

Pakistan A Drift: Navigating Troubled Waters

Asad Durrani (London: Hurst & Company, 2018, 273 pages)

Dr. Attiq ur Rehman*

A debate on Pakistan's contemporary security situation cannot be divorced from its social, political and economic crises. An overwhelming wave of crises has not only disturbed the internal situation of Pakistan, but it has affected its foreign relations as well.

Pakistan's position in regional and extra-regional political affairs in the presence of an unreliable western partners and troubled neighboring states has been examined by various authors. A recent account of such analyses made by Former Director General Inter-Services Intelligence (DGISI), General (Retd.) Asad Durrani, presents a fresh insider's view of Pakistan's politics.

Durrani served as a three-star general in the army, and headed the country's intelligence agency from 1990 to 1992. In addition to serving in the Pakistan army, he provided his services as anambassador to Germany and Saudi Arabia after retirement. His intellectual insight and persuasive scholarly writings are variedly appreciated in both academics and multiple policy forums. Moreover, he delivers lectures at various degree awarding institutions, and his academic vision makes him stand tall amongst his peers.

The book under review is primarily based on Durrani's personal experiences and his own way of managing various troubled situations under severe circumstances. He has tried to cover several political developments which he closely watched both within and external affairs of the country.

* The reviewer is Assistant Professor in International Relations Department, NUML, Islamabad.

The book is divided into three parts and each part covers a different dimension respectively. The three parts comprises eighteen short essays. It is a combination of Pakistan's internal politics and leading foreign policy decisions taken during his service. The central theme hence relies on the primary source of information since it is based on his personal experiences when Pakistan went through various critical phases. He keenly observed the last phase of Cold War when the demise of the Soviet Union altered the global political landscape. He has particularly emphasized his analysis on the regional and international alliances in South Asia after the demise of the Soviet Union. India came closer to the US which consequently helped her rise economically.

Durrani's in depth study also provides a valuable insight on Pakistan's policies during post-Soviet era. The world had transformed into a unipolar world. A glimpse of Islamabad's decision to join the US-led War on Terror (WoT) and Washington's decision of invading Kabul after the tragic incident of 9/11 are also significant parts of author's analysis.

The book contains interesting details of author's examination of German and Saudi societies which is the reflection of two brief periods of his ambassadorial services. Chapters four and five present the details of author's time he spent in Germany and Saudi Arabia as an ambassador. While discussing Pakistan's relations with Germany and the role of German non-profit organizations in Islamabad, the writer mentions Dr. Hein Kiessling who wrote a book on ISI and shared his thoughts on civil military relations in Pakistan (p.61). The discussion on Saudi Arabia comments the role of Pakistani diaspora in the Holy Land which is mainly consisted of skilled people. The hosting of international community as Hajj pilgrims further explains interesting features of various communities who belong to different parts of the Muslim world. (pp. 86-90).

Chapter fifteen covers the major portion of Pakistan's foreign policy. It contains Islamabad-Washington relations mainly. According to the author, despite having divergent interests and conflicting politics, the United States and Pakistan have undeniable close relations. It is therefore, under the broader framework of its global counter-terror campaign, Washington was once again compelled to ally with Islamabad. Pakistan was never a part of NATO though.

Durrani has also explicitly highlighted the role of military in the political affairs of the country. He observes that an unavoidable tug of war between military officers and the civilian leaders perpetually intensifies the internal situation of the country. The differences on the major foreign policy decisions further add fuel to the fire and allow the opposing international community to take the advantage.

The first part of the book comprise on an interesting account since it provides a short overview of Pakistan's internal politics in its first two chapters. The clashes of different political parties along with a brief discussion on main security problems of the country are widely covered.

South Asia is a sensitive model of regional politics. The book offers a detailed discussion on India-Pakistan conflicts and the interest of great powers. Kashmir dispute between New Delhi and Islamabad along with numerous disagreements between both nuclear rivals of the subcontinent is the gravitational point of South Asian politics which always fascinates the extra-regional powers.

Durrani has also made an exceptional evaluation of the military regimes of Ayub, Zia and Musharraf. It makes a substantial portion of his work. The candid communication holds an appreciable intellectual depth of the writer. Though the civil-military relations in Pakistan are articulately covered yet respect for their roles is maintained with balance. It is more of a masterly advice.

Hence, the book portrays a combination of analytical and autobiographical account which is an outstanding feature rarely available in literature. Durrani remains precisely outspoken throughout the book by discussing several segments of Islamabad's politics during different administrations.

There is also a brief reflection of his experiences in early days in the Pakistan army when he was exposed to a disciplined life in uniform. Additionally, the book very briefly speaks about Durrani's tough days when he was forced to take harsh and unpopular decisions. Few bold confessions also form part of the book which is often expected from a writer in his autobiographical survey.

In short, the book is an appreciable effort of the writer and contains a fresh look at different phases Islamabad has passed through. It is a creditable historical survey and a praiseworthy effort of a retired military officer who has understood the tough choices Pakistan made for the efficient management of its foreign relation appropriately.