

Book Reviews

Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2008)

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Democracy and military dictatorships alternate game each other on the political scene of Pakistan, almost playing a game of hide and seek. Pakistani politics and Pakistan Army cannot be separated from each other as military have remained in power for more than half of Pakistan's existence. Therefore any book on the Pakistani military ostensibly has to devote some portion to the role played by the armed forces in the politics of Pakistan. The book under consideration is no exception. What distinguishes this book from other works on Pakistan's military is that other works have devoted a chapter on the military's role in politics separately. This book on the other hand travels through a historical frame by discussing military adventures, wars and the military's peace-time activities along with the politics and process of governance.

It is a voluminous book, with eighteen chapters and three appendices. The book starts from the birth of the Pakistani Army at Partition in 1947: the division of the Royal Indian Army and the 'Pakistanising' of the initially British dominated officer corps, especially at the high command level. It also discusses ethnic and sectarian angles (p. 146-148). It gives a detailed account of the military operations starting from the first one in Kashmir to Kargil. It includes minute details of military strategy and operation, arms used and other details of the battlefield. Though sometimes monotonous, these passages establish this book as a distinguished work on Pakistan's military capabilities.

The author belongs to one of the established military families of Potohar region of the Punjab and observed the Pakistani military, its working and development over the decades. He approached the retired and serving officers to share their experiences of service in the armed forces, which provided him with good oral history accounts. Moreover his connections with serving military officers, especially in General Headquarters (GHQ), offered him access to the documents which were not available to ordinary researchers. His own background of working with Pakistan Television and later, with international media, allowed him to witness many historical events (p. 276). His job in the USA provided him access to American documents and the opportunity to interview several important decision-makers and officials. Thus, there is considerable material to build up his arguments on the subject which make this book a good source of information on military affairs and Pakistani politics.

This book focuses on the Pakistani army and its development over the decades following the creation of Pakistan. It also highlights how political circumstances caused military intervention in politics at different instances. The author shares public opinion: that the role of USA is vital in the over development of the military, and thus affects the development of the political system in Pakistan. This constitutes a major theme in the book. Other related themes are the role of the judiciary in supporting the military's direct rule, the bureaucracy and its relationship with military governments, the role of intelligence agencies, the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Pakistan's interests, the nuclearisation of South Asia, India-Pakistan relations and the War on Terror.

The author argues that the rapid development of the military halted the growth of the political system, whose leaders "made no attempt to redress the power imbalance between the institutions of state and that of army," (xxviii). This converted the army into

the power centre. The politicians invited the army for arbitration of the dispute between the politicians which exposed their weaknesses to the military (chapter 4). The appointment of two serving officers, Gen. Ayub Khan, the C-in-C and Major Gen. Iskander Mirza, from bureaucracy, in violation of the Constitution of the country gave the military an opportunity to observe the deficiencies of the politicians. They expressed unqualified criticism of the political system and became the ultimate judges to determine its merits and demerits. If they had remained confined to their role authorised in the Constitution, the history of Pakistan would have been different.

The Americanisation of the Army was coupled with the inauguration of US influence in the politics of Pakistan. "The military – man – turned – bureaucrat – turned – president, Iskander Mirza" was not satisfied by parliamentary democracy (p.150). In fact, Mirza was apprehensive about his re-election in the office for another term by the parliament after the general elections to be held in 1959. The direct military-to-military relations between the Pakistan Army and the US Army generated cordial relations between Gen. Ayub Khan, the C-in-C, Iskander Mirza, the President of Pakistan and US officials. The author says that both Ayub and Mirza had the parallel plans for quashing democracy and shared information with the Americans Ambassador James Langley (p. 151-52) in the quest for seeking US support. This attitude of the President and the Army Chief provided the US with the opportunity for a penetrating role in Pakistani politics.

The author argues that the Americans did not wish to indulge in the domestic political matters of Pakistan but wanted to ensure political stability in Pakistan for their alliance against Communism. Finally they decided to give their consent for imposing martial law by saying that "they favour democracy but [there are] exceptions which can be justified for a limited period" (p. 153). Therefore, the US assumed the role of a neo-colonial

master, controlling the domestic and external affairs of Pakistan through the Army commander's unauthorised judgements and actions regarding the country's political system.

Discussing the events and results of 1965 War between India and Pakistan, the author contend that

As tactic brilliance and gallantry at the lower level of command were nullified by a lack of vision and courage among the higher level of leadership of the Pakistan Army. This was a recurring them of Pakistan's external wars, as senior leaders failed their lower level commanders and ordinary soldiers with poorly conceived military adventures time and again" (p. 214).

