

Book Reviews

Sartaj Aziz. *Between Dreams and Realities: Some Milestones in Pakistan's History.* Karachi: Oxford University Press. 2009. Pak. Rs 595.00.

The geo-strategic location of a country gives it advantage or disadvantage in its relation with the comity of nations and addressing its domestic challenges. The vision, acumen and capacity of political leadership, however, determine the maximisation of advantages from geo-strategic location in attaining the national interests. Interplay of domestic political power, geo-strategic location and global power dynamics are aptly reflected in the political history of Pakistan as narrated in "Between Dreams and Realities".

"Between Dreams and Realities" is both an autobiography and dispassionate account of Pakistan's chequered history as the author puts it "watched the political drama as ring side observer." The author was actively engaged in roles, confronting formidable challenges to improve policy coordination and implementation. A sequenced political, economic, and foreign relations history of Pakistan is described illustrating turning points, milestones, and debacles in her existence as a country. The political scenario of Pakistan, marred by intermittent military takeovers, with disregard, and mutilation of the constitution, mainly served personal interests. The rulers, irrespective of whether elected or otherwise, conjoined survival of their rule with that of the country. Thereupon, usurpation of power is legitimised by engineered elections or putting in place pliable judiciary. The indiscipline in political parties, absence of vision, political inexperience, self-centered, and headlong political leaders, increased the vulnerability of parliament to complete its tenure. Weak organisation of political parties is, thus easily maneuverable to the wheeling, dealings, and gaming of 'establishment'. This is amply visible in all military takeovers of elected governments, right from throwing of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government to dissolution of Nawaz Sharif's government in 1999.

As a by-stander, the author dispassionately analysed various events and milestones in the history of the country, which changed the shape of domestic politics, economy, and regional and diplomatic dynamics. Various accounts of Kargil debacle are available, but the version of the crisis as seen by the then foreign minister takes the maximum space (38 pages), followed by the longest chapter on "Military Take Over October, 1999" (59 pages). According to the author, there exists no institutional framework to coordinate effectively the work of foreign office and military inputs to arrive at concerted foreign policy formulation and implementation for improved regional and global relations, especially with super powers. The foreign office does not know the military planning, while military is engaged in actions without consulting the relevant institutions. One reason for Kargil crisis was the absence of this institutional coordinating framework. The efforts to maintain regional peace and to demonstrate responsible behaviour by a Muslim nuclear power were derailed by Kargil operation. Megalomaniac military adventurism assumed adversary as weak. Non-involvement and absence of consultation with political

leadership proved disastrous. Conversation between General Musharraf and General Aziz on 26 and 29 February 1999 intercepted by RAW, does not suggest sagacious and prudent act. It speaks volumes of how the military has not learnt from its past blunders, and in this particular situation caused derailing of peace process and embarrassment to the whole nation. Statements and counter statements whether General Musharraf mentioned Kargil sector in the briefing on 5th February, 1999, where he claims in his book 'In the Line of Fire' that he informed the Prime Minister; is challenged by the author as he himself was present in the meeting. Knowing the author's excellent memory and integrity both intellectual and professional, the veracity remains unchallenged. Like many other disasters, this debacle is termed as a 'black spot' in the history of Pakistan, which caused immense set back to diplomacy, regional and international relation, and infamy to the country. Moreover, it weakened the Kashmir cause.

Interestingly, there were many plans, which were originally envisaged during the second Nawaz Sharif Government and for which General Musharraf took credit. One such act was restarting the peace process which was stopped due to Kargil adventurism. During the Agra Summit, he imaged himself as friendly, diplomatic General. Did he want the laurels of the peace with India placed on his head?

A strange phenomenon observed in the sixty-three years history of Pakistan is the intermittent military takeovers, which has left both the institutions and political parties dwarfed and incapacitated to respond to the challenges, both domestic and international. The proposition stated in the book, that boggles the mind of thinking persons in Pakistan is that "each time Pakistan is required to participate in a great global game, there is military rule in Pakistan; whether this coincidence is really accidental", requires further research. The geo-strategic location of the area comprising Pakistan, even before independence, was important for the global powers. Each super power wanted this area under its sphere of influence for its own reasons. For example, Russian interest was access to warm waters; and US to counter Russian influence and control over energy resources. After independence, the tug of war intensified and China joined the fray and its interest in the region was to look for shortest route through Pakistan to Middle East and Europe but in low note approach. Military rule in Pakistan is amenable to U.S. interests. The military rulers sought legitimacy to their rule. They mainly have two ways to legitimise their rule. They look for support from super power and in *quid pro quo* allow super power to work for its national interest in the area. The second is to arm twist judiciary to make it pliant and thus legitimise all military actions. In the process, military rule weakens the institutions by setting example of usurping power through unconstitutional means. Thus, weaker the institutions easier it is for external power to penetrate and take benefit from the situation. U.S. interests in Pakistan's domestic issues have been omnipresent, covertly and overtly until today. USA could not digest defiance of Nawaz Sharif of carrying out nuclear test in May 1998. Its concern over impending passage of Shariat Bill and micro management of domestic issues was not coincidental; rather it is designed to protect its global interest.

The mishandling of institutions (judiciary and executive) by the politician and military rulers alike, and above all the tussle between the institutions of the President and Prime Ministers, has been the constant battle fronts adding to the miseries of the people of Pakistan; eroding credibility, predictability, and trust in the institutions.

The book has many policy lessons for politicians and military rulers, provided it is read dispassionately and the mistakes are thought through to rectify and avoid future blunders. The book is written with a purpose to “convey to the coming generations” that Pakistan, despite its many failings, “can survive only through a genuine democratic framework” fulfilling the aspiration of people through participation of federating units and adopting fair and justice practices in distribution of resources and dialogue with stakeholders. The self-sustaining democratic institutions, based on the parameters of separation of powers of the three pillars of state, without meddling into each other’s domain and allowing it to function in unison, rather cross cutting, can take the nation forward. Finally, there is no disagreement, the cultural and ethnic diversity is an asset of the Pakistani nation and through participating, democratic framework; this diversity can bring vitality to economic progress and military strength.

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