

**Pakistan the Garrison State: Origins, Evolution,
Consequences 1947–2011** by Ishtiaq Ahmed, Karachi:
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Pakistan has had a distinctive and chequered trajectory since its creation in August 1947, following the partition of British India, and was conceived on the basis of the contested two-nation theory. The latter formulation, championed by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, averred that the Muslims of the subcontinent needed their own state and against a backdrop of cynical realpolitik considerations and venal politics, the new state was born in the womb of intense Hindu–Muslim communal violence.

Pakistan had no history or a past that could be resurrected, for it was a sui generis creation. But it envisioned a future that was outlined by Jinnah in a well-documented speech of 11 August 1947. However, Jinnah died in September 1948 and in the years that followed, the secular democratic aspiration became increasingly elusive and the Pakistani military, represented by its army, became the dominant institution and influence in the state. Having set the secular ideal aside, the Pakistani state and society become progressively ‘Islamic’—defined in an exclusive sectarian manner—and for more than half its existence, Pakistan has been under military rule, beginning with General Ayub Khan who came into focus in 1954.

The book under review addresses this complex issue in a comprehensive and commendable manner and Lahore-born Ishtiaq

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Ahmed, who is Professor Emeritus at the Stockholm University, delves deep into the subject. He observes at the outset:

This study seeks to solve the following puzzle: in 1947, the Pakistan military was poorly armed and lacked the infrastructure and training needed to function as an effective branch of the state. It was not directly involved in politics. Over time, not only has it become a middle-range power possessing nuclear weapons, it has also become the most powerful institution in the country with *de facto* veto powers over politics. *How* and *why* did this happen and *what* were its consequence? (Emphasis in original.)

The ‘how’ part is elucidated in extensive detail, running into 400 pages plus, and spans the period from 1937 that marks the formal articulation of the demand for a separate state and concludes with the ‘gory end of Osama bin Laden’ in May 2011. The analytical framework is contained in the first section of the book that dwells on how Pakistan transmutes into ‘the fortress of Islam: a metaphor for a garrison state’.

Ahmed points out that he was drawn to the concept of the fortress when he heard General Musharraf using the Urdu phrase, ‘Pakistan Islam ka qila hai’, in an address to his country in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attack and the subsequent assault on the Indian Parliament in December 2001. At the time, the global community led by the United States (US) had embarked on the global war against terror and Pakistan, which had nurtured the Taliban in Afghanistan, was given an ultimatum that heightened its sense of vulnerability.

Elucidating the centrality of security for Pakistan, Ahmed notes: ‘From its very inception, Pakistan has been beset by the question of security: India has been identified, historically, as the villain of the piece, and Afghanistan its sidekick [*sic*] if ruled by hostile forces demanding a redrawing of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border.’ This perception is then exploited by the Pakistan military to consolidate its primacy in its perennial ‘defence’ of the state, and by extension Islam. As the author adds, ‘Indeed, the feeling of being beleaguered is imperative in order to construct a strong and formidable fortress—a garrison; the Pakistani establishment staked its dominant position in Pakistan society by prioritizing security and defence.’

In a brief but tantalizing theoretical trapeze, Ahmed reviews the formulations of Pakistani scholars and analysts who have studied the rise of the military (Mazhar Aziz, Ayesha Siddiqi and Hamza Alavi) and offers another perspective on the contextual

relevance of Pakistan during the Cold War. Ahmed asserts: ‘Pakistan came to play an important role in that competition. Its importance lay not in providing a surplus to imperialism but in being of vital geo strategic importance to the Cold War.’

Delving further into the conceptual origins of the garrison state, Ahmed invokes Harold Lasswell, an American political scientist who, in 1937, advanced the idea in a seminal essay in the *American Journal of Sociology*. At the time (World War II was still two years away), Lasswell cautioned that the purpose of his article was ‘to consider the possibility that we are moving toward a world of “garrison states”—a world in which the specialists on violence are the most powerful group in society.’

Ahmed applies the Lasswell template persuasively and demonstrates how, at different points, the military apex uses many of these elements to consolidate the primacy of the khaki institution in the domestic polity. For example, Brigadier Siddiqi, a Pakistani author, observes: ‘Since there is no other institution to rival the military...its image grows apace... where it becomes an object of reverence or fear. A sort of [*sic*] prussiansim is born to produce an army with a nation in place of a nation with an army.’

In like fashion, the sleight of hand where democracy is eulogized but the civilian politician denigrated, where Ayub Khan declaims about the domestic polity in Pakistan:

It would be appropriate to reiterate the fact that our eventual aim must be to develop democracy in Pakistan, but a type that suits the genius of our people. Our people are mostly uneducated and our politicians not so scrupulous...we, therefore, have to have a controlled democracy with checks and counter-checks.

The significant extrapolation from the Lasswell model that burnishes this volume is the reference to the post-colonial garrison state—of which Pakistan is a prime example—and the many drivers that enable this transition. As Ahmed points out, despite the fact that it had not reached a stage of advanced industrial development—à la Lasswell—‘the Pakistani power elite, comprising both politicians and the military, successfully transcended the problems of under-development through alignment with powerful resourceful (?) foreign donors willing to provide it with armaments and training to create a large class of specialists on violence.’ This list, one may add, includes Generals Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf who cashed in on the geostrategic and geopolitical

importance of Pakistan to the donors. The consequence, as Ahmed adds, is that ‘the obstacles that industrial backwardness imposed were successfully circumvented and Pakistan could evolve...as post colonial garrison state, with its hawkish leaders and supporters romanticizing it as the “fortress of Islam”.’

