

BOOK REVIEW

Imtiaz Gul, *Pakistan: Before and After Osama*, New Delhi: Roli Books, 2012.

Imtiaz Gul's *Pakistan: Before and After Osama*, is a fascinating and timely read. It was published in 2012, a year after Osama was killed in Abbottabad leaving a lot embarrassment internationally and unanswered questions for Pakistanis. As the title suggests, the book tries to chronicle some key developments before and after the killing of world's most wanted terrorist.

Gul tries to answer some of the questions that were in peoples mind post-Operation Neptune - Why and how Pakistan had become home to the world's most wanted terrorist? Bin Laden's escape from the Tora Bora Mountains in Eastern Afghanistan in December 2001, to his last hideout in Abbottabad; and to find answers to the dozens of questions surrounding his stay in Pakistan as well as the U.S. raid on May 2, 2011. The unanswered questions, like how had the world's most wanted person been living in Pakistan for all those years? How did he manage to stay undetected together with his large family? Who from within the security establishment provided the safety network to the family? What stakes did the Pakistan Army and the ISI have at all if they were complicit in protecting him? How Osama impacted radicalism in Pakistan, especially within the rank and file of the military and security organizations? What were the financial sources of various terrorist organizations associated with Al Qaeda? What was the nature of relations between Pakistan and the U.S. after the raid?

However, what stands out in the book is Gul's account of what happened that fateful night and his description of "the Talibanisation of Pakistan or the Pakistanisation of Al-Qaeda". The reaction of Osama's death as a result of Operation Neptune puzzled the international community because instead of accepting their weakness, Pakistanis were more concerned about the violation of their sovereignty by the U.S. Gul points out how Pakistan preferred to plead incompetence rather than accept that the ISI had been harbouring bin Laden until his death in the U.S. Navy seals operation. The popular question then, as reiterated by the author is: why is \$5 billion of the Pakistan taxpayers' money spent each year on their military when it can neither stop a terrorist nor foreign soldiers from entering the country?

Killing of bin Laden also raises the issue of the fragile U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The incident and the subsequent quibble by Americans further deteriorated the situation. Gul is quite frank in admitting that there was little critical understanding among Pakistanis and the media about America's continued suspicion of their country, and the ISI in particular. He also throws

some light on how the media perceives the incident and delves into the minds of ordinary Pakistanis as well. For the media, Gul says, the focus was on *qaumi ghairat* (national honour) and the way America violated Pakistan's sovereignty like an imperialist power. For ordinary Pakistanis, it was a political battle with the U.S. and its allies on one hand, and Al-Qaeda on the other. However, Gul also makes a compelling counter argument: wasn't Pakistan's sovereignty violated by bin Laden's presence in Pakistan? "How could he, along with a dozen children and two wives be given entry to Pakistan?" he asks. (p 22)

Gul's book is also an attempt to analyse Pakistan in the light of two narratives: one put forward by Washington and the other woven in Pakistan and how differences over how to tackle Al-Qaeda and its local affiliates, which continues to strain relations between Islamabad and Washington.

Writing about the impact of Osama and the War on Terrorism in Pakistan, Gul gives a detailed account of dissent and how some military officers have been inspired to take over to impose a Taliban-style Sunni government with the aim of establishing a Khilafa. It also gives accounts of senior as well as junior officers and staff in the military who have been involved over the years in their links with militant organizations and helping them by tipping them off about various actions to be undertaken by the security forces or helping them in successful attacks at various military installations. Talking about cooperation with the U.S. in the counter-terror war has had a heavy bearing on the national psyche. The issues of sovereignty, drone attacks, and unquestioned cooperation with the U.S. have led to ideological anti-American differences within the Armed Forces and its affiliated institutions as well.

