

## Book Review

Armed Forces & Society

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Chaudhry, R. (2023). *The Changing Dynamics of Civil–Military Relations in Pakistan*. London: Routledge. 152 pp. \$54.99, ISBN:1032388404.

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Pakistan with 252 million people is one of the most populous nation-states. It is also one of the most dangerous: since 2001, some 35,000 of its citizens have been killed in terrorist attacks by groups that the army once nurtured (Khan et al., 2018; Rashid, 2001, pp. 181–182).<sup>1</sup> Pakistan has also been subjected to overt military rule by military dictators four times since gaining independence in 1947: General Ayub Khan (1958–1969); General Yahya Khan (–969–1971); General Zia ul Haq (1977–1988); and General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008). And it has been ruled indirectly by the military for the remainder. The Pakistan army has pursued security competitions with all of its neighbors except China, with the most intense security competition being with India, with which it has fought wars in 1947–1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999. It has sustained several proxy wars since the 1980s. With it being in possession of over 170 nuclear warheads, the Army has one of the fastest growing nuclear arsenals in the world (Kristensen et al., 2023). Given the necrotic influence of the Army upon Pakistan’s body politic, understanding how the army (or military)<sup>2</sup> continues to dominate the country is an important empirical question.

In *The Changing Dynamics of Civil–Military Relations in Pakistan*, Rabia Chaudhry hopes to provide some answers. She writes of the situation that “As things currently stand in Pakistan, the military presence in the civil arena is neither limited to the duration of the coup nor circumscribed by political aspirations and administrative considerations. Even when not directly in power, we see the military present and thriving in almost all the traditionally civil domains. . .” particularly those related to development (p. viii). Elsewhere she argues that the army’s “self-designated compulsion to fix things, to save the country as it were, is deeply ingrained in the military’s mindset” (p. 1). She asserts that the best heuristic with which to understand the Pakistan army is as a hegemon that garners support through its “nation-building

work.” This is seen by the public as beyond reproach and corruption-free, which stands in contrast to the popular perception of actions undertaken by the civilian politicians. She offers up two case studies to exposit how the army generates public goodwill through the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) and the notorious Fauji Foundation (FF), both of which are explicitly military organizations even though they appear to function as private enterprises. Research for this book is based upon interviews with senior military personnel, such as former Corps Commanders, as well as some senior civilian bureaucrats. As I discuss below, herein lie some of the challenges of the book.

In her Chapter 1, Chaudhry offers up two research questions as the subject of the book: Where does the popularity of the Pakistan Army originate from, and how is the Army’s hegemony established and reproduced? (p. 21). The book’s purpose is to examine “the mechanisms employed by the Pakistani military to extend its presence to the civil sphere and to take ownership of public service delivery in a civilian state” (p. 13). In the balance of the chapter, she reconceptualizes military hegemony by drawing from a number of scholars who have written extensively on the topic of hegemonic militaries. The various extant studies that she uses to examine the Pakistan army include Shafqat’s 1997 book, *Civil Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto*. She identifies what she believes to be some theoretical shortcomings of previous scholarship that sought to explain how the Pakistan military retains actual power. She then erects her own understanding of the army as a hegemon that elicits support through multiple externalities such as the establishment and leveraging of local governments, along with generating public support from the activities of such organizations as the FWO and the FF.

In her Chapter 2, she explains the strategic evolution of the military as a hegemon, emphasizing its colonial roots. However, if Pakistan’s colonial roots are to blame, why don’t we see similar patterns in India? With the exception of Prime Minister Indira Ghandi’s Emergency (1975 to 1977), India has had uninterrupted democracy since 1947. This would have been a superb opportunity to engage the work of Steven Wilkinson on the Indian Army, which also offers insights for the current state of dominance by the army in Pakistan (Wilkinson, 2015). In this chapter, she also describes how each of Pakistan’s dictators viewed their rule as a necessary evil to counter-act political corruption and a vehicle of social change and nation building. She emphasizes that these coups are not the result of “grand strategy formulated at the military’s general headquarters”; rather, they are the result of “a personal decision taken by the Chief of Army Staff based on circumstances peculiar to that time” (p.36). This appears to underestimate the role of the important and powerful Pakistan Army’s Corps Commanders, whose complicity is required in the immediate aftermath of any coup. In this chapter, she reviews the commonalities or parallels that can be detected among the four major coups in Pakistan, along with the tools employed by the military dictator to secure acquiescence and public support, which she maintains always exist due to the social, economic, and political conditions inherent in Pakistani society.

Chapter 3 covers the critical issue of how the Pakistan military has captured the development sector of the country and then uses it to great effect to win the hearts and minds of the people. The motives behind “the military’s self-appointed nation building role” (p. 65) are numerous, with two standouts: enabling the military to exist as an autonomous and essentially a sovereign entity and its ability to shape and then gain political legitimacy both internationally and in the eyes of the Pakistani people. What is not lost in this chapter is how it exposed the role of the United States in supporting—militarily and financially—the military’s efforts to gain hegemony by conferring legitimacy—over three decades—to its hegemonic role in the Pakistan polity (p. 69).

