

Aziz, Sartaj: *Between Dreams and Realities. Some Milestones in Pakistan's History*. Karachi: Oxford University Press 2009. ISBN: 978-0-19-547718-4; 408 S.

Rezensiert von: Sadia Bajwa, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

In Pakistan, the political tug-of-war between the civilian government, the military and (in recent years) the judiciary and the civil society not only presents the academia with a complex case to gnaw at, but is also very much a topic of lively public and private debate in Pakistani society. Sartaj Aziz's „Dreams and Reality“, an autobiography of an economist turned politician who at many points in the history of Pakistan was at the forefront of political decision-making, will thus appeal to scholars and students of Pakistan's political history, but especially to the layman interested in Pakistani politics. While its strength does not lie in any literary merit, or for that matter grounded political analysis of Pakistan's history as its book jacket may lead one to believe, its appeal lies in the fact that it is a first-hand account of upper-level politics in Pakistan. Sartaj Aziz, an economist by training, began his political career as a Minister of State for Food and Agriculture in 1984 and till his retirement from politics 1999 held many key political positions in government including that of foreign minister during the 1999 Kargil crisis, an event shrouded in controversy.

Aziz states in the Preface, that he is not a historian but hopes that this record of events which he witnessed while participating in the political life of Pakistan will be of use and interest for historians as well as for future leaders looking to learn from the past. While this is a realistic estimate of the book's importance as a memoir, Aziz does however go on to make lofty claims of having „explored some of the causes of failure if democracy in Pakistan“ (xiv). Unfortunately, any historian or political scientist looking for an in depth critical analysis of the subject of democracy in Pakistan in this book will be disappointed. However, if one reads this book without such expectations, it does keep its promise of providing the reader with an insider perspec-

tive on the political and economic policy developments of the late 1980s through to the early 2000s in Pakistan. This is a book in the tradition of political autobiographies written by players in the upper-echelons of Pakistani politics, the latest most stirring being that of Pervez Musharraf.¹

Aziz's career can be divided into four phases, beginning with his first 20 years as a civil servant, from 1950-1970, followed by his time in the international civil service from 1971-1984. The third phase, his political tenure, lasted from 1984-1999 and is the focus of this book. Today, in the fourth phase, Sartaj Aziz is working in the education sector and holds the position of Vice Chancellor of a private university in Lahore. The book has thirteen chapters of which the first five chapters cover his early and student life and the first two phases of his career. The bulk of the book is made up of Chapters Seven to Thirteen in which Sartaj Aziz traces his political career, experiences and actions through the fifteen years of quasi-democracy from the end of Zia's regime through the democratic seesaw of the 1990s up until the fourth military takeover by General Musharraf in October 1999.

The first five chapters are relatively brief and of a sketchy nature and give an overview of the developments in the period from the 1940s to 1985. In Chapter One, „Early Life“, Aziz gives a personal account of his student life, his encounter as a young Muslim Leaguer with Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his early years as a civil servant in the Planning Commission under President Ayub Khan. Chapter Two, „Milestones and Turning Points“, is brief introduction to the book and identifies certain milestones that the author feels are central to the question of democratic development in Pakistan. Chapter Three, „The Shattered Dream (1947-1971)“ is short overview of the creation of Pakistan and the first few decades after independence. This chapter attempts to give an analysis of the failure of nation-building in Pakistan and tries to explain the ideological vacuum that became evident following independence. This analysis, however, at best scratches only at the sur-

¹ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire*. New York, Free Press, 2006

face. The chapter does nevertheless include a few interesting first-hand accounts of cabinet meetings held during Ayub's tenure as well as a reference to the author's role in the Planning Commission during 1970 and 1971 when East Pakistan began to exert itself in the face of West Pakistani domination. Chapter Four is a brief account of the „Democratic Interlude“ under Z. A. Bhutto between 1971 and 1977 and the reader is left to wonder where Aziz was during this period. It is in the next chapter, which deals with the period of military rule under Zia-ul-Haq and the revival of the political process in the mid-80s, that the reader is related the beginning of Sartaj Aziz's political career. This chapter holds a lot of interesting material on „Zia's Game Plan“ (p. 62), giving accounts of a number of strategy meeting at which the Aziz was present in the capacity of minister of state for agriculture.

The following chapters constitute the greater part of the book and cover the next fifteen years, the political phase of Aziz's career. The author gives an interesting insider's perspective on the split in the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) in the post-Zia scuffle. He covers the ping-pong politics of the 1990s in great detail, of course, especially focusing on the Nawaz Sharif tenures during which he held key positions in the government. In Chapter Seven, Aziz makes an insightful analysis of the impact of Benazir Bhutto's first two-year government (1988-90) on the democracy in Pakistan. He points out that instead of strengthening the role of democratic institutions, especially the parliament to counter the clout of the military-bureaucracy 'Establishment', she inserted her main efforts into „consolidating and expanding the political space of the party“ (p. 99), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) In his view, the PPP compromised the federal democratic structure by trying to centralize power and neutralize opposition. He accuses the PPP government of promoting its interests to the extent of corruption: „During its twenty-month rule the PPP government 'placed' about 200,000 personnel in different grades, recommended by PPP members of parliament and the party leaders.“ (p. 101)

Academic studies of Pakistan's political system show that party politics are based

on patron-client networks which throughout Pakistan's history have been drawn upon by all leading political parties, including the PML. Aziz, however, levies this criticism on the PPP periods of rule while not addressing the issue when writing about the PML governments, clearly showing his bias. The trend of consolidating the party instead of the institutions is something that has defined Pakistani politics throughout its history, irrespective of which party was in power.

