

The Battle for Pakistan: The Bitter U.S. Friendship and a Tough Neighbourhood

By Shuja Nawaz

Rowman & Littlefield, 2020

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Reviewed by Gerald J. Krieger

History may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes.” “This famous and oft-attributed warning of Mark Twain is taken up by Shuja Nawaz, a leading South Asia political and strategic analyst, in his latest book, *The Battle for Pakistan*. Nawaz is a prolific author serving as a distinguished fellow in the South Asia Center at the Atlantic Council. His latest book provides a detailed examination of the relationship between Pakistan and the United States from 2007 to 2019 and offers readers insights into navigating the future of the relationship. The author explores watershed moments, providing unique context and conversations that took place behind the scenes to clarify the 70-year-old relationship that sometimes resembles a Hollywood drama. His interviews with Pakistani military and political leaders, as well

as American diplomats, offer unique insights for joint force planners by capturing the nuances of a complex relationship, allowing readers to peer behind the veil of Pakistani politics and critically examine missteps and misperceptions by both countries in the hope of forging a more cooperative future.

Conflict is inevitable in the “Arc of Instability” that runs from Indonesia to Turkey, and Nawaz suggests that anyone who claims to be an “expert” on Pakistan should set off alarm bells. Most so-called experts, according to Nawaz, fail to understand the embedded tribal dynamics of the country, many of which are exacerbated by its complex geography and tough local neighborhood. Nawaz’s insider perspective, however, helps readers understand Pakistan’s politics and grasp the real motivations behind its behavior. Nawaz’s research is impeccable and his interviews insightful, though the book would have benefited from a summary of the relationship that served as a springboard for Pakistan’s aggressive campaign against militants and the assault on the “Red Mosque” in Islamabad in July 2007. Nawaz might also have better framed his argument by providing a chapter for historical context on the origins of the relationship that soured at Pakistan’s birth in 1947, when its leaders looked to America for support and were largely rebuffed. Nevertheless, readers shall find an engaging and comprehensive examination of the contemporary relationship between the United States and Pakistan.

The Battle for Pakistan is divided into 13 chapters that trace the contours of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship from 2007 to 2019. After brief scene-setting to capture the challenges of governing remote areas of Pakistan, the end of military rule under General Pervez Musharraf provides the true launch point of the book as the country erupted with antigovernment and anti-American protests. Musharraf’s structured democracy was supported by the United States in a bid to garner support for the invasion of Afghanistan. Nawaz details the gradual erosion of the relationship through successive U.S. administrations. He suggests that American

leaders were coconspirators in the demise of Pakistan’s civilian authorities by super-empowering Pakistani military leadership and isolating the civilian government—a lesson that should generate useful discussion among future stewards of the relationship.

Nawaz also highlights the transformation of the Pakistani military from a conventional force to one that was equipped and trained for counterinsurgency. Nawaz is correct to note that the transformation of the Pakistani military was an often-underappreciated source of friction in the affiliation. While Americans expected the Pakistani military to quickly hunt down and capture terrorists in remote regions, it took time for Pakistan to adapt to counterinsurgency warfare, which the United States often perceived as a reluctance to engage. Nawaz reminds readers, however, that elements of the Pakistani military, such as the Frontier Corps, did seek and engage insurgents, suffering more casualties than the combined International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

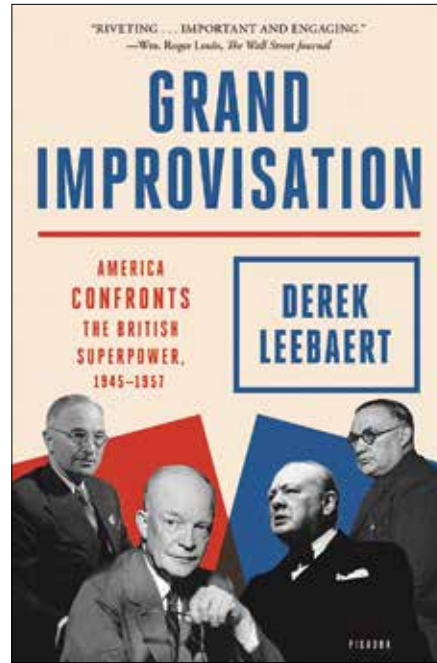
The Battle for Pakistan also examines the deterioration of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in the aftermath of the killing of Osama bin Laden. The Pakistani military’s complex relationship with Islamic extremist groups was exposed when bin Laden was killed by U.S. special operations forces in Abbottabad, only a mile from the Pakistan Military Academy. The story is not only fascinating but Nawaz also captures the event from new perspectives with details from retired Inter-Services Intelligence officer Eqbal Saeed Khan, who was instrumental in assisting U.S. efforts to track and locate bin Laden’s compound. Moreover, Nawaz serves as a useful guide to understanding the schizophrenic response of the Pakistani military amid overwhelming public condemnation of the United States for the operation.

