Pakistan's Security State of Mind

Maya Tudor

No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad. By Daniel S. Markey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. $80.00 cloth, $27.99 paper.

The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World. By T. V. Paul. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 272p. $27.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.

The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan. By Aqil Shah. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. 416p. $35.00.

In August 2014, the Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan led a "freedom march" on Islamabad, protesting alleged electoral fraud during the elections of May 2013. These protests brought the capital to a virtual standstill and threatened to bring down the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif. In the weeks that followed this showdown, the Pakistani army arbitrated between the two sparring politicians.[1] Ultimately, this confrontation weakened both the incumbent prime minister and the charismatic leader of the anti-incumbent agitation. The real winner from the weeks of political drama was the military—an institution that was able to once again position itself as the force of stability and order. As the books under review make clear, the tendency of the military to slowly, steadily aggrandize military power is as old as the country itself. They are a welcome contribution to our understanding of the Pakistani army and how it has managed to create and sustain this advantageous position for itself for much of that country's existence. Observers of Pakistani politics, military coups, democracy, and international security would do well to take note.

With their focus on the Pakistani military, these three books pose distinct questions in relations to that institution: Why has it regularly intervened to supplant democratic governments (*The Army and Democracy*)? Why is it driven by a development-impeding obsession with external security threats (*The Warrior State*)? And why has its relationship with America been so troubled for so long (*No Exit from Pakistan*)? Despite these different inquiries, the works share several points of consensus.

Both *The Army and Democracy* and *The Warrior State* emphasize the first postindependence decade as pivotal in setting in place the ascension of the Pakistani military for the five-plus decades since. The shared focus on the origins of Pakistan's initial military coup in 1958 is important for at least two reasons. One is that Pakistan's first decade forms an excellent case study for illustrating the processes driving a consistent statistical finding—that the risk of a military coup in a country with a history of previous military coups is significantly higher than the same risk in a country with no previous history of military coups.[2] These two books provide a useful, in-depth case study of *why* military interventionism tends to be sticky over time. The answer they propose is that the years after colonial independence were formative because political institutions were either adapted from rump colonial institutions or created anew. The early political roles that these institutions assumed subsequently became codified in constitutional precedents, in behavioral patterns, and in institutional beliefs.

An emphasis on some periods of history as more formative than others is in such clear evidence in these two works that they can be said to form part of a broader historical turn in democratization studies.[3] As such, these books caution us not to read history backwards and see military ascendance in Pakistan (nor the absence of mass collective action) as inevitable but as more or less likely had different political decisions been taken. Few political analysts foresaw the perpetual instability of Pakistan as probable in 1947. If anything, instability was predicted to be more likely in neighboring India, which had to contend with many more politicized ethnic cleavages, a wider array of institutional arrangements, and abysmal levels of poverty and human development. By the end of that first post-independence decade, early practices had set in motion the yo-yo politics between civilian and military rule that has continued to the present day in Pakistan, while India's stable democracy today is still governed by its 1950 constitution. In short, because first coups beget coups, to ask of Pakistan why perpetual military coups,

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why no democracy, why no development, and why no stable alliances, these books tell us, is to ask about the antecedents of Pakistan's first military coup.

Aqil Shah's *The Army and Democracy* investigates the key decisions initiating military involvement in civilian politics in the decade after independence, as well as the factors driving its continual involvement. The central analytical arguments of the book are twofold: First, Shah asserts that ethnic divisions between East and West Pakistan stoked elite fears of national disintegration. This fear combined with external security threats to drive the early civilian governments' autocratic suppression of regional demands for autonomy. The authoritarian response drove a politics of musical chairs and directly paved the way for the first military coup of 1958.[4] Second, since 1958, budgetary allocations, norms of military autonomy, American military assistance, but most of all the army's belief in its own institutional supremacy explain Pakistan's recurrent pattern of military coups.

To make compelling causal claims about the origins of Pakistan's regime type invariably invites comparisons with India, a parallel that Shah himself regularly invokes. Independent India was also carved from colonial British India and inherited many of the same colonial institutions, including its military. Yet for the first of Shah's two central arguments—namely, that the interaction of a high degree of external security threat and a demand for regional autonomy were critical for explaining Pakistan's first military coup—the comparison with India does not support his conclusion that internal and external threat perceptions were critically important. This is because the very same causal factors led to a different regime outcome in India.

