

## CROSSED SWORDS

### Review

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***CROSSED SWORDS — Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within***; by Shuja Nawaz, Oxford University Press

Pakistan's history is really that of its army, as aptly described by a former Army Chief, since 38 of its 60 years existence was ruled by them.

Thus Army remains the centre of gravity of Pakistan's polity, and explanations for this were framed in terms of the feudal elites from which the army drew its leaders. Others attribute this to Pakistan serving the purposes of the U.S.-led alliances as a front-line state against the Soviet Union during the Cold War, by which the military gained and retained its dominant status.

Shuja Nawaz's book provides new insights into the ideological and cultural drivers of this unique army. His close links with the military and political leadership gives him extraordinary access both to archival and anecdotal history. He focuses both into the belief system and the internal rivalries, and reveals this army's role as the main determinant of Pakistan's polity and policies.

#### Continuing strategy

Resultant effect is a military hierarchy loath to a political hierarchy and believes itself as the best form of governance

This outcome of the unequal struggle between an organised, well-trained military institution and a weak squabbling political establishment was so clear an opportunity which General Ayub Khan and his successors, quickly seized by exercising the levers of power at every level, as are the consequences of that continuing strategy.

The decision-making processes which were responsible for the start and continuation of the conflict in Jammu & Kashmir, of wars with India, and of seeking the U.S. as the guarantor of military's legitimacy etc all make for a fascinating account. What the author does not mention explicitly but still conveys skilfully is the exploitation of the 'Indian bogey'. The sustained portrayal of an Indian threat to dismember Pakistan, and undo the Partition was effectively used to legitimise the extraordinary size, role and expenditure on the military. In the process, Pakistan's army embraced a militarist ideology which placed all its interests above that of the state. It led in turn to the army arrogating to itself extraordinary privileges and benefits, making it an independent economic and business player in the state.

#### Militarist thinking

General Musharraf's speech after dismissing the Nawaz Sharif Government provides the window to the militarist thinking. The Prime Minister who had been elected by a near two-third majority was deposed and in his words, the P.M.'s decisions had affected the integrity of the military. The military's cohesion was placed at a higher value than that of the state.

The limited and motivated briefs given to the Prime Ministers by the Army Chiefs are a revelation. The dogma that the military knows what is best for the country comes through repeatedly in the insider accounts of the politician-military interaction.

The possibility of gaining political immortality by taking Kashmir was suggested in a GHQ briefing to Benazir Bhutto. General Musharraf's offer to Benazir to plant the Pakistani flag in Srinagar by

the Kargil operations is an extraordinary recounting. These events further confirm the militarist beliefs which make the army disregard international and domestic implications of their actions.

#### Army management

The sub-title of "wars within" the Pakistan Army refers to the systemic flaws in the political management of the army. Despite the firm professional grip the Army had on the internal cohesion and efficiency of the force, there are Byzantine manoeuvring, above the ranks of Major Generals for bigger prizes, because the Chiefs have been rarely chosen on the principle of seniority. Normally amongst the top half a dozen Generals, seniority should be the established norm, other things being equal. When that is given the go by, as has often happened in Pakistan, other considerations come to the fore. Clan against clan, Punjabi against Pathan, Multani against Muhajir, even marriage and blood relations become determining factors. This book chronicles

the decision processes that go into making national policies concerning major events in Pakistan's history. Emergence of Bangladesh, the Afghanistan-Taliban-ISI play, and the current struggle to restore democracy are all provided, as hitherto unavailable insight, through interviews and close observation.

The major event, Kargil conflict is presented through comments and perspectives of multiple individuals. As such there are as many interpretations of the event as there are individuals which the author terms the Roshomon effect, after the famous Japanese film maker's technique.

#### New phenomenon

The Pakistan Army is faced with the phenomenon of fighting a new war on its own territory. Its operational doctrines are based on maximum force, with the use of artillery, helicopter gun ships and even tanks against opposition. It is not used to taking casualties or conducting operations without recourse to overkill. Actions against the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are viewed in parts of the army and amongst the populace, as fighting someone Else's war on Pakistani soil. resulting in the legitimacy and relevance of the army to a Pakistani cause has become doubtful. It is no surprise that the army has done its deals of live and let live in the tribal areas.

The conclusion from this book highlights the indispensability of the army for any political arrangement in Pakistan. It is not yet possible in Pakistan to secure and exercise political power without the support of the army. Benazir Bhutto and Zardari came to terms with this reality late and were co-opted by the military, while Sharif is yet to do so. A united political front against the military's role is not in sight. as the security situation also makes the army a prime player in the country.

Their belief in their capacity to mould political outcomes will thus be strengthened and will retain sole control over its nuclear assets. Their economic clout will also remain undiminished. and militarist belief system will be further reinforced, and policy-makers everywhere would do well to take note of konthai