Pakistan's Army: Running and Ruining a Country

C. Christine Fair

T.V. Paul, a professor of international relations at McGill university, and Aqil Shah, a long-time scholar of democratization in Pakistan, have written two very different but ultimately complementary accounts of the Pakistan Army—*The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* and *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*, respectively. Both books describe Pakistan's long-standing security competition with India and exposit the primary means through which Pakistan has sought to impose its will on India: a reliance on Islamist proxies, an ever-expanding nuclear arsenal, and alliances with countries like the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Whereas Paul focuses on the policies pursued by the military and their sequelae, Shah focuses on how the institution of the army came to dominate the Pakistani state. Whereas Paul places the blame for Pakistan's development largely on the United States, Shah holds the army accountable for its ruinous role in the troubled state.

The Warrior State examines the roles of war and war-making in the development of Pakistan in particular and several other historical and contemporary nation-states in Europe and Asia. Paul finds that although the experiences of many countries suggest that war-making helped spur national development and consolidation, Pakistan's own trajectory has been an outlier. Despite pursuing militarized security for some six decades, Pakistan is insecure and politically fragmented. The book describes how Pakistan's political elite pursued militarized security at the expense of the country's political, human, and economic development. Oddly, for the most part, Pakistan's citizenry has supported these policies and has rallied around the army's incessant warmongering and selfish claims on the state's budget.

Paul argues that great-power patrons such as the United States—and to a lesser degree China—have played a preeminent role in undermining Pakistan's development, security, and ultimately stability. These patrons discouraged the Pakistani elite from forging state policies that would enhance social, economic, and political development and incentivized

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them to instead pursue geopolitical goals and a narrow strategy of military security based on hyper-realpolitik assumptions. In doing so, these elites have neglected other potential national goals and, in turn, have undermined the state's very viability. In summary, Paul contends that because of the interests of great powers, Pakistan's political elites have "had both the motive and the opportunity to pursue such policies" (p. 3). Like Ayesha Siddiqa and Husain Haqqani before him, Paul puts forward the argument that Pakistan is a rentier state that has lived "off the rents provided by its external benefactors for supporting their particular geostrategic goals" (p. 18). He further argues that Pakistan's alliance with the United States through the Mutual Defense Pact of 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) was "the beginning of the geostrategic curse" (p. 117). *The Warrior State*'s overarching argument is important and compelling. The book's logical conclusion is that the United States and China are responsible for a large share of the burden for enabling the recklessness of this crisis-prone state.

Yet this argument is not without some important problems. First, Paul implies that the United States sucked Pakistan into its alliance strategy. With India being unwilling to join hands with the United States, the latter was "desperately looking for strategic partners in Asia-Pacific…. Sensing a major opportunity, the Pakistani elite began discussions with Washington and in 1954 they struck an alliance" (pp. 116–17). At times, the book implies that the United States was predatory in its approach to cultivate Pakistan as a partner. However, until the mid-1950s, Washington was disinterested in South Asia and was generally content to let the United Kingdom take the lead in the region. In the early years after Pakistan's independence, General Ayub Khan and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan repeatedly made overtures to the United States to ally with Pakistan, noting Pakistan's strategic utility, yet their appeals were rebuffed by Washington. Only after the onset of the Korean War did Washington become interested in the "northern tier" defense concept discussed by Paul.[1]

In fact, Pakistan was very keen to offer its strategic utility to Washington, which is illustrated by its extensive lobbying efforts to join

[1] The northern tier defense concept, which gave rise to CENTO, was modeled after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). CENTO was formed in 1955 and included Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. The United States was not a member but had observer status. (Iraq withdrew from the organization in 1958.) SEATO was formed in 1955 and included Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These three treaty organizations together formed a band of countries to prevent Soviet expansion. The eastern-most partner of NATO was Turkey, which was also included in CENTO. Pakistan in turn linked SEATO to the alliance system.

SEATO. Contrary to Paul's account, the U.S. Department of Defense initially opposed Pakistani membership in SEATO, correctly assessing that Pakistan's inclusion would drive away other Asian states. Washington's apprehensions were justified: ultimately Thailand and the Philippines were the only other Asian states willing to join. Pakistan was adamant in joining in the hopes that membership would provide some protection to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In fact, Pakistan's foreign secretary Zafarullah Khan attended the SEATO organizational meeting in Manila in 1954 with the aim of obtaining a security guarantee against all acts of aggression, even though SEATO—like CENTO—specifically addressed threats from Communist states. U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles, fearing that the United States or SEATO would become enmeshed in Pakistan's security competition with India, outright refused Khan's overtures and further explicitly declared that SEATO defense guarantees would apply only to Communist aggression.[2] Failing to secure absolute security guarantees, Khan was supposed to seek further instruction from his ministry. However, he signed the treaty without consultation, contending that Pakistan's interests would not be served by backing out after lobbying vigorously to be included. Pakistan's cabinet ratified the treaty in early 1955.