In chapter 11, he follows the same line of thought and declares that

By the time the new [Yahya's] martial law regime handed over power to the civilian government (but still under martial law), of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1971, the military had lost a war with India and the East Wing had become independent Bangladesh with the aid of Indian force. Inaptitude in both civil and military operations allowed regional differences to bubble out of control, while wishful thinking and faulty judgement of its core leadership group, clouded by blissful ignorance and liberal doses of alcohol, produced a national debacle.

He concludes that the army had become "top heavy and corrupt at the upper echelons as a result of over involvement in civilian affairs and martial law duties." He believes that prolonged

military rule left negative impact on military "training, thought processes, and actions. The result was the military defeat and political dissolution" (p. 249).

Shuja Nawaz argues that it was the inability of Yahya Khan's military regime to go for political settlement rather than a military solution that led to the war with India, which intervened in favour of Bengali freedom in 1971 and ultimately led to the separation of East Pakistan (282). However, the roots of disintegration lie in prolonged military rule, non-representative and non-responsive government in Pakistan. In fact, a federation can only survive if a truly representative democracy operates with freedom from the military's direct or indirect intervention.

The writer points to the irony of the fact that Yahya Khan was personally involved in facilitating the opening of US-China relations at a time when his own country was in trouble. He might have seen this as an investment: by pleasing both of his allies, he could ensure their help in any domestic crisis (pp. 271-275). However, the US administration did no more than a lip-service, known as the 'Nixon tilt.' Nawaz quotes Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State at that time (p. 288) and the CIA (p. 308): both had predicted Yahya Khan's downfall and the disintegration of Pakistan. Therefore, the US concluded that the maximum it could have done was to save 'West Pakistan' (pp. 309-310).

Despite defeat and the loss of half the country, General Yahya was not ready to relinquish power, and announced his intentions to promulgate another constitution. It was the 'democratic upsurge in the ranks of military,' which forced the immediate departure of Yahya and his group from power (p. 321). It was an opportunity for Z. A. Bhutto to consolidate civilian rule as the successor of the discredited military regime. Despite successful negotiations with India, the release of 90,000 prisoners of war, hosting an Islamic Conference at Lahore to promote foreign affairs, passing a new constitution, introducing labour and land

reforms and starting the nuclear weapon programme, Bhutto fell victim to the street power which gave the military an opportunity to enter the power corridors again. Shuja Nawaz concludes that Bhutto's fall from grace was due to his own mistakes- such as 'distancing himself from his original political core, taking on the army with his paramilitary organisations and falling into the web of sycophant and unprincipled bureaucrats that made him oblivious to the reality around him.' Bhutto alienated all the constituencies that voted for him in 1970. Instead of acting like a genuinely elected leader, he tried to employ the attributes of a military dictatorship. When Bhutto's regime found itself in a crisis, he was helpless since the real power lay in the hands of the military-which deposed him sent him to the gallows (p. 353). In fact, it was Bhutto's inability to use popular power to consolidate democratic institutions. In effect, he tried to establish his own personal rule and could not realise that his real power lays in the people of Pakistan. He depended on the military and the bureaucracy, who betrayed him when he was in a crisis.

The army again imposed martial law, the third instance of overthrowing civilian order on a self-created moral ground for 'saving the country' from civil war. Shuja Nawaz notes that the military under General Zia-ul-Haq assumed the role of the guardian of Islam, as he claimed himself to be. Although the term "Islam *Pasand*" (those who like Islam) was coined together under Yahya Khan's rule in 1969, the army assumed the role of the custodians of Islamic ideology under General Zia, who used Islamisation as a source of legitimacy at a domestic level to prolong his rule. The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan provided Zia with a rare opportunity to gain legitimacy for his backdoor rule at an international as well. US-Pakistan relations were at this lowest ebb after the burning of the US Embassy in Islamabad on 21 November 1979. The Iranian Revolution further complicated the situation. As the realpolitik worked, General Zia was personally invited by President Carter to the White House (p. 370). Pakistan became a front-line state and its military government won

considerable economic aid from the US and its allies to present an artificial economic boom which deterred ordinary people to come out on the streets to demand the restoration of democracy. This US-Pakistan partnership in a US-sponsored war once again provided the military with an opportunity to delay elections in the name of stability and continuity in order to deal with the security threat on the western border. The army denied the people of Pakistan their right to of self-determination once again.