As Nawaz points out, however, part of the troubled U.S.-Pakistan relationship rests with perpetual amnesia among Americans regarding the two nations’ joint history. Nawaz does useful work recalling the depth of this history—and

the U.S.-Pakistani support of the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan against the occupation by the former Soviet Union (1978–1989) is a notable example. A failure to recall and understand this history often results in short-sighted policy. This situation is exacerbated by the average ISAF command tenure in Afghanistan, with 18 general officers over 17 years. This frequent turnover makes nuanced policy creation difficult while perpetuating a relationship that is always unfamiliar. U.S. aid tied to expectations of immediate results in Pakistan, for example, is unrealistic and imprudent.

The Battle for Pakistan is required reading for joint force planners and students of the region who seek lessons on mistaken assumptions and skewed perceptions. As U.S. domestic policy takes priority, Chinese investments in Pakistan ramp up, and the U.S. military footprint in the region is minimized, the time has never been more critical for a revision of the U.S. approach to Pakistan as a key regional partner. U.S. policymakers and military practitioners must find a way to learn from a turbulent past to forge a new cooperative relationship. In Pakistan, history has rhymed enough. America needs to find a new note when it comes to foreign policy there. JFQ

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Grand Improvisation: America Confronts the British Superpower, 1945–1957

By Derek Leebaert
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018
612 pp. \$35.00
ISBN: 978-0374250720

Reviewed by Daniel Marston

Grand *Improvisation* is an engaging and well-researched dive into U.S. and British statecraft during the often overlooked power transition between the two nations following World War II. Derek Leebaert immediately sets out to challenge the common historical narrative that “the British Empire was too weak and too dispirited to continue as a global imperial power; thus, a confidently prosperous, well-armed America assumed leadership of the West.” Furthermore, he makes the case that “America’s biggest postwar difficulty—perhaps more than the Soviet threat—was the inability to say no to the British Empire. In effect, serious people in Washington believed that ‘no acceptable foreign policy’ was available to the United States if it was not aligned with its sprawling, problematic ally.” He continues, “History’s

largest empire [British] was battling to maintain its standing.”

It is immediately apparent, in challenging the myths surrounding the birth of the modern global order, that the book’s greatest strength is the interweaving of diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and strategic history; the arguments are superbly organized and integrated throughout each chapter, and the thoroughness of the research is apparent. The discussion around NSC (National Security Council) 75 in particular highlights the close integration of the various themes running through the book in a clear and concise historical narrative.

Another strong aspect of Leebaert’s work was the presentation of instrumental characters of the era. While some readers of *JFQ* may be aware of the U.S. personalities, the author also introduces several key British figures, including Ernest Bevin and Malcolm MacDonald, who may not be as well known. He also introduces some overlooked Americans, such as John Snyder, President Harry Truman’s Secretary of the Treasury, who worked closely with the British but has been overshadowed by larger personalities in popular history. In the heavily “militarized” climate of contemporary strategic debate, *JFQ* readers will find value in the examination of the many civilian personalities on both sides of the Atlantic who worked closely with their military counterparts to make difficult decisions about crisis situations and policy debates.

A key focus of *Grand Improvisation* is the “role of personalities.” While both the British and Americans had various organizations dealing with economic and strategic decisionmaking, Leebaert’s research highlights how key personalities, not just of the prime minister or President, may shift decisionmaking. The book does an admirable job of analyzing the effect of various ministers and secretaries on decisionmaking, as well as the collaborations and tensions inherent to working with their opposite numbers across the Atlantic. This theme is an important one for future policymakers to consider because it illustrates not only how a given policy may be shaped more