

# *Book Reviews*

**Veena Kukreja.** *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1991. 257 pp. Bibliography + Index. Price: Rs 260 (Hardbound).

A quite large number of developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which are today characterised by chronic underdevelopment, general social retardation, slow social mobility, and political instability became highly prone to military interventions in politics in their initial phases of decolonization soon after World War II. These military interventions in the fragile civil polities and stagnant economies, termed by some scholars as the coup zone, are justified and legitimised on various pretexts of modernisation, democratisation, and reform; which means that the military seeks to fill the institutional vacuum when the overall civil administration of the country breaks down as a consequence of the rivalry for pelf and power between various ruling classes. Thus, the military has emerged as the most powerful institution in these countries. Some social revolutions of modern times, in China in 1949, for example, and in Cuba in 1959, were caused by endemic military interventions in the civil society.

Why does the military capture political power in some developing countries, while in others it has to operate under the control of civil institutions? Secondly, how does this military intervention influence the configuration of an internal relationship between the armed forces and the larger civil society within the perspective of institutional restructuring of the country, on the one hand, and the external relationship between this country and the world at large, on the other? Thirdly, after the take-over of civil institutions, how does the military justify and legitimise the use of coercive authority over the social, economic, and political institutions of the country? These are some of the broad questions which the book under review raises in relation to the case-studies of three South Asian countries, namely, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, which, according to the author, reflect the underlying uniformities in their society, history, and overall culture in spite of some inherent differences.

A revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Delhi in 1987, the book develops a theoretical and conceptual model of civil-military relations based on the assumptions, hypotheses, and theories of some Western scholars of comparative politics (such as Amos Perlmutter, S. E.

Finer, Morris Janowitz, Samuel P. Huntington, Stephen P. Cohen, and others) and then tests these hypotheses in South Asia from an interdisciplinary standpoint.

The main thesis of the book is that the Pakistani case of military intervention is typically that of a praetorian model in which, by definition, the cause of military intervention in politics does not necessarily lie in the nature of the military organization itself. It is rather due to the larger phenomenon in an underdeveloped polity and economy, weak institutionalisation, and lack of stability, autonomy, and adaptability of the existing social institutions. That is, in this praetorian model, the military tends to become a ruling political elite in competition and collusion with other social elites like bureaucrats, feudal lords, capitalists, technocrats, and professionals.

In this praetorian model of Pakistan, the political, social, economic, and legal institutions have always remained weak and, therefore, the Pakistan army has had to intervene. These interventions in 1958, 1969, and 1977 were bloodless, however.

On the contrary, as described in the second chapter, in Bangladesh the military interventions since 1975 have been characteristically bloody coups, counter-coups, and mutinies, involving the brutal assassination of two heads of state and the execution of a large number of political leaders and army officers. The author, therefore, terms Bangladesh as a model of militarism which emerged in the country soon after the war of 1971, when Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League failed to develop a strong political organisation.

In the case of India (Chapter 6), the author argues that a planned and sustained economic development, rapid industrialization, stable political conditions, and democratic processes and social mobilisation have diminished the probability of a military intervention in India. Thus, in India, civilian control over the armed forces has been well established.

The study correctly suggests that the only solution to eliminate permanently the cycle of military coups in Pakistan and Bangladesh lies in the development of stable civilian institutions which could function independently.

The author's characterization of the civil-military relations in Pakistan as praetorian, in Bangladesh as militarism, and in India as purely democratic, is simplistic and appears utterly biased. Nothing in the world is all white or all black. Civil-military relations in South Asia are a highly complex matter, which cannot be correctly understood in the emotionally charged environment of the Subcontinent where two modern armies have clashed three times over Kashmir. The mere size of the Indian military establishment has, since independence in 1947, aggravated the problems of security, survival, and defence of Pakistan, which is both militarily and economically disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* India. Why did Pakistan seek the help of Western defence pacts in the early 1950s? The author does not explain. The dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 by the Indian military proved that India was

even more militaristic than Pakistan and had hegemonic aims in South Asia. The Indian army's unjustified take-over of Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagadh soon after Partition was naked militarism which has caused the civil-military relations in Pakistan to be pulverised ever since. The survival of societies usually takes precedence over political or economic restructuring or any other social change. The over-developed military and bureaucratic apparatus which gradually came to dominate the civil society in Pakistan was the direct result of the immediate problem of security and defence of the new nation of Pakistan when civil institutions were weak in their early formative phase.