Shuja discusses the partnership between the military and religious political parties, especially the Jama'at-i-Islami in fighting a "holy war" in Afghanistan with the "covert" support of the US and its allies. Another book on a related theme by Hussain Haqqani,¹ titled *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (2005) exposes the Mullah-military alliance which played a vital role in prolonging military rule in Pakistan. Haqqani proves that the military resorted to Islamisation in Pakistan in order to legitimise their rule after imposition of martial law in 1977. The army needed the support of the politicians, which was provided by some conservative political parties like the Muslim League. But the major support came from the religious parties which willingly joined hands with the military. Zia wanted to avoid elections indefinitely and the religious parties were also not interested in elections because they could never get more than 5 percent popular vote to implement their Islamisation agenda. The religious-military alliance was a marriage of convenience between two parties to achieve their common goals. In this way, the military used religious parties to extend martial law in Pakistan. The alliance was fitted to the Cold War design of the US which promoted a "holy war" in Afghanistan without taking into account the logical outcomes. Nonetheless, the religious intolerance and sectarian violence which later turned into terrorism was the by-product of the Afghan Jihad sponsored by

¹He is a well known scholar cum journalist and presently serving as an ambassador of Pakistan to the US. The title of his book is *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Lahore: Vanguard, 2005.

the US in its determination to pay back the USSR for Vietnam in its own coin.

The author gives a well-researched account of the political and professional handling of the Afghan war by the military regime. The army also facilitated a direct collaboration between the CIA and the ISI, and assigned an operational control to ISI in the process. The ISI, the CIA, Saudi Arabian and other agencies were involved in many levels of corruption. The CIA was offering direct and indirect benefits to Pakistani military officers and their children in return for to serving America's interests (p. 375). The confidence the ISI gained during the Afghan war was later used in domestic politics even after the restoration of electoral democracy in the post-Zia period. The other serious repercussions of Afghan war were the breakage of the social fabric due to corruption, a massive increase in narcotics trafficking, intensified sectarian divisions and the increased militarization of society by the availability of weapons for cheap (p. 372).

The Taliban² and the aftermath of Afghan war formed a central theme of Nawaz's book. The Taliban emerged in the post-withdrawal period of USSR from Afghanistan. The army wanted to have a pro-Pakistan government in Afghanistan to secure western borders of Pakistan. Shuja Nawaz examines the official stand of the government that 'the *Taliban* were not a creation of Pakistan' but adds that 'Pakistan found it expedient to collaborate with them as they gained strength, provided support, as needed, to dislodge a pro-India Tajik-dominated regime in Kabul.' He writes that Pakistan's support was vital for the initial success of the Taliban. Both the Saudi Arabia and Pakistan provided generous aid to Afghanistan under the Taliban. He further says that the

² Literally means 'students.' The term is used for the orphans of Afghan Jihad, brought up in religious schools (madrassas) and they established their control over the major cities of Afghanistan, ended civil war and maintain peace in the post withdrawal period of USSR after the Geneva Accord.

dream of General Aslam Baig, the Army Chief at that time and General Hamid Gul of a unified Afghanistan and Pakistan seemed to have come true.

Shuja Nawaz gives a detailed account of Zia's fake transition to democracy through nominated political institutions, the oppression of opposition parties, press and students followed by non-party based elections to introduce his own brand of Islamic democracy. The referendum and constitutional engineering in the form of the Eighth Amendment (1985) to the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan ensured his position as President³ for the next five years, and gave him full control over the elected government even after lifting of martial law in December 1985. The civilian government, working under the uniformed President, could not exercise the real powers of the parliamentary form of government as the Eighth Amendment created a hybrid government that relied more on the President than the parliament with more attributes of the later. Shuja Nawaz claims that the judiciary supported the consolidation of military rule. However, he ignores the treatment that military rulers extended to the judiciary. How the judiciary was maltreated, disgraced and then humiliated by the martial is not given full attention.