Gaining independence the day after Pakistan's, India inherited part of the same colonial military, a high level of external security threat (being surrounded on both sides by a state with which it almost immediately went to war), and a variety of similar subnational demands for autonomy. India responded to calls for autonomy on analogous questions of state building, such as calls for the recognition of regional languages that Shah explores in the case of Pakistan, not by repression but by slow, steady, constitutionally-specified accommodation. India's elites were able to do this because they had built an organized, programmatic political party that had been functioning well for decades.[5] Because India's dominant party could devolve some power to regions and stay in power, neither regional demands for greater autonomy nor external security threats portended political instability. As in Pakistan, the Indian military attempted to arrogate civilian rule—but was prevented from doing so by a prime minister supported by loyal party members with grassroots support.[6] The clearest difference between India and Pakistan was thus not the nature of the military nor regional demands for autonomy, but the presence of a national political party capable of brokering and resolving these demands, thus staving off a reliance on military intervention to maintain political order. Shah's analysis does not give enough credence to this difference.

It is exceedingly rare for political elites anywhere in the world to willingly cede power indefinitely. Shah's contention that the civilian tendency to aggrandize autocratic power in postindependence Pakistan was the critical cause of the first military coup hinges upon whether the civilian elite governing Pakistan upon independence could have accommodated East Pakistan's autonomy demands and still stayed in power. It is unlikely that the answer to this is affirmative. Because Pakistan's dominant political party was poorly organized; because there was no consensus on the social and economic programs that an independent Pakistan was to pursue; because the civilian leaders of the Muslim League were refugees from India with no political base from which to be elected in Pakistan; and because regional elites in *every* region (not just East Pakistan) refused the legitimacy of Pakistan's central political leadership, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the leadership of Pakistan's dominant party could stay in power democratically, even had the country's wings agreed to parity in power-sharing structures. While the first decade of independence in Pakistan set the country on the path of unstable autocracy, the decade *before* independence was more crucial to Pakistan's political future because it was during this time that Pakistan's nationalist movement and political party had an opportunity to invent itself differently.[7]

A brief glance at the Pakistan military's first foray into civilian rule further belies the claim that an insurmountable East–West divide was the anvil upon which democratic politics in Pakistan was first forged and thus doomed. The military's first imposition of martial law in 1953 was not in East Pakistan but within West Pakistan, to put down protests in Lahore that were engineered to resolve a dispute between Punjabi regional politicians and the Muslim League leadership at the center. Even if East Pakistan had become Bangladesh in 1947, Pakistan's national party would not have been able to govern West Pakistan in a stable manner. If Pakistan's dominant party failed to provide a stable political order within West Pakistan in the presence of the unifying impetus of West versus East politics, it would have been unable to govern West Pakistan stably in the absence of this unifying force. Exit, not voice or loyalty, was the main means of conflict resolution in newly independent Pakistan. Even within West Pakistan, the lack of party organization and programmatic agendas would have limited the civilian government's ability to provide the kind of stable political order that could have staved off military intervention.

Political power must be created before it can be used. This is why many political scientists have argued that the origins of *first* military coups often lie with weak political parties that are unable to govern effectively. In the words

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of a renowned scholar of civil–military relations and political stability, "the susceptibility of a political system to military intervention varies inversely with the strength of its political parties."[8] Upon independence, Pakistani political elites were simply not in possession of a centralized, organized, and programmatic political party: This was the clearest difference between Pakistan and India, and this difference most critically drove their divergent democratic paths.

The second claim of *The Army and Democracy* is "that the military's tutelary beliefs and norms ... have profoundly shaped its political interventions and influence by justifying the authoritarian expansion of its role in state and society" (p. 2). The book's focus on the content of beliefs and the institutional means through which these beliefs are perpetuated helpfully illuminates the processes through which the military's grip on civilian politics continues to the present day. Shah is surely right in advocating that the role of norms in perpetuating military coups has been a neglected cause of regular military interventions. But the reader is left unclear as to how big a role tutelary beliefs play when set against such alternative explanations as the economic interests of the military in perpetuating its own grip on power, the lack of organization among existing political parties, and American support for military regimes.