As for organization of the book, the first chapter develops the conceptual model for analysing civil-military relations in the three cases under observation, taking them as the dependent variable to be explained by four independent variables, viz.,

- (1) the level of institutionalization of civilian political procedures;
- (2) the level of military institutionalization;
- (3) the domestic socio-economic environment and the international environment; and
- (4) the nature of boundaries between the military establishment and its socio-political environment.

The next five chapters of the book analyse the case-histories of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India in the light of these variables, and the last chapter (seventh) concludes the discussion.

The selection of the above four independent variables, only to be tested in the three South Asian cases, has been justified by the perceived uniformities of history, society, and culture of the three countries – despite some differences. However, the addition of some more variables, such as the periphery-metropolis relationship (which binds highly industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America and the dependent economies of Pakistan and Bangladesh); the level of elite formation in the respective countries and the nature of the gap between the rich elites and the poor masses; the level of general education, scientific progress, and intellectual maturity; and the level of industrialization-urbanization in the three countries would have made the discussion more comprehensive and relevant, indeed closer to the reality.

It may also be mentioned that the nature and character of these independent variables, on which the respective experiences of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India have been tested and explained, are themselves dependent for their correct evaluation and interpretation on some other, *higher* independent variables, such as the larger world capitalist system in which are now integrated the polities and

economies, societies and cultures of these three South Asian countries. Because of its vast resources and a higher level of industrialization, India can take an independent stand against the powerful Western countries, whereas Pakistan and Bangladesh are more dependent on Western capitalism.

Nevertheless, the author's dexterous management of the four variables chosen and his masterly marshalling of the evidence in the spectrum of civil-military relations in vast geographical areas of the size of South Asia do lead to a better understanding of an extremely complex issue. This is in spite of some politically and culturally conditioned biases of the author. Her real contribution lies in her cogent analysis of the process through which the military consolidates its power over civil institutions.

Despite the social diversities and political differences in the developing countries prone to military intervention, the author thinks that there are similarities in the political culture and socio-economic conditions of the states which are subjected to military interventions. "These countries suffer from poverty, lack of consensus on constitutional procedures and experience with government by discussion, and represent mutual distrust and a precarious feeling of national identity manifested in horizontal (reflecting linguistic, ethnic, and regional diversities) and vertical (reflecting a wide gap between the westernized elites and the poor) cleavages in the social structure" (p. 251).

The last (seventh) chapter recapitulates discussion of the six chapters and presents the summary and conclusions. About the military regimes in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the author concludes that four strategies have been evolved for the survival and legitimisation of military interventions: (1) a collusion with the bureaucracy, which has resulted in an over-developed bureaucratic apparatus; (2) a systematic and ruthless elimination of political opponents – for example, constant persecution of the Pakistan People's Party by the late General Ziaul Haq after the execution of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the elected prime minister of Pakistan; (3) populist policies, such as 'Islamization' of the economy and introduction by the military regime of *Zakat* (poor-dues) in Pakistan; and (4) constitutional legitimisation and democratisation – for example, the scheme of Basic Democracies undertaken by General Ayub Khan and his framing of a new constitution for Pakistan in 1962.

Another finding of the author is that the military elites develop their own vested interests. Therefore, they oppose the demands of the lower social classes for economic and political rights (p. 254). According to the author, the military rulers in South Asia (in Pakistan and Bangladesh) have also failed to build new institutions, a fact which has further aggravated the political, social, and economic problems of these countries. The reason partly may be that they have concentrated, instead, on creating a military elite.

In sum, the book is an important addition to our knowledge of a complex problem, in an area where detailed studies have not been made of the phenomenon. Dr Kukreja's detailed study of the problem does not limit itself to finding the reasons or antecedents of military interventions but goes further; it investigates the political-ideological and economic processes in which the military seeks to build the bases of its legitimisation and survival. The book will be of immense help to those students and scholars who specialize in comparative politics, sociology, development economics, defence studies, and history of South Asia – India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, in particular.

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