

Book Review

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Afghanistan and Pakistan Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity by Riaz Mohammad Khan, Oxford University Press, Karachi-Pakistan, 2011, 395pp, **ISBN: 978-0-19-906381-9**

The Book titled "*Afghanistan and Pakistan Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity*" by Riaz Mohammad Khan has been published by Oxford University Press, Karachi-Pakistan, this book examines the crucial region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has dealt with the happenings in Afghanistan and their impact on Pakistan, the two neighboring states with long porous border. Along with this factor there are tribes on both sides of the border which historically have been moving freely on both the sides. Thus there always has been cross border movement.

This is a very timely book on the aspect of Afghanistan and Pakistan security concerns. Amongst the many affects of Afghanistan on Pakistan in present times the most serious impact regarding this is the rising militancy and extremism in Pakistan.

The book is divided into three parts the first is regarding Afghanistan's continuing conflicts in which the author has given details of the era after the Soviet forces left Afghanistan; the country remained in turmoil till 1995 when the Taliban took over the reins of the country. Till that time there was complete instability in Afghanistan which worried the decision makers in Pakistan with this new situation in Afghanistan, along with a complete changed regional and international scenario. Then came the Taliban rule and the author has given an elaborated account of the causes and consequences of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. This drastic change in Afghanistan led to drastic policy changes in Pakistan whose effects are even felt today. The Taliban rule turned out to be a very controversial era which led to numerous condemnations at the international level due to basically their violation of human rights. But Pakistan was one of the three states that recognized the Taliban government despite criticism within and outside Pakistan. The reason for this controversial decision given by the Pakistani policy makers was strategic depth. As the event of 9/11 took place and USA along with NATO forces initiated War on Terror against the Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements, and once again the epic centre of this war became Afghanistan and Pakistan. This area comprising both the states acquired the attention of the world and due to Afghanistan,

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Pakistan again comes to the lime light, as the militant elements using the porous border started infiltrating into the tribal areas of Pakistan.

Part two of the book deals with the challenges faced by Pakistan due to the Afghanistan situation after the attack on Afghanistan by NATO forces. The most serious and lethal is militant extremism and terrorism in Pakistan which have badly affected the society and threatened the internal as well external security of Pakistan. The author has also given detailed account of the Musharraf regime regarding the issue of extremism and terrorism. During his tenure one of the most serious problems faced by Musharraf was dealing with militant religious organizations and the overall rise in militancy in the society. Musharraf himself survived suicide attacks by the extremists. He had to eventually initiate military operations against these elements but in retaliation extremism and terrorism grew even more and devastating. The book further also looks into the different problems and crises being faced by Pakistan that include the intellectual crisis and weak governance. The author feels that there is general confusion that exists on the issue of modernity; he concludes that there is intellectual confusion in Pakistan. In this section he gives a historical background of the various religious parties and their role in the politics along with the role played by Zia-ul-Haq that led to religious extremism and also militancy in the Madrasas. The book also reviews the politicization of the bureaucracy, judiciary and the army and how this has led to the misgovernance in Pakistan.

The third and the last part comprises of the conclusions in which the discussion basically is regarding the various opportunities that Pakistan had but could not utilize them. He suggests that if these opportunities had been availed, then maybe situation in Afghanistan would have been much better in Afghanistan and Pakistan, these he has titled as missed opportunities.

The worrying aspect at this time is the future of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces from there because the conditions as always in Afghanistan will be directly affecting Pakistan. The worries and concerns regarding the future stability and security of Afghanistan are genuine and logical, as Pakistan has already suffered a lot due to the instable conditions in Afghanistan. This time the NATO forces exit should not be abrupt but should be a well planned exit strategy. To ensure a stable Afghanistan after troop's withdrawal Pakistan needs to be involved and consulted as a major actor while the strategies are chalked out, as Pakistan's security is directly linked with that of Afghanistan. In this process the decision makers of Pakistan need to up hold the national interests of Pakistan under all circumstances.

In the last, the book suggests number of recommendations towards handling of the crucial issue of relations with Afghanistan and their effects on Pakistan. These suggestions seem to be very useful not only for policy makers but also for general readers. In the stabilization of Afghanistan the mistrust between

the three major parties Afghanistan, Pakistan and USA must end or lessen. All these parties need to understand that only joint policies acceptable to all can build peace in the region. The bi-lateral relations between the two neighboring should be developed to lessen the trust deficit between them. The long border between them should be managed in a effective manner to keep a check on the movements on both sides. Both the countries need to learn not to interfere into the internal matters of each other. The most effective suggestion is to lessen the ever growing extremism in Pakistan.

As the book is written by Ex-Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Mr. Riaz Mohammad Khan, he shows command over giving details of the various angles of diplomacy on both the sides. This book is a good addition to the material regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, narrations of personal experiences and involvements of the author could have made the book more interesting and captivating.