In Chapter 4, she describes how the army views itself regarding its development role in the country. She also details how and why military coups in Pakistan normally take place (according to the military leaders themselves), where Pakistan coups seem to have two components: (a) “a long-standing trajectory of political corruption” from civilian leaders that naturally leads to a takeover and (b) the decision to take over is made by the Army Chief himself, along with a small group of loyalists, while rationalizing that it “is not an institutional bid for power” (p. 75).<sup>3</sup> The development capabilities of the military help set the stage for the public support necessary to secure power. Curiously, the army eschews the term “development” for “nation building” arguing the former is not in its remit even though the activities that the army understands in the service of nation building are, in fact, traditionally development activities. Here, the author describes how her interviewees see themselves: as competent, effective, and free from corruption. At no point does she question these claims. Instead, she passes the assertions of the retired generals off as empirical fact. One of the authors that she cites, from Ayesha Siddiqi’s book, dilates upon the corruption of the Army’s military–business enterprise. Despite citing this book, Chaudhry makes no effort at course correction. As such, the book often reads as a palimpsest of the Army’s imprimatur rather than a scholarly book dedicated to understanding the Army’s hegemony. In fairness, she states in Chapters 1 and 2 that her effort aims to present how retired generals describe themselves and the actions of the military. Despite these scope conditions, some effort to interrogate the claims would have been a welcome addition to this parsimonious volume.

This trend of taking her interlocutors’ word for it persists in Chapter 4, where she asks “Is there any ‘Island of Excellence’ in Pakistan”? (p. 73). Of course, the answer is given in the affirmative. Curiously, the author claims that “the Pakistan military is so deeply ensconced in the civil realm that it is fulfilling its hegemonic ambitious by not necessarily snatching away the political space but by meeting the social welfare and service delivery needs of the people” (p. 73). Yet critics of the Pakistan army accuse it of doing exactly that. In this chapter, she diagnoses what triggers a coup and how Pakistanis view it. She notes that these coups are inevitably greeted by Pakistanis who welcome their military saviors.

In Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, she conducts her case studies of the FWO and the FF. In both chapters, she repeats the unchallenged perceptions from her military

respondents that these organizations are effective service delivery firms that function without corruption. Yet over the years, both organizations have been credibly accused of massive corruption. Neither chapter makes any effort to explore or identify either side of these claims or interrogate them. The author passes off the verdicts of her interlocutors incuriously.

The author concludes with a restatement of her argument of how the military uses the FWO and the FF to extend its presence into the civilian domain while also using the activities of these organizations to cultivate broad public support for their efforts.

Therefore, throughout the book, the author contradicts herself. For example, Chaudhry claims that “Pakistan has had just over a decade of uninterrupted civil rule” (p. 1). This is debunked by numerous assertions such as the one made on page 28: “even when not directly in control, the balance of power would remain tipped in the military’s favor.” In fact, the Pakistan army has controlled civilian political affairs by manipulating and coercing the courts and the political parties. More recently, Imran Khan, one of the country’s most popular leaders, was forcibly removed and imprisoned. Yet, Chaudhry throughout asserts that civil–military boundaries stay intact, when, in fact, the problem of Pakistan civil–military relations is that these boundaries are almost never intact. Curiously, even as this book went to press, the Pakistani people have shown an unprecedented contempt for the Pakistan army. This does not square with repeated claims in the volume that Pakistanis hold the army in the highest esteem. For example, the author explains that the army’s developmental activity “makes it popular among the people” (p. 142).

In addition, her treatment of the theories of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz seems off, by claiming that Pakistan has transitioned to “a Janowitzian model” where the military can now engage in “internal law enforcement” (p. 67). Janowitz’s constabulary concept was strictly intended to be used by a nation’s military beyond the nation’s borders. In the case of the United States, Janowitz advocated for the use of law enforcement tools by military units to help combat communist insurgencies in foreign lands; he certainly did not imply that such military actions would ever be employed on the soil of the United States itself. Such a bastardization of basic civil–military concepts might indicate a lack of accurate interpretation of other theories and concepts, making the entire contents of Chaudhry’s text suspect.

In short, there is much to praise in this volume regarding the inner workings of the Pakistan political and military systems. But the reader should approach its contents with considerable caution and, in some areas, skepticism.

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## Notes

1. Among these terrorists' groups is the Taliban that has manifested into multiple forms since the 1990s.
2. Chaudhry refers to Pakistan's military, but Pakistan is dominated by its army service branch, with smaller and subservient branches in support. In this article, and for Pakistan, the terms "military" and "army" are interchangeable.
3. In an endnote, Chaudhry emphasizes how such "Takeovers are forced down the military's throats" (p. 93).

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