

Book Reviews

***A History of Nepal* by John Whelpton, Cambridge University Press, 2005, xxiii, 296pp, ISBN 0 521 80026 9 and 80470 1 £40.00 (hardback) and £15.99 (paperback). Asian Edition by Foundation Books, ISBN 0-521-671418.**

Reviewed by Deepak Thapa  
Himal Books & Social Science Baha, Nepal

Despite the huge output of scholarly works on practically every aspect of Nepali society, culture, politics, economy and development in recent decades, none has taken up the challenge of re-evaluating Nepal's colourful past in view of contemporary trends. The publication of John Whelpton's *A History of Nepal* has filled that lacuna. And, this long-overdue book does more than provide just dry historical facts since Whelpton's approach is considerably different from the texts that are currently available either in English or Nepali. Continuing in the tradition of his compatriots—William Kirkpatrick, Francis Buchanan Hamilton and Perceval Landon, among others—Whelpton has produced a valuable introduction to Nepal.

Whelpton has dispensed, quite rightly, with delving at length into the country's ancient and mediaeval past. These eras have been dealt with in many other publications and, as is widely known, the history of these earlier periods focus almost entirely on events in the Kathmandu Valley which, although fascinating, did not affect the majority of those living within the boundaries of what is today's Nepal. Whelpton's book begins by going beyond the hoary details of the Valley's history to provide a more holistic picture of the peopling of the central Himalayas and the events associated with it.

In a true sense *A History of Nepal* begins in 1743, the year Prithvi Narayan Shah became king of Gorkha and set the stage for the creation of the Nepali nation. That event 250 years ago was certainly a significant one for the country's history, since, as

Whelpton emphasises, the Gorkha conquests sowed the seeds of Nepali nationalism, however imperfect. And it is only right, then, that the bulk of the book should cover the period after that.

The first thing that strikes the reader is the book's cover which depicts the Tarai town of Birganj in the 1970s. On initial inspection, it almost appears to be a mistake since the image looks so much like India. This picture is a striking departure, even for Nepalis, from the stereotypical image of the country as comprising only the hills and mountains, and as of its history as being symbolised by the ubiquitous likeness of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Whelpton's choice of image is thus effective in reminding readers that a true understanding of the country will not be possible through only selective representations of its past. Much as the interplay of characters and events in Kathmandu were significant, the story of Nepal is incomplete without reference to what was happening in the rest of the country. This is where Whelpton succeeds admirably.

Whelpton's re-evaluation of historical incidents stands out in its acknowledgement of current scholarship on Nepal. Thus, his treatment of 'unification' is tied to the idea of 'sanskritisation' and what this meant for communities outside the ruling Hindu elite. Historical accounts recounting the various phases of the Gorkha conquest have so far glossed over the latter aspect. Whelpton strips aside blind glorification to assess the cost of state-building on ordinary folk: Limbus had to compromise on their traditional rights to land; Tamangs were forced to serve the growing class of rulers in Kathmandu; the Tarai was treated as a colony; and the Magars and Gurungs, who were among the Gorkha conquistadors, were jettisoned to the margins by a state that began to increasingly identify itself with a Hindu *parbatiya* culture.

The writer's knowledge of Nepali history and society is well attested in his earlier publications, and this book is further affirmation of his erudition. Historical events often take a backseat as he dwells on issues as diverse as the changing nature of state and society, economy, lifestyle, changing values and ethnicity. Yet, despite the passions that some of these issues raise in Nepal, none other than diehards would find fault with his very measured presentation.

Nothing escapes his attention it seems. For instance, in a particularly amusing section on how rulers dealt with the changed political circumstances post-1951, he mentions how the Rana Prime Minister, Mohan Shamsheer, used to speak to newly nominated Ganesh Man Singh in English to avoid having to use the honorific 'tapain'. Equally interesting is the little-known fact that both Tribhuvan and Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah could speak Newari and that, on occasion, used it between themselves when dealing with Indians.

*A History of Nepal* is a concise historical and sociological work that will serve as a ready reference as well as an introductory text for some time to come. Given the range of subjects it deals with, the book is almost encyclopedic in scope. It is just unfortunate that it currently figures in the list of 'banned' publications in Nepal for reasons only known to the present authorities. Paradoxically, it is just this kind of myopia that the book serves to dispel in its portrayal of Nepal.

***Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*, by Manjushree Thapa, Penguin Books Ltd., New Delhi, 2005.**

Reviewed by Manaslu Gurung, a documentary filmmaker and Chris Holme, a city planner at New York City Metropolitan Area.