The Warrior State makes a similarly misleading claim with regard to the Soviet-Afghan conflict when it states the "United States played the most significant role in turning Pakistan into a pivotal front-line state in the war against the Soviet Union" (p. 119). Pakistan had in fact formulated its *jihad* strategy in Afghanistan as early as 1974 under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. The targets of its complaints with Afghanistan were numerous: Afghanistan's initial vote against Pakistan's inclusion in the United Nations, enduring irredentist claims on significant swathes of land in Baluchistan, refusal to recognize the Durand Line as the border between the countries, and episodic military assaults on Pakistan's border. When Mohammad Daoud Khan ousted the Afghan king, Zahir Shah, and began a Moscow-supported policy of modernization, Afghanistan's Islamists resisted. As Daoud began a campaign of repression, they began to flee into Pakistan and Iran. Bhutto directed the Inter-Services Intelligence's Afghan cell to begin organizing the Islamist resistance. By the time the Russians crossed the Amu Darya river on

[2] There are several accounts of this, including, inter alia, Husain Haqqani, *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013); Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001); and Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Christmas Day in 1979, Pakistan had already formed the major *mujahideen* groups. The Soviet invasion afforded previously rebuffed Pakistan the opportunity to draw the United States—along with Saudi Arabia—into its policy of manipulating affairs in Afghanistan.

Overall, however, Paul's account is compelling, these largely historical quibbles notwithstanding, and should provoke the United States to reflect more closely on the negative consequences of its engagements with Pakistan.

In a different vein, Shah's book, *The Army and Democracy*, focuses on successive institutional decisions by the Pakistan Army itself. If in Paul's account, the army is an object of great-power maneuvers, in Shah's account it is the agent of its own evolution. Whereas Paul wants to inform a larger discussion about the conditions under which war-making contributes to state development, Shah aims to contribute the expansive literature on civil-military relations. Taking Pakistan as his primary case, Shah focuses on the senior officer corps of the Pakistan Army and their "shared ideological framework about the military's role, status, and behavior in relation to a state and society" (p. 9). He contends that these "shared values affect how these officers perceive and respond to civilian governmental decisions, policies, and political crises" (p. 9). Shah hopes that by understanding better these shared values, we can better "assess how the military's particular conceptions of professionalism shape its involvement in politics" (p. 9).

Both authors agree that Pakistan's rivalry with India profoundly shaped the worldview of the Pakistan Army, informed its approach to securing Pakistan, and influenced the trajectory of civil-military relations. Shah notes that this rivalry "spurred the militarization of the Pakistani state in the early years and thus provided the context in which the generals could increase their influence in domestic politics and national security policy" (p. 13). Civilians acquiesced and diverted resources to the military, while abdicating oversight, as the twin efforts of state-building and survival appeared ever more synonymous with the war effort. *The Army and Democracy* traces out the opportunity structures that Pakistan's army created and exploited to foist itself increasingly to the center of the state.

Shah's inquiry complements that of Paul. Both scholars seek to explain why Pakistan remains insecure despite pursuing security-oriented policies. Shah, like Paul, identifies puzzles in the extant literature. For example, conventional wisdom and recent political science scholarship suggest that that "external security threats result in civilian supremacy over the military" (p. 9). By that logic, Pakistan's long-standing enmities with India and even Afghanistan should have ensured civilian dominance over the army. Shah

argues that these threat-based understandings of the relationship between the soldier and the state omit a critical intervening variable: national unity. He concludes that external threats will produce civilian dominance over the military only when there is domestic cohesion—something which has long eluded Pakistan.

The Army and Democracy concludes by putting forward a series of policies that, over time, may help Pakistan's civilians "guard the guardians." Shah envisions this process encompassing two phases: transition and consolidation. In the former phase, the primary objective is "to reduce the military's capacity to intervene in politics and keep the democratic process functioning" (p. 263). The latter is accomplished by "consolidating democratic supremacy through strengthening the administrative capacity of the [Ministry of Defence], parliamentary oversight...and the redefinition of military missions and professionalism" to render them compatible with democratic governance (p. 263). Transitioning Pakistan from authoritarianism to democracy has potential implications for the state's belligerence toward India; after all, the scholarly literature suggests that two democratic states rarely wage war against each other. Shah, however, is realistic about the prospects for such a transition in any near-term time horizon.

Policymakers, particularly in the United States, would do well to contemplate Shah's suggestions and consider how U.S. policies may support a democratic transition in Pakistan. At the same time, U.S. policymakers must evaluate the significant challenges posed by Paul, who is surely correct when he alleges that the United States—perhaps more than any other state—has aided and abetted the most pernicious policies of the Pakistan Army, even while spending enormous resources to contain the same. In short, South Asian security analysts should take on board the largely complementary arguments marshalled by both of these authors.

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