One could well characterize Pakistan as the astute but rogue calf that suckles many udders with dexterity—but the trade-off is a Faustian bargain and the price paid by the state and its hapless citizens is heavy. On the one hand, there is compromising of sovereignty due to the abiding vulnerability to pressure from the donors (the US, China and Saudi Arabia), and on the other, the steady drift towards right-wing Islamist radicalism nurtured during the Zia years (this chapter is particularly rewarding), which results in a situation that Ahmed wryly describes as: ‘The state seems to have lost control in the internal domain as fanatics have been able to hit targets almost at will...Pakistan’s reputation as the epicenter of global terrorism and a rogue state is there to stay for quite some time.’

Is democracy congenitally doomed in Pakistan—which thereby allows the military to consolidate its position as the reluctant saviour and thereby justify the garrison state? Ahmed, who had addressed this issue in an earlier volume with candour and objectivity, opines that though the Muslim League did commit itself to democracy in the fledgling Pakistan,

it was going to be Muslim democracy...qualified by Islamic prerequisites. In other words Pakistan was not to be the usual type of secular democracy. In my book *The Concept of an Islamic state: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan* (1987), I demonstrated that, notwithstanding an imagination that furnished an inexhaustible scope for playing with words and flirting with logic and common sense, Islamic qualifications to democracy defeated the purpose of democracy.

In his concluding chapters, Ahmed offers sage counsel about how to redress the excesses created by the garrison state and goes against the dominant narratives that are gospel in Pakistan. As regards the ‘threat from India’, he unambiguously asserts that the ‘belief in Indian intentions to not allow Pakistan to survive needs to be put into perspective—against the puzzling fact that Pakistan initiated four of the five armed conflicts, including three wars, with India.’ And specific to the 1965 war, he highlights the propaganda masterminded by Altaf Gauhar, the Information Secretary, who ‘perpetuated the myth of superior Pakistani

fighters', and concludes that 'the myth that Kashmir was somehow within the grasp of the Pakistani military must be discarded.'

Ahmed's copious research into the events of 1971 that led to the bloody birth of Bangladesh is a valuable addition to the existing literature on the subject. Drawing upon the Hamoodur Rehman Commission (HRC) report, the chapter on the alienation between East and West Pakistan reveals little-known nuggets—for instance, the amicable meeting between Sheikh Mujibur, the Awami League leader, and General Yahya Khan. As Ahmed recounts, 'Their discussions ended on an amicable note. Next day, at Dacca Airport before leaving for West Pakistan, Yahya Khan referred to Mujib as his future prime minister.' One can only ruefully add that had this exigency indeed occurred, the history of the subcontinent and the tenacity of the garrison state would have had a more positive trajectory. But the perfidy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came into play and it was evident that 'Bhutto was conspiring to do Mujib out of the fruit of his favorable election result.'

Ahmed is clinical about the role of the Pakistani Army in the ruthlessness with which it cracked down on its citizens in East Pakistan. Genocide is a word that has been used by some scholars to refer to the 3 million East Pakistani citizens who were killed by the Pakistani Army. This is the official estimate as per Bangladesh, and while there is no consensus about the scale of the violence unleashed by an army on its own people, the author makes note of the HRC figure, 26,000 killed, and dryly observes: 'Both are highly exaggerated figures; downwards and upwards.'

One of the valuable elements of this book is the inclusion of many first-person accounts and one contrast is striking. Quoting from General Niazi, the 1971 chapter notes: 'On the night between 25/26 March 1971, General Tikka struck...the military action was a display of stark cruelty, more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changez Khan and Halaku Khan, or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer.'

And a few pages later, another account by Brigadier Siddiqi recounts: 'Niazi...openly encouraged the jawans in their unsoldierly, inhuman and carnal indulgences. "What is your score, Shera (tiger)?" he would ask the jawans with a satanic glint in his eyes. The score referred to the number of women the soldiers might have molested.'

This is a chapter that warranted some authorial comment about the factors that encouraged the Pakistani Army to turn from trusted

guardian to rapacious predator and the corrosion of the sanctity of the military as an institution. The Weberian formulation about the state enjoying a legitimate monopoly over the application of force could have been extended to the underpinning of honour and rectitude that every military cherishes, that intangible 'izzat', and what the 1971 experience did to the collective conscience of the inmates of the garrison state. This would have enhanced the analytical rigour of the book.

Extensively researched, each chapter is accompanied by detailed list of references—books, journals, interviews et al. (disclosure: this reviewer has also been cited), and here one found one assertion intriguing. Detailing India's troop levels from a 2011 publication, Ahmed claims: 'India has currently surpassed even China in its military spending', but there is no citation to support this statement. This is counterfactual and intriguing given the meticulousness that the author brings to bear in his scholarship.

However, this is not to detract from what is a comprehensive and earnest attempt to solve the puzzle about how and why Pakistan evolved into a garrison state. Empathetic and yet objective, Ahmed has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of a troubled (nuclear weapon) state which continues to be besieged in its own ideological fortress and misplaced certitudes.

A last word that is publisher specific. Oxford University Press Pakistan is to be commended for bringing out a splendid volume, both in form and content, and the editing is well above the median, barring just two very minor errors. But more importantly, this is a volume that should be translated into Urdu and be part of the school/college curriculum in Pakistan so that the younger generation benefits from an objective and lucid account of their country and its origins, whose stakeholders they will soon become.