

Pakistan's at War with Itself

Ashutosh Misra

Hassan Abbas

Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror
M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2005, pp. 275.

Husain Haqqani

Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military
Vanguard Books, Lahore, 2005, pp. 397.

Over the decades, while the Pakistani democratic edifice continued to cave in under heavy assault from the military, one key characteristic of democracy, however, has continued to hold ground – fearless and forceful writings against dictatorship and praetorian regimes. The books by Hassan Abbas and Husain Haqqani are bold, revealing and comprehensive in encapsulating the contours of Pakistan's 58 years of existence. By virtue of being written by Pakistani scholars, these books stand apart from the other non-Pakistani writers writing on Pakistan.

Both the authors have been witnesses and at times victims of the military regime. Both make a forceful case for 'bailing out' the military from politics in order to allow Pakistan to emerge as a normal state. This, of course, is difficult given the fact that past attempts at making this transition have been scuttled by the military, claiming that its intervention is necessary in the supreme national interest. A transition to a functioning and sustainable democratic polity is something which wiser minds on the subjects have long been debating and in all likelihood will continue to do so without much success.

The authors' assertion that no credible alternative structure to the military has been nurtured in Pakistan could be subject to debate.

Democracy has faltered partly because of the shortcomings of the Muslim League, lack of vision on part of Liaquat Ali Khan's successors, over-reliance on the military to fix internal disturbances and immature personal vendetta between mainstream political leaders at the cost of democracy itself. Exploiting the shortcomings of the civilian and political players, the military has moulded the political set up through its might and machinations under its 24-years of direct and 34-years of indirect rule. Ironically, politicians themselves cannot escape the blame for facilitating the creation of the current democratic façade and being able to pose only a short-term resistance from time to time.

The authors critically discuss Pakistan's successes and failures as a state through two different prisms. Abbas submits Pakistan's evolution as a struggle between 'democracy' and 'dictatorship', whereas Haqqani sees Pakistan as a state oscillating between 'mosque' and 'military'. In both cases, the common denominator happens to be the omnipotent military. An interesting aspect of Pakistan's polity is that the military-democracy interface can also be understood by the military-mullah relationship and vice versa. Call it interesting or coincidental; it is an unfortunate phenomenon that has come to characterise Pakistan's political system.

The broad suggestions one gets is that the military must withdraw from political life, that the influence of the US has been detrimental to Pakistan's democracy and institutional development, and that there is the absence of an alternative structure to replace military in politics and governance.

While taking different interpretative approaches, the two authors also converge. For instance, 'Islam will remain a significant factor in politics' (Haqqani) and 'the influence of jihadis will grow' (Abbas). Both authors paint a rather promising future for the Islamists but in varying degrees. For Abbas, once the façade of military cracks, sooner or later, the religious parties will ascend to power. Haqqani, however, while arguing that Islam will remain a factor in politics, refrains from concluding that it will lead the Islamists to power.

While studying Islamisation and the military's role in it, Abbas and Haqqani widely differ in flagging the reference point of Pakistan 'drift into extremism'. Abbas considers the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent boom in *madrassas* and the creation of Taliban during Zia-

ul Haq's regime with the US' assistance as the period when Pakistan got sucked into jihad through 'rent-a-son' agencies. For Haqqani, Islamisation of the people had begun even before 1947 during the struggle for Pakistan, which only hastened to extreme limits in the late 1970s. The two authors, however, are in agreement that militant Islam or the radical Islam has been "managed" and used by the establishment for political and foreign policy purposes.

Not surprisingly, the US factor in Pakistan dominates the two books. Abbas convincingly establishes US' short and long-term policy towards Pakistan, and considers a military regime to be more useful to the US than a democratic one. The case in point to support Abbas' assertion is the statement of General Anthony C. Zinni, Commander-in-Chief of US Central Command (CENTCOM), and a close friend of General Musharraf, before the US Senate Armed Force Service Committee on February 28, 2000:

Because of the historic importance of the military as a source of stability within the country, I believe that isolating Pakistan's influential military establishment is and will continue to be counterproductive to our long-term interest in the region. When the US isolates the professional Pakistan military, we deny ourselves access to the most powerful institution in Pakistani society...I know Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf well and have spoken to him on several occasions since his assumption of power. I believe that our strategic interests in south Asia and beyond will best be served by a policy of patient military to military engagement (Abbas, p. 182).

General Zinni's statement hinted at the likely nature and various levels of US-Pakistan engagement long before the September 11 attacks, which subsequently made Pakistan a key US ally in the global war against terrorism.

Clearly democracy is a far cry in Pakistan so long as its masters in Washington see a military regime more useful to meet its strategic interests. History shows, after Zia died in 1988, democracy was restored following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. This reduced US' interest in the region, seeing Pakistan come under US sanctions for its nuclear programme. A decade later, the unexpected October 1999 coup ended Pakistan's isolation in Washington, prompting the latter to rethink Pakistan's role in the rapidly changing regional dynamics. Come September 11, the Pakistani military again became the recipient of all kinds of US' assistance and the Musharraf regime got the long-sought legitimacy. Amidst all this, democracy was conveniently ignored.

Husain Haqqani provides very interesting data on the politics of US aid to Pakistan. Between 1954 and 2002, US provided a total of \$12.6 billion in economic and military aid to Pakistan, of which \$9.9 billion were given during 24 years of military rule while \$3.4 billion were provided to civilian regimes covering 19 years. Annually, on an average, \$382.9 million were received from the US under military regimes and only \$178.9 million under civilian leadership. All through history, Pakistan has mostly been brought into the calculus by the US to confront challenges on hand. Containment of communism in the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet expansion in 1980s in Afghanistan, nuclear proliferation concerns in the 1990s and finally, the war against terrorism at the dawn of the 21st century prove this point. Hassan Abbas establishes, "In its long association with Pakistan, America lost the forest for the trees. It saw only its army, but behind it, lost sight of Pakistan itself. The continued advancement of the army meant the concomitant impoverishment of the country and the emasculation of the nascent political process".

The phraseology of the contents of the two books is very interesting. Abbas adopts a chronological and era-wise chapterisation taking different regimes of Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Z.A Bhutto, General Zia-ul Haq, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and General Musharraf as the broad phases of Pakistan's evolution as a state. On the contrary, Haqqani prefers a more theme or discourse-based approach in traversing Pakistan's history. The book opens with the identity and ideology discourse, a debate which has dominated Pakistan's polity. The book develops around the ideological debate, discussing how Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies were a reflection of the ideological churning within the country since its creation. Haqqani explains the Pakistan political system featuring three faultlines – 'who should wield political power', 'ethnic and provincial differences', and 'ideological division over role of Islam in national life', analysing that unlike India and Bangladesh where secular democracy focused on economic development, Pakistan witnessed regimes wherein civil-military oligarchy defined, protected and executed 'identity of state' through religious and militarist nationalism mix.

Today, Pakistan is yet to come to terms with its own ideology. With regard to India, it is ultra-Islamic. When it comes to drinking scotch, it is less Islamic. While confronted with the debate on the 'burqa', it is clearly anti-Islam or anti-Taliban. As Pakistan gets increasingly polarised on ethnic

and provincial lines: whether it is the water issue, dam issue or for that matter the Gwadar Port, there can be no dispute on adopting an inclusive approach to a win-win solution for all. The current military approach in dealing with sectarian turbulence in Baluchistan has proved counter productive and the negotiated approach of the special parliamentary committee, led by Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain, has failed to make any headway. The alienation of the ethnic Baluchs continues unabated and the two sides look set for a long haul. Having an ideology pushed down peoples' throats can be counter-productive and only reinforces the need for greater regional autonomy and inclusive democratic polity. Haqqani appropriately illuminates that as long as the military holds an overbearing influence in national life, the discourse on autonomy and democracy will be trampled under the jackboot because it finds it going against its institutional supremacy and interest.

Haqqani posits that the present crisis is a product or a consequence of duality of Musharraf's policy, aimed to influence the domestic and international agenda. While espousing a policy of enlightened moderation and simultaneously seeking to retain the leverages provided by the instruments of terrorism in dealing with its neighbours, such as India, Musharraf has undermined the long-term prospects for stabilising the domestic situation. He aligns with the mullahs and resorts to the bashing of democratic and liberal forces in Pakistan by maintaining a façade of guided parliamentary democracy. Haqqani's book, however, does not dwell in detail with the constitutional changes brought about by General Musharraf since 1999 and how democracy itself has been made the target in the name of supreme national interest. The long list of (un)constitutional amendments such as passing of the legal framework order (LFO), creation of a national security council (NSC) and uniform issue required a serious and in-depth analyses for the implications it beholds for Pakistan's political stability and future. While Abbas briefly covers Musharraf's anti-democratic measures, he has overlooked a range of measures that were introduced since the coup. Drawing upon his experience as a police officer, Abbas has been able to provide useful insights into the inner workings of sectarian and jihadi groups, and their impact on the society and polity of Pakistan. Chapters nine and ten of his book are particularly interesting on these counts. Be it the Kargil War, the split in the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) or the overthrow of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977, Abbas provides

some startling facts and information in the course of his analyses of these events.