*Forget Kathmandu* by Manjushree Thapa is more than "an elegy for democracy," as its subtitle suggests. By recovering the scraps of the history of Nepal's competing political elites, from the Shah Dynasty to the Ranas, and then to the Nepali Congress Party (first in the 1950s and once again in the 1990s), Thapa helps to reconstruct and 're-member' a fragmented and obscured past. In a nation where honest historical research and investigative journalism was risky before the 1990s and after 2001, this book is

an important contribution to rebuilding the foundations of democracy in Nepal.

Thapa's book is engaging and thoroughly post-modern in that it interweaves the author's family background, social status and emotional states with a description of the changing political contexts that permeate her existence, and the existence of all Nepalis. Thapa shares with the reader, in the intimate manner of an entry in a diary, her depression and anxiety, as well as the absurd and humorous moments that make up her days in the shadow of, as she calls it, "bad politics".

Thapa, who wrote *Mustang Bhot in Fragments* (first published in 1992) and won widespread acclaim with her first novel, *The Tutor of History*, in 2001, has brought her talents to non-fiction in an engaging way. She tackles in one book what most authors could not cover in four, providing a personal and political account of the June 2001 royal massacre, a history of the Shah dynasty, a history of the democratic movements of Nepal, and an account of the current situation in Maoist-controlled rural areas of Nepal.

The first part of the book, narrated primarily in the first person, offers a comparison of the official story of the royal massacre with evidence that the murders were perhaps a royal coup, engineered by the king's brother. Thapa describes her own and her friends' reactions to the news of the massacre, the subsequent media blackout, and the hasty funerals in which all of the bodies were cremated along the bank of the Bagmati River. In the process, she includes the voices of shopkeepers and passers-by on the street, expressing doubt ("Did Dipendra *really* kill them all") and dissent ("*Bhai marna paindaina, hatyara raja chaindaina!*" – "You can't kill your brother, we don't need a murderer king!"). Spontaneous protests to block the coronation of the dead king's younger brother, Gyanendra, are met with tear gas, a power blackout, and a shoot-on-sight evening curfew.

Having whetted the reader's appetite for discovery through exploring the fragile façade of the official story regarding the royal massacre presented in both the local and international media, Thapa turns to the violent history of Nepal's feuding royal families. The reader is struck by the fact that the June 2001 royal

massacre was but the most recent violent incident in a long and bloody history, in which only a handful of leaders have lived long enough to die a natural death. This concise tour of Nepal's political history confirms that even the wildest conspiracy theories regarding the royal massacre may be closer to the truth than the official story of the crown prince running amok and killing nine members of his own family.

Next, Thapa covers the political history of the two democracy movements, the first of which came above ground in the 1950s, and the other, which resulted in parliamentary elections in the 1990s. The rise and demise of both these movements parallel each other in so many respects that they leave the reader with an agonized feeling, wondering how the actors involved in the democratic movements could repeat the same mistakes in the relatively short time span of five decades. An examination of these two movements requires Nepalis to conceive of what "True Democracy" would look like for all the people of Nepal, and not just for the privileged elites living within the Kathmandu Valley.

Finally, Thapa breaks free from theories, histories, and the Kathmandu Valley, and takes to the hills for a final and more personal section, where she directly confronts Maoists in the countryside, and speaks to the villagers who have spent the last several years just trying to stay out of the crossfire between the warring Maoists and the Royal Nepal Army. Here we see the Nepal where most Nepalis live, a land and a people that are paying the dues for the Kathmandu elites and rulers who have plundered the country in the name of democracy and development. As Thapa travels through the land, she notes the dire situation of much of the rural population, with an already sparse existence made more difficult with suspicion and hostility all around. This chapter is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book, mirroring, intentionally or otherwise, the disconnect between the people of Kathmandu and the inhabitants of rural Nepal.

This book's simple, down-to-earth, style is itself democratic, making it accessible and appealing to a wide audience including the urban and educated Nepali youths who are trying to make sense of tumultuous events in Nepal. Nepalis who have learned some English but have not quite mastered the language will also be

able to engage with this book. Thapa has made an important contribution to Nepali literature by applying a frame of reference for understanding the complex political history of Nepal, and laying it out in a fairly straightforward manner. The history in the book is alive with the energy of the author's own frustration, a frustration with which all of us who care about Nepal can relate. It seems that in Nepal political leaders can act with impunity so long as the media can be bent to their will, and that scandals and crises come regularly enough to keep people off-balance and overwhelmed. In *Forget Kathmandu*, this frustration acts as a positive force, making the account, as devastating as it is, empowering instead of paralyzing.

The book includes a full-scale map of Nepal and a dozen provocative black and white photos that bring the reader into contact with Nepal's troubles in a particularly vivid way. Images of the statues of late Shah Kings that still adorn many important sites in Kathmandu are juxtaposed with the killing fields scattered with dead bodies in rural Nepal, and serve as a poignant reminder of how divided the country still is.

