

BOOK REVIEW | Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy

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By IndraStra Global Editorial Team



Cover Image Attribute: The file photo of soldiers marching past during the Pakistan Day military parade in Islamabad, March 23, 2018, | Creator: AAMIR QURESHI | Credit: AFP

"Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy" by Ayesha Siddiqa is a critical and insightful analysis of the economic and political power wielded by the Pakistani military. The book provides an in-depth look at the origins, growth, and impact of the military's financial enterprises, which have significantly shaped the country's political and social landscape.

Siddiqa, a Pakistani scholar and analyst, draws on extensive research and interviews to paint a detailed picture of the military's economic activities. She argues that the military's economic power is rooted in its historic role as a defender of the nation's security. However, it has expanded rapidly in recent decades to include a vast array of commercial

enterprises. These include everything from land development projects to heavy manufacturing to retail businesses, all owned or controlled by the military through various front companies.

The book delves deep into the specifics of these enterprises, examining their origins, organization, and impact on the economy and society. Siddiqa argues that the military's economic activities are both a cause and a symptom of Pakistan's broader political and economic problems, including corruption, cronyism, and a lack of accountability. She also shows how the military's economic power has helped to perpetuate a culture of secrecy and authoritarianism within the country's political establishment.

One of the book's most compelling arguments is that the military's economic activities have created a "deep state" within Pakistan, a network of influential actors who operate outside of democratic institutions and are largely immune to public scrutiny. This has corrosively affected Pakistan's democratic institutions, with the military able to use its economic power to influence and control the country's political process. Siddiqa's analysis is particularly relevant in light of recent events in Pakistan, including the ouster of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017 and the ongoing protests against the military's role in politics.

Throughout the book, Siddiqa carefully provides a balanced and nuanced view of the military's economic activities. While she is critical of the military's dominance of the economy and its impact on society, she also acknowledges the military's role in Pakistan's security and the challenges it faces in a volatile and unstable region. This balanced approach helps to make the book both informative and thought-provoking.

One of the book's strengths is its use of case studies to illustrate its arguments. Siddiqa provides detailed accounts of several vital military-owned enterprises, including the Fauji Foundation, which is involved in everything from cement production to fertilizer manufacturing to banking. She also examines the military's role in land development projects, a major source of controversy in Pakistan in recent years. Through these case studies, Siddiqa is able to show the complexity and diversity of the military's economic activities, as well as their impact on different sectors of society.

Overall, the book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the military's role in Pakistan's political and economic landscape. The book is well-written, well-researched, and provides a unique and insightful perspective on a topic often shrouded in secrecy and misinformation. Siddiqa's analysis is both informative and thought-provoking, and her balanced approach helps to make the book a valuable contribution to the field of political economy. Whether you are a student of South Asian politics, a journalist, or simply someone interested in learning more about one of the world's most critical and complex countries, "*Military Inc.*" is an essential read.

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