

The Economics of Peace and Security Journal

© www.epsjournal.org.uk, ISSN 1749-852X

Book Note

Fair, C. Christine and Peter Chalk. 2006. *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press. xxi + 164. ISBN 1-929223-88-9 (pb). Price: \$14.95.

Reviewed by Bjørn Møller [21 May 2007]

This is a well-written and concise account of U.S.-Pakistani relations. Initially determined by its central role as a staging area for operations against the USSR in Afghanistan, it allowed Pakistan's regime to get away with almost anything in terms of human rights violations. When Pakistan was subsequently suspected (as we now know, rightly) of developing nuclear weapons, relations deteriorated considerably, reaching a freezing point after the nuclear tests of 1998. In the light of the global war on terror, however, Pakistan's importance to the United States has increased dramatically as the presumed favorite hiding place for terrorists belonging to al Qaeda and the Taliban – at the same time as the country is experiencing growing internal turmoil. Hence the U.S. support for the Pakistani government – not least as far as its security sector is concerned – in return for which President Musharraf has pledged his government's support for the U.S. "war on terror."

This small book provides a concise and informative account of the many dilemmas involved, for both sides. The Pakistani government must navigate between its support for the West (which is unpopular among the population) and its own electorate, especially considering its dubious democratic credentials. In particular, it must be cautious about alienating religious institutions and groupings, some of which have a strong backing within the security sector itself. The United States, in turn, needs to balance its own military and other security needs for freedom of action on Pakistani territory and operational support from the Pakistani security services against the need for political stability in this country. Hence, Washington must also balance its wish for democratization in Pakistan against its need for a stable and pro-Western regime. It must further seek to avoid that its two proclaimed "wars" (against drugs and terrorism) work at cross-purposes, as they might well do. If the war on drugs demands cracking down on opium production and smuggling, this may well jeopardize the livelihood of local communities who might then be inclined to lend their support to anti-American forces, *in casu* Islamist jihadists.

Besides being well-documented, the analysis is throughout very balanced. This does not prevent the authors from voicing their critique of the dominant U.S. approach, i.e., the emphasis on military support. Should the United States win the "war on terror" (at least as far as Afghanistan is concerned), it might well be inclined to disengage and terminate its support: "should this occur, Washington's aid will have been instrumental in consolidating the power of an unelected military regime and will have had no meaningful impact on the fostering of viable democratic institutions" (p. 71).

Bjørn Møller is Senior Research Fellow at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark.