

Review - The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World

Written by Ajay Anil Cherian

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AJAY ANIL CHERIAN, SEP 22 2014

The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World

By T.V. Paul

Oxford University Press, 2014

The ability of the state to efficiently provide essential services to its citizens is the marker of a strong state. But since its independence on 14th August 1947, the state of Pakistan has been struggling to exist as a cohesive unit. Despite overwhelming support from the United States, Saudi Arabia and China in terms of aid, it has continuously faltered in emerging as a powerful South Asian economy, becoming instead a breeding ground for Jihadist networks and a proliferator of nuclear weapons technology. A 2013 global survey conducted by Worldwide Independent Network/ Gallup shows that Pakistan is considered the second largest threat to world peace.[1] While India, with several problems of its own, has prospered since partition and is regarded as a champion of democracy and an emerging great power in Asia by the United States and its allies[2], neighboring Pakistan has failed to emulate this success story. Well-known International relations academic T.V. Paul's *The Warrior State* cogently summarizes the reasons why Pakistan remains Obama's "biggest nightmare".[3]

According to the author, the primary reason why Pakistan is what it is today is because of the state's Hobbesian view of the world (2014: 4), which leads to excessive spending on the military as a result of its obsession to achieve strategic parity with its "rival" India. The Pakistani military continues to stimulate threat perceptions of India to gain a major portion of the economic pie and overexerts itself militarily; acquiring nuclear weapons for instance. India sees such behavior as a threat to its own national security and an arms race ensues, destabilizing the entire region. Paul understands that Pakistan has had its own "resource curse" in a different form: the geostrategic curse (2014: 5). Pakistan has made use of its pivotal position in South Asia to attract billions of dollars of aid money which it has funneled to its military and its Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). It worries that a peaceful resolution of problems in its backyard would cut the flow of monetary aid it currently receives from the West and therefore continues to cultivate an atmosphere of uncertainty in the region.

The book offers a historical insight into how the military elite continue to hold a dominant role since the inception of the Pakistani state (2014: 18). While other military dominated Muslim majority states like Turkey and Indonesia have engaged in policies that favored inclusive growth and development, the Pakistani military elite have sadly not engaged in pro-growth policies. Unlike their Pakistani counterparts, the militaries of Indonesia and Turkey have also wisely avoided consorting with radical Islamist organizations to achieve foreign policy objectives.

The author correctly diagnoses the reasons for Pakistan's malady: the lack of a powerful civil society, lack of demand for institutional reforms, social heterogeneity and the masses' lack of political will to transcend this heterogeneity (2014: 29). Add to this ISI's support of terrorist outfits that provide it "strategic depth" in Afghanistan and the picture is complete. Any liberal political actor or organization in Pakistan that stands for sweeping reforms faces mortal danger. The murder of liberal Muslim politicians and journalists by extreme right wing groups supported by the ISI sheds light on the grim situation of the country that resists attempts to change the status quo.

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The reader is introduced to the concept of a garrison state; one that is preoccupied with national security where the military (economically and also by promoting its values) enjoys high standing in society (2014: 69). Pakistan is an example of a garrison state because of its primitive obsession of protecting its land borders rather than ensuring the welfare of its citizens. The author offers several explanations in support of the same, the most prominent of which include the Kashmir issue and India's past intervention in East Pakistan, which has developed a sense of insecurity within the Pakistani elite vis-à-vis India. This insecurity moulds its behavior. Instead of focusing on export-oriented development, it saw fit to import high tech weaponry from its Western allies and China, looking for a window of opportunity to humiliate India militarily as it tried in 1965 and 1999.

The Warrior State also provides a glimpse of how political Islam has played a role in shaping Pakistan (2014: 128). Islamization has failed to develop Pakistan into a cohesive unit with the promotion of a "single core religious line" as the extremist "Sunni-Wahhabi-Deobandi coalition" tries to dominate or suppress other sects, especially the Ahmadiyyas. Attempts to emulate Turkey's moderate Islamist model also came too late as these sects grew extremely powerful by this time.

The author also blames Pakistan's external allies for making matters worse. The champions of democracy, the United States, preferred an allied, stable Pakistan much more than a democratic Pakistan and hence made no conscious effort to democratize the state (2014: 71). Also, the most vocal state when it comes to matters of nuclear proliferation, it is curious to note why the U.S turned a blind eye to Pakistan's weaponization program when it clearly had proof against the latter.

After painting a grim portrait of the dysfunctional Pakistani polity, Paul tries to shine a tiny ray of hope into the reader's eyes in the final chapter of the book. He stresses that the only way forward for the Pakistani state would be to shed its hyper-realist orientation towards "rival states". It needs to understand that without development, security would never be achieved no matter how much a state arms itself. An abundance of arms and weaponry available cheap and a growing youth bulge, most of whom are unemployed and disgruntled, is a very dangerous combination. Pakistani elite needs to learn from its mistakes and let go of its obsession with national security with respect to India and must understand that if they do not act soon, there may not be much of a Pakistan left to defend from external aggressors.

One aspect of the story which the author misses out in detailing is the story of the ISI. While there are several references to the organization throughout the book, a chapter on the ISI and its activities would have been a welcome addition. *The Warrior State* otherwise addresses most other issues that deserve attention. Overall, it is a must read for scholars and students of international relations trying to understand the complex political entity that is called Pakistan.

[1] <http://www.wingia.com/web/files/services/33/file/33.pdf?1410938376>

[2] <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/1108/Obama-presses-India-to-become-global-champion-of-democracy>

[3] <http://www.iwallerstein.com/pakistan-obamas-nightmare/>

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