Chapter 8 deals with the first tenure of Nawaz Sharif's PML (1990-1993) which won the elections that followed the dismissal of Benazir's government by the president's implementation of the controversial Article 58 (2)(b) that had been introduced through the 8th Amendment passed under Zia-ul-Haq. The unstable democracy of the 1990s owes much of its character to the existence of this clause. Both the PPP and the PML governments had to contend with a president who had the power to dissolve the national assembly. Meant to act as an instrument to balance the power of the Prime Minister it was abused multiple times by the Presidency with the backing of the Establishment as well as the respective opposition party.

Aziz gives one an actor-level insight into the political tussle between the PPP and the PML in the 1990s. He includes, for example, an account of the crisis leading up to the dismissal of the Nawaz Sharif government, detailed with diary entries of his from April 1993. Aziz highlights the irony that the very President who paved the way for Nawaz Sharif's entry into office was the one to dismiss him. In his second tenure, Nawaz managed to pass the 13th Amendment which deleted the Article 58 (2)(b), thus reducing the Presidency to a ceremonial figurehead.

During the Nawaz tenures, (Chapter 8 & 10) Aziz played an active and central role in politics. As a senator since 1988, he had developed a „strong working relationship“ (113) with Nawaz Sharif, especially at the time when Aziz worked to unite the two factions of the PML before the 1988 elections. Aziz gives the reader his personal evaluation of Nawaz Sharif's character and is of the opinion that it in no small way contributed to the personalised politics that Nawaz seems to favour to

the detriment of democratic institutions and processes, a point of criticism in Aziz's view. However, Aziz's political career did take a leap at under the new Nawaz government as he was appointed Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs, a position which he also rejoined in the second PML tenure from 1997-1998 when he climbed the political ladder further to become the Foreign Minister in the same cabinet.

The reader is given a description of the economic reforms of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation which were initiated during the first, and continued during the second, Nawaz tenure, Aziz having been their main architect. According to him, these reforms did not take place in response to any financial crisis or pressure from the IMF or any other multilateral agencies. As we know, the early 1990s are also known to be the time of liberalisation in India, but Aziz is sure to point out that Pakistan's reforms preceded those in India. Aziz's account of the process of drafting and implementing reforms, especially in the energy and agriculture sector, draws one's attention considering that some of the problems Pakistan faces today have their roots in long-term planning failure and the lack of continuity in economic planning due to political discontinuities. This is a point that Aziz makes multiple times in the course of the book.

In Chapter 11 „The Foreign Office: A Melting Pot of Global Faultlines“, Aziz gives the reader a sketch of Pakistan's early foreign policy and goes into deeper detail from the end of the 1980s when he joins politics, peppering the narrative with anecdotes from first-hand experience. He goes into the following three main foreign policy concerns of Pakistan: Afghanistan, the United States and India. In writing about the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Aziz merely repeats what is by now general knowledge. He mentions the role of the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) and the (military) Establishment in influencing and outright steering Pakistan's foreign policy decision-making. For example, with regard to Pakistan recognizing the Taliban government in 1997 he states „Apparently the instructions to recognise the Taliban government were received by the foreign office from DG ISI, General Rana...“ citing Mur-

shed's 'The Taliban Years' (2006) as his source. The reader is given the impression that the civilian government had a sense of resignation, helplessness in the face of the more dominant military.

Aziz also talks about the Lahore Process of diplomacy with India which was started ironically when right of center parties were in power in both Pakistan and India (BJP). There is a detailed account of the negotiation process, the Chenab Formula, and the Lahore declaration. He expresses his regret that the genuine intentions of moving forward on the Kashmir issue were foiled by the fall of the Vajpayee government. Aziz writes: „...when I met Vajpayee in New Delhi on 12 June 1999, he said with a voice choked with emotion: 'I had traveled to Pakistan with such sincerity and with high hope for durable peace between India and Pakistan. The real casualty of the Kargil crisis is trust between the two countries.'“ (p. 230).

Aziz dedicates an entire chapter to the Kargil which was the biggest challenge he faced during his time as foreign minister. The Kargil operation, Aziz states, „prepared the ground for a prolonged military takeover“ as well as causing „irreparable damage to Pakistan's principled and legitimate stand on Kashmir...“ (p. 250). He contradicts Musharraf's version of events² in which he states that the Prime Minister was briefed on the Kargil operation before its commencement. Aziz states that he was present at the briefing and that „there was no mention of the Kargil sector“. (p. 259) Aziz makes the perceptive observation that the Kargil „misadventure“ is „a sad reflection of the on Pakistan's governing structure, the civil military relationship and the total absence of an effective infrastructure for decision-making in national security issues.“ (p. 258) Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the civil government (including Aziz) was under pressure to support the ideologically popular move to 'stand-up' to India in Kargil even though the operation was initiated more or less without its knowledge by the military. The ideological might of the 'Indian threat' has time and again maintained the supremacy and legitimacy of the military as a politically powerful institution.

²Narrated in *ibid*.

While Aziz criticizes this state of affairs, he obviously sees himself as having been powerless to do anything against it. In his account, he comes across as a passive witness of the important decisions being taken and the foreign office seems to be at most an instrument for their implementation rather than formulation. It is at time difficult to discern whether Aziz is writing from his own experiences or from hearsay and of course having been part of the cadre of the big decision-makers, whether it was during Zia-ul Haqs time, or later under the PML governments, the authors seems to be in a constant struggle to absolve himself of any responsibility. All in all, the book is an interesting read because of its chapters on the Nawaz tenures, the Kargil operation and subsequent military take-over. Like many events in Pakistan's history, whether the 1971 debacle or the 1965 war with India, Kargil still poses many uncomfortable questions. Accounts such as Aziz's shed some light on these controversial events.

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