On the Kashmir issue, Abbas and Haqqani hold divergent views, both on the genesis of the conflict and the approach that the key actors should adopt for its resolution. Haqqani's analysis is more academic, ponderous and qualified. His analysis is based on a realistic understanding of the power balance between India and Pakistan, and their corresponding strengths and constraints. Haqqani succeeds in placing the Kashmir issue in the right perspective. He is closer to the truth when he says, "Maharaja Hari Singh sought Indian military help and signed the instrument of accession with India to secure military assistance". This is how India has interpreted and chronicled the events of October 1947 in the wake of Pakistan backed raid on Kashmir. In contrast, Hassan Abbas submits, "...India dispatched a contingent of Indian forces to pressure the hesitant Hindu maharaja of Kashmir, an overwhelmingly Muslim state contiguous to Pakistan, to opt for India". Such interpretation of events will find little favour with Indian readers.

Haqqani's prescriptions for the resolution of the conflict sound more feasible and prudent than Abbas'. For Pakistan to transcend from ideological to functional state, pragmatic peace with India over Kashmir is necessary. Without indulging in lopsided and prescriptive lecturing on Kashmir, Haqqani soberly concludes:

India's much larger size and economic and military prowess means that Pakistan is likely to get exhausted while running hard to keep pace with India. There is no doubt that Pakistanis have strong feelings over Jammu and Kashmir, which might have been included in Pakistan in accordance with the logic of partition. But much of this strong sentiment has been produced by the constant rhetoric of Kashmir's centrality to Pakistan's existence that has been fed to Pakistanis on a regular basis. Fifty-eight years after partition, and in the absence of any incentive or compulsion on the part of India to revise the status quo, it might be prudent for Pakistan to give priority to normalization and stability in South Asia over settlement of the Kashmir dispute (p. 319).

Hassan Abbas fails to impress in his take on the Kashmir question, putting himself in the league of thinkers who consider any writing incomplete without a mention of the Kashmir issue. His five-step prescription, though bold, is nonetheless ambitious and formulaic. Abbas begins rationally in contextualising his proposed solutions to the Kashmir issue but soon after, the patriotic cop gets better of the Harvard scholar. He recommends:

If Pakistan is to be saved from its likely future, it must invest in its envisioned future, and start doing it now. It must start by coming to a sincere accommodation with India over Kashmir. To make this possible, India too will have to shed its present position on Kashmir and proffer an equally sincere hand of friendship, to which Pakistan could respond by creating further space and circumstances for India. In a second stage, India and Pakistan could work out the modalities of a jointly controlled Kashmir Valley, turning the bone of contention into a peace bridge between the two countries (p. 241).

Brilliant! Sounds like a perfect speech for General Musharraf on Pakistan's National Day. Frankly, given the overall quality of the book Abbas should have left Kashmir to be resolved another day.

Both the books have come out at a very critical juncture in global affairs. Having conducted elections in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US has strongly conveyed its bias and preference for having a democratic regime rather than any other form of government to run the affairs. There is nothing objectionable in that until one juxtaposes it with the US' historical relationship with the military dictators in Pakistan. To put it succinctly, the greatest test for the US' democratic ethos and principles have time and again come from Pakistan. In 2007, it will be interesting to see if the US decides to back a democratic regime and revert its policy of achieving long-term strategic interests through a military regime.

Looking ahead to the 2007 elections in Pakistan, the two books present farsighted as well as thought-provoking perspectives on its political and religious predicaments. It raises fundamental questions. Should or will the US help bring genuine democracy in Pakistan? Will General Musharraf continue to align with mullahs keeping the mainstream parties at bay so as to keep the military supreme? Or is there a possibility that in the wake of growing extremism and rise in assassination bids on him and his corps commanders, General Musharraf provides the much-awaited space to the mainstream parties to neutralise extremist tendencies? Will the jihadis continue to grow in power and stature and come to turn the table on its own masters in uniform? Will Pakistan be able to overcome its obsession with non-existential India threat and transcend to become a more functional state from an ideological one? These questions will continue to dominate the academic as well as popular debate in Pakistan for many years to come.

Both the books after intensive exploration draw a bleak and uncertain future dominated by military and Islamists and largely ignored by the US.

The glimmer of hope, if at all, to be found in the books, rests on several 'ifs' and 'buts'. Hope is more dominant than conviction in envisaging Pakistan's future as a normal state.

The reviewer is a Research Fellow at IDSA.