The Army and Democracy could thus do more to convince us that the military's beliefs are crucial wholly apart from its institutional interests. This is a difficult task. Militaries around the world almost uniformly justify their coups as being for their nation's ultimate good, as witnessed most recently by events in Thailand and Egypt. In Pakistan, the army's belief in its own benevolence penetrates deeply and is perpetuated through both educational institutions and professional norms. But this does not mean that the belief systems are a *primary* rather than simply a proximate motivator of coups. As Shah acknowledges, interests and ideas are difficult to distinguish. If the political and economic interests of the military in protecting its power and its paternalistic beliefs in its ability to do so both motivate coups, how does one analytically disentangle them from each other?

Methodologically, the only means of demonstrating a casually independent role of beliefs, as constructivist scholars within international relations have done, is to trace decisions that are consistent with belief structures but contradicted by political or economic interests.[9] To draw a limited analogy, Americans have historically drunk deeply of a belief in the value of democracy, both through their education and through their nationalism. During the Cold War, American politicians were surely convinced that American support for democracy was a benevolent gift to the world. Yet selective American support for democratic regimes and the willing support for autocratic regimes when it compellingly served the security interests of America demonstrated that democratic beliefs were consistently trumped by geostrategic security concerns.

By focusing a sorely needed comparative lens on Pakistan's garrison politics and by innovating the concept of a geostrategic curse, T. V Paul's *The Warrior State* is a valuable contribution to the scholarly understanding of both the circumstances under which militaries govern and those under which states develop an effective capacity to extract and redistribute. Paul argues that Pakistan has not pursued the kinds of developmental policies pursued by other warrior states because it receives largesse from a foreign patron willing to financially and politically underwrite the military. This "geostrategic curse" insulates the regime's elites from the need to create an effective, capacious state. In making this argument, Paul helps to qualify Charles Tilly's well-known dictum that "war made the state and the state made war" in the context of postcolonial states. Unlike European states, many postcolonial states came into existence without battling through a natural selection that eliminated weak political entities. As such, postcolonial states, whose borders were often arbitrarily drawn by elites in foreign capitals, were unlikely to have developed effective extractive and distributive capacities. Postcolonial warrior states are therefore less likely to be strong political entities.

Another contribution of this work is to highlight how the ideational foundations of Pakistan's increasingly sectarian national identity support military interventionism—an underappreciated phenomenon in scholarly analyses of the country. Paul joins other scholars in delineating a set of beliefs, beyond just the Pakistani military, that help to perpetuate military interventions.[10] Chief among these are an India-as-archenemy narrative that has been widely acknowledged to support the military's political role.[11] But Paul also rightly underscores the increasing identification of the Pakistan state with Sunni Islam as problematic for Pakistan's developmental future. The lack of clarity about the role that religion plays in Pakistan feeds an identity-based politics in which it is difficult to create a consensus about the need for a shared investment in the public good across all social groups.

These strengths aside, the chief shortcoming of *The Warrior State* is a lack of clarity about why the author has chosen Turkey, Indonesia, Egypt, Korea, and Taiwan (why not Israel?) as comparative case studies and an inconsistent adjudication of competing explanations for Pakistan's lack of developmental capacity. Pakistan is described as a comparative regime outlier because of its "rare garrison-cum-hybrid democratic" status (p. 78). Why do Myanmar and Thailand not fit this category? The book's closest comparative case study is Egypt—a weak state with a shared religious identity, a high level of external security threat, a failure to implement land reforms, and a powerful geostrategic patron. Although Egypt's foreign largesse has come with the express condition for making peace with its chief external threat,

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Egypt has also experienced recurrent military rule. This similar regime outcome suggests that the simple fact of geostrategic patronage (rather than the direction of this support) promotes military interventions. Yet at other times, Paul seems to suggest that the nature of American support (e.g., by creating democratically unaccountable forces such as the *mujahideen* that now work to destabilize the state) has been especially detrimental for Pakistan. Elsewhere, the author argues that land reforms play a critical role in Turkey's and Korea's transformations into more successful developmental states and that Pakistan's and Egypt's failure to implement such reforms is important for retarding their developmental transformations. But since the relative explanatory weight of land reforms and colonialism versus the geostrategic curse is not systematically evaluated, it is difficult to tease out the import of competing explanations.

There are a number of factual inaccuracies that undermine confidence in *The Warrior State.* For example, the book states that just 95 of 1,157 colonial bureaucrats went to Pakistan at colonial independence, a fact that Paul uses as evidence that Pakistan was institutionally disadvantaged. Yet this does not acknowledge that nearly half of these bureaucrats were Europeans, most of whom left after independence. Thus, Pakistan inherited approximately its population-proportionate share of colonial bureaucrats, especially because it received a greater share of British bureaucrats than did India.[12] Muhammad Ali Jinnah's "moth-eaten and mutilated" Pakistan did not refer to proposals for a Pakistan without Punjab and Bengal but to proposals that the Hindu-majority districts within those two states be allowed to decide which state to join. Pakistan's first constitution did not take a decade because of divisions over religion, since every major religious question was actually settled in the draft 1953 constitution—a constitution that was never passed because of the divisions between the two geographical wings of Pakistan that ultimately led to the Constituent Assembly's dismissal at the hands of civilian bureaucrats.[13] Although such mistakes are minor, their regularity nonetheless raises concerns.

If *The Warrior State* locates the sources of Pakistan's weak state capacity in its geostrategic curse, then Daniel Markey's *No Exit from Pakistan* chronicles Pakistan's relationship with the source of that curse. In doing so, the book highlights the myriad ways in which both Pakistan and America have suffered through unfulfilled expectations and bouts of outright hostility, culminating in the toxic status quo of the present day. Markey recounts this history through an excellent mix of official documents and news articles interwoven with personal interviews and thoughtful judgments about the (many) mistakes made.

To the extent that a single theme captures the essence of *No Exit from Pakistan*, it is that Pakistan's relationship with the United States is today characterized by mutual vulnerability. This vulnerability arises from Pakistan's growing terrorist networks, its nuclear capabilities, and the wider regional rivalry between India and Pakistan. These three threats are compounded by vast demographic changes in Pakistan without any requisite governmental investment in education, health, and infrastructure that could channel these changes into prosperity and political stability. The explosive and potentially revolutionary demographic shifts, coupled with an interventionist military and weak, elitist politicians, Markey argues, neither portend a happy future for Pakistan's relationship with America nor allow America the luxury of disengagement with this on-again, off-again ally.

No Exit from Pakistan should be applauded for its attempt to grapple with both the American and Pakistani perspectives on their relationship within the same pages. The narrative is particularly effective at laying out the prisoner's dilemma quality of this bilateral relationship. In Pakistan, strategic priorities are muddled by the interrelated civilian-military tussle for power and the regional rivalry with India. This is a state of affairs that the United States bears a general responsibility for exacerbating, as Markey, to his credit, acknowledges. At the same time, he also points to similar problems within the American government that impede effective policymaking toward Pakistan. The discussion of the difficulties over the creation of the Kerry-Lugar bill in 2009 particularly epitomizes how political incentives for individual politicians in both countries led to a frustrating setback for champions of democracy.

Although *No Exit from Pakistan* provides a detailed narrative of the one-step-forward, two-steps-back nature of the American relationship with Pakistan, missing is a specific acknowledgment of the direct way in which shortsighted American policies feed a vicious political cycle that ultimately undermines America's long-term security goals. Each administration's short-term focus on combating such purportedly immediate security threats as the unlikely disintegration of the Pakistani nuclear command leads it to design policies that financially and politically support the Pakistani military. In light of this aid, the primary incentive of the Pakistani military and intelligence services is twofold: Internationally, the military wishes to keep copious foreign funds flowing into its coffers while domestically, it wishes to protect its legitimacy and power relative to civilian institutions.

Fully aware that American attention in the region will eventually wane and that NATO forces will withdraw from Afghanistan, the military and intelligence services can accomplish both of these goals by playing a double game. Their institutional incentives are to publicly hype the threat of terrorism while covertly cultivating the support of domestic terror groups that both create strategic depth in Afghanistan and level the playing field against India in a way that is plausibly deniable. American policies exacerbate this undesirable state of affairs by

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channeling funds to the Pakistan military, which can publicly position itself as the bulwark against such threats while still perpetuating an India-as-archenemy narrative that ensures its continued preeminence relative to domestic institutions.

Markey himself epitomizes the American policymaking community's excessive focus on traditional security threats when he writes that the greatest threat to Pakistan's stability comes from "confusion, deterioration, or division within the army itself" (p. 7). After a decade in which annual civilian deaths from terrorist attacks have skyrocketed from the hundreds to the thousands and in which, as Paul points out, even the military itself has listed internal instability (within the country, not the army) as the primary threat to Pakistan, this perspective is in need of updating. In 2007, Markey made a considered case for America *not* pushing Pakistan's military dictator to abandon his presidential hopes.[14] Just a few months after that article was published, Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency and postponed the January 2008 elections. The fact America has been unwilling to raise even its voice in support of limiting the Pakistani military's prerogative, especially when doing so would cost relatively little, has not only cost America's reputation dearly within Pakistan but also directly contributed to instability in that country. Markey could do more to detail the mechanisms of America's culpability in perpetuating the warrior state.

No Exit from Pakistan adopts an occasional derogatory tone that can detract from its overall analytical effect. Markey is not careful enough to recognize the adverse effects, for example, of calling Pakistan a "basket case" or of deriding Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's performance before the Council on Foreign Relations audience as "literally laughable." This evidently patronizing approach is best avoided in a clearheaded analysis of Pakistani politics.

This book also suggests that Pakistanis do not appreciate America's generous contributions. On the contrary, educated Pakistanis realize that America has contributed economically greatly toward Pakistan, but much of that has lined the coffers of the military rather than that of civil society, while the American government has been unwilling to seriously engage in granting trade concessions that could create more than a million Pakistani jobs. This fact merits just a sentence shortly before the book concludes, rather than the sustained discussion it deserves in a book that details policy options for American policymakers. In the words of Mohsin Hamid, the per person total of American aid to Pakistan is the price of a no-toppings pizza in Lahore, a pizza that has been mostly eaten by the military and that has come as part of a package deal with dramatic increases in civilian fatalities in the last decade.[15] While Pakistan's intelligence services and army certainly bear responsibility for this turn of events, so too does American support for the military. Markey concludes by suggesting that if armed with a realistic understanding of its difficult history and lower expectations for the future, this bilateral relationship can become less troubled. But if American strategy toward Pakistan is to follow Teddy Roosevelt's injunction to speak softly and carry a big stick, then it needs to work more on the former.

In sum, these three books make important contributions toward an understanding of the nature of Pakistan's politics today. While these works rightly focus on the possibility of another military coup as the most immediate threat to Pakistan's democracy and stability, sustaining the country's democratic transition must involve more than just keeping the military formally in the barracks. Achieving democratic consolidation will also necessitate several structural changes in Pakistani politics. Among the most important of these is a diminution in the perception of India as an existential threat. The narrative of a neighboring enemy bent on Pakistan's annihilation provides the military with an immediate impetus for intervention (as it did in 1999) and creates a ready-made alibi for the military's inability to deliver effective governance or human development. Future research could help shed light on the comparative conditions under which governing militaries have genuinely ceded executive power.

Democratic consolidation in Pakistan also hinges on citizenship becoming progressively associated with inclusive rather than exclusive identities. Every government in Pakistan, democratic or not, has turned to religion to bolster its legitimacy when it is weak. Embracing religious leaders and institutions may have prolonged the short-term life of these governments. Over the longer term, however, the tendency to legitimize a central role for religion has enabled debates over religion to assume center stage in national politics. Focusing steadfast national attention on whether Christians, Ahmadiyyas, and Shias are committing blasphemy does more than create different classes of citizenship, thereby depriving whole groups of their civil rights. Just as importantly, such polarizing debates distract governments from what should be their core business, namely, promoting human and economic development.

Political elites everywhere can and have used their previous experiences with democracy to overcome collective action problems.[16] Pakistani politicians whose reigns were shortened by shortsighted bickering during the 1990s banded together in 2010 to limit military prerogatives via a constitutional amendment. If the civilian governments of Pakistan can learn another lesson from their country's past, it should be to sideline costly international distractions and minimize polarizing debates over religion and get on with the business of promoting human flourishing in a reimagined and pluralist Pakistan.

Notes

1 New Delhi Television 2014.
2 Londregan and Poole 1990.

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3 Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010.
4 This "musical chairs" conceptualization of unstable politics, defined by the continual reshuffling of the same handful of characters to prevent any single individual from amassing too much political power, was coined by Migdal 2001.
5 Tudor 2013a, Chapters 2–4.
6 Raghavan, 2012. The article details how Congress leaders gave serious thought to the nature of civilian–military relations before independence.
7 Tudor 2013b.
8 Huntington 1968.
9 Keck and Sikkink 1998.
10 Shaikh, 2009; Tudor 2013a, Chapter 3.
11 Tudor, 2014.
12 Potter, 1986.
13 Tudor 2013a, Chapter 5.
14 Markey 2007.
15 Hamid 2011.
16 Bermeo 1992.

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