The author also discusses other aspects of the US-Pakistan relationship during this honeymoon period when both sides were close allies against the Communism. Pakistan's nuclear programme was a major irritant in these relations. The US Congress's apprehensions about Pakistan's nuclear programme led to the "Pressler Amendment" to the Nuclear Laws of the United States. Under the new laws, the US President had to issue a certification every year that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear device, in order to release the economic and military aid to Pakistan (p. 390). There was a lot of irritation among factions of civil society but Zia was content to have US support for his

³He got himself elected in the so-called referendum in 1984 as the president of Pakistan keeping the hat of the C-in-C with him.

policies. Moreover, the ISI's management of the Afghan war was also a source of distrust and dissatisfaction for the US and its allies. Shuja Nawaz calls the regime a 'watershed for Pakistan politics.' Nawaz elaborates:

He was the first COAS who represented the post-colonial officer class. He came from a humble non-military background and had joined the army as many others did in the 1940s, as a means to upward mobility. He also represented the conservative values and ritualistic religiosity of the urban lower middle class. However he did not have a clear political agenda for the country; his agenda was merely to survive and retain power, and he was to use religion as a powerful tool in that regard. In the end, Islamisation was the legacy he left for Pakistan. (p. 361)

General Zia-ul-Haq institutionalized the strong role of the military in Pakistani politics, whether on the scene or behind the scenes.

Shuja Nawaz deals with the transitional period to democracy in the post-Zia period from a militaristic view point. comprehensivelyThe role of the President, the Prime Minister and the Army Chief in electoral democracies gives a detailed picture of the era. The period started from the 1985 party- less elections, which restored an electoral democracy. However, the polity remained under martial law for another six months. After lifting martial law the civilian government had to work in the shadow of martial law, in the presence of a president who was also the C-in-C Army Chief. Foreign policy, the nuclear issue and Afghan policy remained the exclusive domain of the President and the Army. This trend continued even after the death of Zia when the military chose to let democracy continue. The administration was also under the control of the President, as many of the powers of the

Prime Minister were transferred to the President under the Eighth Amendment. The four elected governments became the victims of this amendment. It was actually a mode of maintaining indirect military rule via the President. The ISI and the Army Chief remained active throughout this period from the election process to the conduct of governmental affairs.

Although Shuja Nawaz covers all the details, his criticism of the civil government, opposition leaders and his justification of the role of Army Chief shows him to be the representative of the establishment and not an independent scholars. Such biases are visible at the several places in chapters dealing with the post-Zia period (from Chapter 15-17).

Shuja Nawaz argues that the role of politicians in government and opposition blocks, and their tussle in the post-martial law period threatened the fragile democracy from the inside. He argues that the politicians themselves compelled the Army Chiefs to facilitate the change of the corrupt government (p. 453-455). However, this is the outcome of prolonged military rule where politicians and political parties are oppressed and kept out of political processes for a long time. Even in the transition period, the powerful role of military commanders in the making and breaking of governments leads to a sense of insecurity and politicians look towards military's help to gain power. The author ignores this fact completely.

The last chapter deals with Musharraf's coup. Musharraf, like other military rulers, portrayed posed himself as a reluctant ruler but retained his privileges and, like his military predecessors, remained embroiled in political games. Shuja Nawaz gives a detailed account of Kargil and 'Operation Badr.' He also discusses the clash between military and political leadership which caused a rupture between the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Army Chief General Musharraf. The role of Washington in winding up the crisis between India and Pakistan is also discussed. The author

rejects Nawaz Sharif's claim that he was not aware of this "adventure" of the Army and that the Army Chief acted independently without the consent of the civilian government (pp. 507-19). Shuja Nawaz justifies his stand with reference to a briefing by General Zia-ud-Din Khawaja, who was later appointed as the Army Chief by Nawaz Sharif. However, General Zia-ud-Din declared this assertion wrong and said that he himself gave that briefing and that there was no discussion about any possibility of army action in Kargil.⁴ In my opinion this nullifies Shuja's assertion and prove Nawaz Sharif's stand as the right one. However as Nonetheless the Kargil episode became the cause of the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif's elected government. Shuja's discussion on the issue weakens his standing as an independent observer.

Pakistan again underwent transition to democracy under a military president. The Supreme Court also validated the PCO (Provincial Constitutional Order). Democracy remained in crisis in Pakistan as the created a Kings' party and continued a military rule with a legitimizing civilian face, was keeping the office of the Army Chief in hand. The constitution again engineered process, and the Seventeenth Amendment (2002) assigned special powers to the Military president. After 9/11 the US and Pakistan become allies and Pakistan abandoned its Taliban policy; but as usual the army continued relations with Islamists.

Shuja Nawaz's book is a valuable addition to existing literature on Pakistani politics with special reference to the role of the armed forces in the nation building politics and security of Pakistan. It provides a detailed account of the armed forces in the state and politics society of Pakistan, exposing the weaknesses and limitations of capabilities along with the points of credit. Despite its pro-military bias, the book remains interesting and provides much material for academic debate.

⁴ General Zia-ud-Din Khawaja, interview with GEO News in programme 'Jawabdeh'.