

Bruce Riedel, Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America and the Future of the Global Jihad, New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2011.

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This book was important when Osama bin Laden was alive and a seemingly never ending hunt was on for him. But, now, in the backdrop of his death due to an extraordinary Commando Operation in the heart of the Pakistani territory by the US navy seals and the United States having announced a withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2014, it helps to understand, the dynamics of the US-Pakistan relationship which is metaphorically a “Deadly Embrace” as the title of the book suggests. It is a brief and compact narrative of the development and evolution of US-Pak relationship which has been full of contradictions and paradoxes. According to Riedel, “Pakistan has the potential to be a game changer for the global jihad like no other country. As the forces of global jihad have terrified Pakistan, the deadly embrace between America and Pakistan has got deadlier” (p. x). The book narrates the history of US-Pakistan relations since 1947 and the major shifts in this relationship from time to time. Focusing primarily on the global jihad and Pakistan as the epicentre of the phenomenon it explains the changes in the US policy towards it with regard to regional and global issues like war, terrorism, jihad and nuclear proliferation. It also explores future policy options in the light of the increasing terror activities of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan which have essential and provable connections with the politicians, bureaucracy, military and the ISI in Pakistan. “It also provides some thoughts on what may come next in the jihad, along with some policy recommendations on how to help Pakistan help itself” (p. x).

Being a former CIA officer and a senior advisor to four presidents on Middle and South Asian issues Riedel is an authority on the subject. He has divided the book into seven chapters. In the first four chapters he discusses the various jihads undertaken by General Zia’s, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden which, though different in some aspects, have the same targets and objectives converging and magnifying into global jihad. He also discusses the Al Qaeda-Taliban nexus aided and abetted by the Pakistani establishment. The last three chapters consist of the arguments Bruce puts forwards for the policy makers. He elaborately delineates the development of global jihad from out of the remnants of the Arab and Afghan

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mujahideens inspired by their victory over the Soviets in Afghanistan. He talks about how the Al Qaeda tricked the Americans into Afghanistan so that they could defeat them the same way as they did the Soviets.

Bruce recognises that “American policy toward Pakistan has oscillated wildly. At times – under the Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush administrations – the United States was enamoured of Pakistan’s dictators and embraced its policies without question. At other times – under Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton – the United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan, blaming it for provoking wars and developing nuclear weapons” (p. x). The United States chose to overlook the Pakistani nuclear programme during the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan as it needed Pakistan to contain communism in the region. With the end of the Cold War the US turned its attention to the programme and Pressler’s Amendment was passed by the Congress stopping most of the US military and economic aid to Pakistan. Therefore, the Pakistanis consider the United States as an unreliable ally as it has also proved to be when it went to war against India. The extremist interpretations of Islam and the jihadi propaganda further alienate the people of Pakistan from America. Riedel agrees that “Pakistan is a complex and combustible society undergoing a severe crisis, which America helped create over the years” (p. 118).

The new Afghan war in the wake of 9/11 events provided Bush Jr. the much needed opportunity to start military and economic aid to Pakistan again. It was in the interests of the US to join with Pakistan which became indispensable in its war against terrorism and global jihad. This cooperation was not easy to come by but Pakistan was left with no choice as Richard Armitage, according to Musharraf, told General Mahmud to cooperate with the United States or be bombed mercilessly back in to the stone age (p. 65). Agreeing to Pakistani condition that India would no way be a party to it the US released its military and economic aid.

Thinking the Unthinkable creates a horrific scenario of nuclear Pakistan overtaken by jihadis. The scenario is based on the strong linkages and reactions of jihadis with the nature of US-Pakistan cooperation against terrorism which is further radicalising, destabilising, fragmenting Pakistan as the extremists and the public opinion have turned against it.

Pakistan’s obsession with India and the Kashmir leaves limited options for any US policy towards the country. To deal with Pakistan in a better way the author suggests that “Washington should quietly but forcefully encourage New Delhi to be more flexible on Kashmir” as it is in the “American interest to try to defuse a lingering conflict that has generated global terrorism and repeatedly threatened to create a full-scale military confrontation on the subcontinent.” He believes that

it will make Pakistan more normal and less preoccupied with India, mitigate the nuclear threat and give the army no reason to ask for huge budget.

More Pakistani soldiers have died fighting the Taliban than American or Europeans. Now, Pakistan is faced with a Frankenstein of its own creation as the jihadi groups have turned against it because of its cooperation with the United States. There is a constituency of leadership in Pakistan which does not want the Pakistani state to get in the hands of jihadis. For them, the US and the world “a jihadist, nuclear-armed Pakistan is a scenario that must be avoided at all costs” (p. 113). Riedel suggests, engaging Pakistan by proceeding in a manner that strengthens Pakistan’s civilian-elected leadership, encouraging leaders of both (US and Pakistan) countries to be candid in their interactions and draw red lines, and by internal verification and stock taking. Indeed, the book is able to engage, inform and stimulate the reader eager to understand the peculiar US-Pakistan relationship.


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