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The army and democracy: military politics in Pakistan

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The army and democracy: Military politics in Pakistan, by Aqil Shah, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2014 ix + 399 pp., £26 (hardback), ISBN 978-0674728936

Aqil Shah's book makes an important contribution to the growing literature on the Pakistan army. Its focus is different from other publications in that it attempts to understand the motivation and processes that has led to the army's manifold interventions in the political arena. It does this by situating the case study of Pakistan within two sets of literature: civil-military relations and democratization theory. From this perspective international literature predominantly, but not exclusively, from the South American and Middle Eastern experience of democratization informs the introductory chapter which examines how regimes transit from authoritarianism to democracy. These perspectives theoretically inform the subsequent chapters on Pakistan's experience of authoritarian rule from Ayub Khan's martial law through to Musharraf's rule.

The author's attempts to explain the framework of the military mind-set that justifies and rationalizes military intervention by identifying two concepts: guardianship to governorship, which is used to justify the military's direct and indirect role in Pakistan's chequered politics. Shah disagrees with the view that Ayub Khan's coup was promoted by Washington and instead argues that the US' main concern was stability during the Cold War and is also critical of justifications used by the military at pivotal junctures in Pakistan's history. For example he exonerates Zulfikhar Bhutto's role in the breakup of Pakistan by placing the primary responsibility on the army. Likewise Shah claims that General Musharraf deliberately misled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the Kargil plan.

In evaluating the army's justifications the author also investigated the mentality of the army officers which is inculcated with a deliberately low opinion of politicians and an over inflated estimation of their own capabilities and exclusive capacity to protect national security determined exclusively by the external threat perception of India. While there has been anecdotal evidence of such an officer mentality this is the first systematic attempt to document and understand how this mentality is nurtured. Shah demonstrates that officers are calculatingly socialised through command training on the legitimate role of the military to intervene, their role as the ultimate watch dog of the nation, the inappropriateness of the democratic system, dynastic characteristics of political parties, a central concern with India and the fear of a war on two fronts. Interestingly the highly negative views of the political process militate against permanent military rule due to concerns that its corrosive effects will impact on the army.

Shah returns to the theoretical dimension in the conclusion which probably is the most interesting chapter of the book. He asks how the democratization process can be advanced and argues that the change of civilian regime by means of an election (the so-called turnover test) is not sufficient. What his investigations show is the militarization of key civilian institutions in particular the Ministry of Defence, the Inter-Services Intelligence and the paramilitary forces as well as a lack of parliamentary oversight. All of this makes it relatively easy for the army to maintain autonomy from civilian control and thus make it relatively easy to take over when necessary. Shah argues that these institutions need to be under full civilian control, that defence should be securitized by parliament and that the security committee has to have teeth. Alternative nodes of power such as the judiciary and the media need to be strengthened. In addition the national educational curriculum, and the command college, need to make it clear that the military is subordinate to parliament. Furthermore the lead agency in dealing with terrorism should be the police, the army playing only a support role, which would require the police to be reformed and depoliticized. Finally he suggests that it is in Washington's interest to see democracy develop in Pakistan as this would be the best way to contain terrorism and nuclear proliferation in the region. War as an external factor that could

promote democracy by critically weakening the army is an unlikely scenario as the high risk of a nuclear confrontation makes this option fraught with danger.

Given the extended periods of military the earlier parts of the book covers a period of Pakistan's political history which is already fairly well known. Thus, the sections covering the period prior to Musharraf often fall between two stools; these passages are either not theoretically informed enough or do not bring new empirical data to table. New data however is deployed in the latter chapters particularly from the Musharraf period onwards by investigating officer mentality and the depth of military penetration of civilian institutions even when not in power. This material, along with the theoretical insights offered, enables Aqil Shah to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Pakistan army.

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