

The Economist

The army in Pakistan

Nosebags

Why Pakistan's army wields so much power

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The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics. By Ayesha Jalal. *Belknap Press*; 435 pages; £25. Buy from [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0674052897/theeconomists-20)

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Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War. By Christine Fair. *Oxford University Press*; 347 pages; \$34.95. Buy from [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0199892709/theeconomists-20)

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MOST countries have armies, but in Pakistan the army has a country. Historians repeat that aphorism because Pakistan's military men have always enjoyed disproportionate political clout. The men in khaki have ruled directly for 33 of the country's 67 years and have meddled heavily in politics the rest of the time, right up to the present day.

The warriors in charge take the lion's share of public spending. Figures are opaque, but Ayesha Jalal in a new history, "The Struggle for Pakistan", offers some shocking ones. In 1973, she says, almost 90% of the federal budget went to military ends. By the late 1980s, around 80% of current spending either paid off debt or funded the army. Little has improved. Christine Fair, whose "Fighting to the End" is similarly sharp, suggests that the \$30 billion of direct and indirect aid which America has given Pakistan in the past 11 years has done little but enrich the military men.

The books share a similar thrust, even if the authors—Ms Jalal is a professor at Tufts University, Ms Fair at Georgetown—differ in how they think outsiders should respond. In short: Pakistan suffers from unsavoury politicians, judges who care little for the law and a rising tide of Islamist extremism, besides other troubles. But the greatest failing is an army (and its spies) with too much power and no accountability. "It was precisely because the military had never been out of the political system that Pakistan was in such a state of disrepair," concludes Ms Jalal,

describing the misadventures of Pakistan's most recent dictator, Pervez Musharraf, who was in power for seven years until 2008, but who was recently charged with treason for, among other things, suspending the constitution.

The army's record is not one to be proud of. Wars launched against India in 1947, 1965 and 1999, won little or nothing beyond international opprobrium. Genocidal repression of Bengalis in East Pakistan led to the loss of that half of the country, after a humiliating defeat by India's army in 1971. Pakistan's army became a nuclear proliferator, supplying technology to North Korea, Iran and Libya. It also pushed Islamist extremist groups to export terror and instability, which now worries China, as well as India and Afghanistan.

At home the army made a martyr of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a popular if flawed elected prime minister. Its spies have routinely rigged elections and bumped off journalists and politicians they do not like. Benazir Bhutto, his daughter and another popular leader who was assassinated in 2007, had predicted that the army would somehow have her killed. And though neither author makes much of the detail, it seems likely that Osama bin Laden, discovered in a garrison town in 2011, long enjoyed support from someone within Pakistan's spy network.

Ms Jalal offers a clear, chronological account of how the army, in competition with civilians, has misruled Pakistan. Its centralisation of power did much to spread disaffection in the provinces. Adventurism abroad brought tactical gains, but provoked long-term strategic losses. Under Zia ul Haq, in the 1980s, the government promoted violent *jihād* as a state policy and spread Islamist extremism. Ms Jalal spells out too, without labouring it, how American worries about the cold war and then Islamist terrorism helped to give the army a free hand and many resources for controlling domestic affairs.

Ms Fair's focus is on the army's "strategic culture", as she tries to explain why the generals behave as they do. She has pored over decades' worth of official army publications and she concludes, gloomily, that they are driven not by an urge to promote national security, but by ideology. Their main motivation is to resist and weaken Hindu-dominated India in whatever way possible; they see India as an existential threat. Ms Fair says that Pakistan that is thus best understood as a "purely greedy state", one that would consume whatever territory, aid or other benefits it can get, but would never seek peace with the old enemy, since giving up hostility under even the best circumstances would be tantamount to defeat.

When it comes to advice, the authors differ widely. Ms Jalal thinks Americans should keep on engaging and funding nuclear-armed Pakistan, rather than risk "untold consequences" by isolating it. Outsiders can help to preserve a space for moderates in the country and limit the disruption that might spread abroad. Ms Fair's opinion is bolder. Elsewhere she has depicted the army, in view of its ability to extract funds from America, as a massive "self licking ice-cream

cone". She now urges Westerners to stop paying for this and to dare, instead, to "let Pakistan fail". The country has endured so many crises and shown "a very stable instability" over the years. It will not collapse now. The army, once held responsible for its actions, may not behave any better than before, she agrees. But at least the West would no longer be paying for it.

From the print edition: Books and arts