalised society from the year 1947 to 2007, which unless curbed and checked would (and already is manifesting) instability and strife within Pakistan as well as around it. Mohammad Waseem in his analysis of the country's civil military relations, remarks that the "gap" so often discussed in this relation is not exclusive to Pakistan alone, but found even in developed countries such as the US and UK. Pakistan's case is very typically that of military filling in the void created by the political system and its decaying institutions. An argument he puts forth is that politics in Pakistan remain in a perennial process of democratization, which usher in an unstable civil military relationship whereby policies set by military are preferred. Military's role in state formation, constitutional engineering and most damaging the politicisation of the military itself, exacerbated by the insecurity dilemma allows military to maintain its

stronghold on the country's body politics, even if not in direct political power.

The chapter contributed by Dr. Jetly covering the Baloch insurgency is a fascinating read, as it draws from her earlier work on the subject as well. Covering the entire range of differences between the Baloch nationals and the governments in question and their divergent perspectives, the insurgency of 1970s, the military action in Balochistan and the extremely controversial action of the Musharaf regime, that is, killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti further worsened the already troubled centre-province relations. The province is estimated to hold critical minerals and natural resources, worth trillions of dollars. Jetly concludes by saying that if the insurgency is not curbed and the major issues and grievances are not addressed, this could spell disaster for the country. Of the several options to deal with the problem, one possibility she offers is a rooting out insurgency through military action to ensure steady flow of oil and gas for the country's economic survivability, second option could be the redressal and appeasement by the government of Baloch grievances. Third, it could be the continuation and further intensification of insurgency, which could prove highly damaging for the country, and could empower and embolden actors such as Al Qaeda to exploit and seize the void created.

The book although a single volume study yet provides a very comprehensive and holistic read of the last military rule. As we read the book today, most of the analysis offered by the contributors seems to be unfolding and proving itself true. Where the book at one hand analyses the developments of an extremely important phase in Pakistan's recent history, it also carries a word of caution for us to deal with issues of governance, security, institutional and social sector reforms, civil military relations, political stability, electoral, political and constitutional mishandlings, which have cost us dearly both in the past and present. The country may not be able to sustain another attempt at political and constitutional engineering, and we need to address these critical questions before it is too late.