The Problem with Pakistan's Military

by Simon Henderson **(/experts/simon-henderson)**

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Saturday, May 28, was the thirteenth anniversary of Pakistan's first nuclear test in 1998. The day is known as Yaum-e-Takbeer, the Day of Revival. This year it revived a long-running and vicious campaign between the controversial Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan and the former military dictator Pervez Musharraf, who in 2004 put Khan under house arrest, accusing him of proliferating nuclear secrets to Libya, Iran, and North Korea.

Over the weekend, a Pakistani newspaper reported that when Khan had invited Musharraf to watch the test launch of the North Korean-designed Ghauri missile in April 1998, Musharraf had been worse for wear. Since drinking alcohol is against the law in Pakistan, journalists don't have the repertoire of phrases that their American counterparts might use to cover such circumstances but the newspaper reported: "General Musharraf ... was not in his senses." And Khan told him: "We are reciting Quranic verses, Haj is being performed in Mecca and in which state you have come here."

Alcohol, or the lack of it, is one key indicator of what is going on in the Pakistani military, which, wittingly or otherwise, is now known to have provided sanctuary to Osama bin Laden in the quintessentially military town of Abbottabad.

In a scene from *Charlie Wilson's War,* the congressman (played by Tom Hanks) visits Pakistani president Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, an observant Muslim. When a servant asks whether he would like something to drink, Charlie Wilson asks for a whisky. Zia curtly informs him there is no alcohol available. It reminded me of when I first met Zia in 1977, a few weeks after he had seized power in a military coup. For some reason he liked me -- I was the BBC correspondent -- and had invited me to dinner. Zia batted away my questions and was not a conversationalist, so it was an agonizing meal. I could have used a whisky. Charlie Wilson and I would have perhaps been luckier if we had met Musharraf, who even before this newspaper report was known to like a quiet drink. Because of it, as Shuja Nawaz writes in his 2009 study *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within,* "The 'agencies' (short-hand for the ISI and other intelligence outfits) had reported that [Musharraf] was not 'suitable' for the post [chief of army staff]."

Besides alcohol, another indicator of Pakistan's military mindset is the degree of religious observance. Zia is credited for making the military more Islamic; Musharraf purged several Islamist military officers. So far, it is difficult to tell which direction the current military chief, General Ashraf Kayani, is taking the military. One measure of Muslim piety is the beard, which is more common in the lower ranks, less so among Kayani's officers. There was a photo in the media of Kayani meeting with his senior commanders after bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad, showing that only one general had a beard.

I am certain that the Pakistani military doesn't like the United States. But it is more concerned with Pakistan's traditional enemy, India, which it regards as an existential threat, and a source of resentment since the army's every war with India has led to either a stalemate or, worse, a defeat. The Pakistani military is determined to outmaneuver India, which is why it supports jihadists fighting in the contested province of Kashmir and trains and controls the terrorists who wreaked havoc in Mumbai in 2008. With more than 150 nuclear bombs, Pakistan's arsenal exceeds India's. The weapons are there to be used in a war that, this time, Pakistan intends to win.

I met Khan twice in the 1990s, and since his 2004 arrest his correspondence claims he only acted at the instruction of successive military and civilian administrations. On balance, I tend to believe him. Sharing nuclear technology was a way of convincing Iran that despite U.S. ties, Pakistan was not an enemy. Links with Libya were in gratitude for the support Colonel Qaddafi gave the Bhutto family during their years of exile and opposition. With North Korea, it was swapped for missile technology. Did the top Pakistani civilian and military leadership know of this proliferation? Some did, some of the time.

This latest Pakistan newspaper story includes another jibe against Musharraf by Khan. Having started a local production line of the 900-mile-range Ghauri missile, Khan was also working on a slightly longer-range version, the Ghauri-2, and a 2,000-mile version, the Ghauri-3, a copy of the North Korean Nodong-2. But Musharraf, who mounted a coup in October 1999, "stopped the funding" for the project in May 2000.

According to Khan, the cancellation of the project also resulted in the expulsion of North Korean engineers and technicians, who had been working on the missile project as well as learning about uranium enrichment technology. This point speaks directly to the current crisis in U.S.-Pakistani relations. Musharraf was apparently willing to do some diplomatic favors for Washington. There is little indication that Pakistan's current military leadership is inclined to do the same.

Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the ***Gulf and Energy Policy Program (/templateI02.php?SID=23&newActiveSubNav=Gulf%20and%20Energy%20Policy%20Program&activeSubNavLink=templateI02.php%3FSID%3D23&newActiveNav=researchPrograms)*** *at The Washington Institute.* ❖

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