Gul says that between 2004 and 2009, at least 2,000 soldiers had either refused or disappeared after they were posted to Waziristan region of Pakistani tribal area. Chucking devious elements out is not the solution because faith-based motivation is part of their training, "divorcing the religious narrative from the curricula" is Imtiaz Guls solution to the widening dissent. Glossing over certain realities and quick fixes do not help build and save nations. Quick fixes may provide transitory relief but the real remedy lies in treating root cause and not the symptoms. In the words of Imtiaz Gul, "Rooting out the odd one or two is no substitute for tackling the ingrained, institutionalised anti-Western sentiment that has taken root in the armed forces just as it has taken root in the rest of the society". (p. 130)

In the chapter titled 'Bin Laden's Jihad: America's war on terror', Imtiaz Gul explains how Bin Laden's declaration of jihad against the West provided more

opportunities for the militants and criminal mafia in Pakistan, and how it has been a boon for organised crime. The frequency of cross-border smuggling, drug trafficking, abductions for ransom, carjacking and target killing through hired assassins have also increased. It has also given rise to a war economy that involves staggering sums that has thrown up new stakeholders. Gul points out that most leads to criminal activities point to Al-Qaeda, as well as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and dissidents. "While conflict has affected the economy of the region, destroyed millions of jobs and stymied growth, it has also brought dividends for those associated with the military establishments or those who are directly or indirectly in league with religious militants." (p. 133) Gul argues that the Taliban have become the biggest stakeholders in this criminal empire wanting the biggest share from the pie. The control of trading and smuggling routes is also very crucial to the sustenance of many groups that has often triggered armed bloody confrontations among various Taliban factions. Giving a rough estimate of the militants' income from foreign remittances through banks and hawala, the author believes it to be around Pakistani rupees 4 billion per annum. "Karachi is the purse of the militants, the Wall Street or ATM of organised criminal and militant organisations", he says. (p.145) Gul also explains how the missing NATO containers have been another very important source of finance for militants and company.

Expanding on the rocky Pak-U.S. relations that have for decades been marred by mutual distrust and acrimony, Gul believes that mutual dependence always dictates damage control. In the past one decade, numerous incidents have from time to time worsened bilateral relations, and specifically the Salala strike and Bin Laden's discovery have exacerbated mutual acrimony and the cost of conflict. He also gives the U.S. and Pakistani narrative to these rocky relations where the links of the ISI with the militant outfits are openly discussed. (pp. 200, 212)

Pakistan: Before and After Osama emphasizes the importance of Pakistan's lifting itself out of the quagmire in which it finds itself, and act as a positive power in South Asia. Imtiaz Gul gives excellent recommendations and advice to policymakers in Pakistan both civil and military, calling for a consensus on foreign policy. He suggests that if Pakistan wants the world to empathise with its narrative, it needs to sever relations with the militants. (p. 274)

According to Gul, Pakistan's "skewed foreign policy" prevented Islamabad from severing its ties with radical groups and the country was brought into direct conflict with Afghanistan, India and the U.S. At present, these three countries "hold a consensus view" about the Pakistani security establishment: that it is a

“big source of instability in the region”. (p. 194) Imtiaz Gul argues that without synchronising and rationalising foreign policy objectives, both Pakistani military and civilians would keep facing embarrassment. Therefore, foreign policy needs to be redefined, keeping in mind long-term national objectives of peace, security and growth. Pakistani leadership needs to negotiate long-term benefits for their country rather than settling for petty deals. Pakistani establishment must shed its romanticism with Pakistan's strategic location which has prevented it from thinking strategically, i.e., long-term. In Gul's view, it is high time Pakistan took a “more dispassionate and realistic view” in its foreign policy engagements. Its flawed policy has not only brought international condemnation to Pakistan, but has also brought chaos upon itself.

Gul also proposes that the U.S. should recast its drone policy by creating a joint ownership whereby Pakistan can project them as joint ventures or exclusively as their own effort. But expecting the U.S. to give up the drone strategy altogether and abandon this effective way of fighting Al-Qaeda is wishful on part of Pakistan.

Given the heavy reliance on aid and assistance from Western countries and institutions, Pakistan can ill-afford to deny these countries what they want. Pakistan cannot afford to stick to its maximalist position vis-a-vis a rapidly growing India, and the Pakistani leadership should therefore stop confusing tactics with strategy.

Pakistan needs to realise that the Taliban rule would not return to Afghanistan, and Pakistan should work with the Afghan government to strengthen stability and peace in that country, which is important for its own interests.

Overall, the book provides a frank and candid perspective on the complex situation faced by Pakistan and the long-term challenge of terrorism faced by the decision makers. It offers considerable insight and fact-based information on the issue plaguing Pakistan today. However, the figures provided in the book are rough estimates provided by military and security organizations, and are not verifiable. The book is a must read for policymakers and academicians and one can only wish that the suggestions contained in the book are heeded and implemented in Pakistan's policy in order to come out of this conundrum.

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