Thapa insists that the past shall not be forgotten, and that history is decipherable. She believes that democracy is built upon the true history of the Nepali people and concludes the book with a call for a fresh discussion on the future of her country:

"Only democracy, and the sovereignty of the Nepali people matter. Neither the monarchy nor our failed political leaders nor any national myth or relic need be kept if they pose obstacles. It is time to re-imagine Nepal." (p 258)

***People in the 'People's War'*, Centre for Investigative Journalism, Himal Books, Kathmandu, 2004, 104pp, ISBN 99933 43 60 9, NRs. 100 (paperback).**

Reviewed by Sara Shneiderman  
Cornell University

It is often said that one of the most impressive results of Nepal's experiment with democracy in the 1990s was the emergence of a

vibrant free media. *People in the 'People's War'*, published by the Centre for Investigative Journalism at Himal Association in Kathmandu, is a testament to this fact. With ten articles by Nepali journalists on topics ranging from caste discrimination, conflict-induced migration, ethnic issues, militarization, disappearances, sexual violence and the economy of war, this compilation provides a moving yet sober look at the social costs of the Maoist-State conflict since 1996.

Many of the articles first appeared in the Nepali press, and are made accessible to an English-reading audience for the first time in this compilation. Himal Books should be commended for taking this important step towards closing the gap between the Nepali language media, where most of the in-depth reporting on Nepal's political crises is done, and the English-reading community responsible for shaping international policy responses. The book introduces a capable and committed new generation of Nepali journalists working hard to provide accurate field reports from the far reaches of the country to a wider community often starved of such ground-level detail.

Ranging from four to twenty-five pages in length, each article begins with a simple black and white photo to set the tone. Thereafter, the pieces vary greatly in style and substance. Some are micro-accounts of the effects of war in specific locales, such as Baburam Biswokarma's exploration of the problems *dalit* blacksmiths have faced under pressure to make and repair weapons for the Maoists, Rameshwore Bohara's documentation of a series of disappearances by the army in a Tharu village, and Siddharaj Rai's story of porters threatened by both sides. Others, such as Dambar Krishna Shrestha's discussion of the relationship between ethnic autonomy movements and the Maoists, and Karna Bohara's look at the conflict-induced migration to India, take a broader sociological view of these phenomena and include data from a wide variety of sources.

Three of the authors deserve special praise for their hard-hitting exposes of the seedy underside of war, particularly in the current climate where such critical work is not received lightly by the central authorities. Rohit Dahal describes the first known case of a government-supported village militia group, which was

established in Ilam in 2003. Sita Mainali provides an unflinching account of the sexual violence against women endemic in the culture of the security forces, with a particularly shocking description of the many excuses police and military men provide for their behaviour. Finally, Ujir Magar offers detailed description of Maoist budgeting and spending habits, estimating that the Maoists spend upwards of 528 million rupees a year—a cost ultimately borne by innocent Nepalis.

Taken together, these articles provide an unusual insight into the interpersonal dynamics behind the usually dry reports of daily battlefield encounters and political infighting that are so prevalent in the Nepali press. Reporters like those represented in this volume should be encouraged to carry on with this brave and important work. We can only hope that journalists and publishers will continue working together to make detailed accounts of the dynamics of conflict available in both Nepali and English. Their insights should be properly incorporated into assessments of the conflict situation, both at a policy level and in the scholarly community of concerned social scientists.

***Cricket: A Bridge of Peace* by Shaharyar M. Khan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, viii, 230 pp.**

Reviewed by Michelle Cooksley  
University of Leeds

Not so long ago, Test cricket was dismissed as slow and uninspiring in opinion polls in countries like the UK. How fitting, then, for Shaharyar Khan's latest work, *Cricket: A Bridge of Peace*, to be published at the time of the historic Ashes Test series in Britain in order to finally dispel such a grave misconception once and for all. The book spans Khan's time as manager of the Pakistani Cricket Team during its tour of India in 1999, and later its participation in the World Cup in South Africa, as he chronicles the sport's ennobling impact and its power to move people, nations



and enemies. An honest and enlightening account, Khan's work seeks at every turn to be 'more than a cricketing journal' (p vii) as it presents detailed analyses of cricketing, diplomatic relations and also wider political problems in its propagation of the theory that cricket acts as a bridge of peace.

The book is divided into sections of date and location; the first part covering the three months of Khan's appointment as manager exclusively for the Indian tour. Constructed largely from his diaries of the tour, Khan is able to closely guide the reader through events, including his own thoughts and fears in an attempt to interpret and explicate the difficult and specific nature of the tour. It takes place, we are told, after a gap of nearly twelve years in bilateral cricketing contests, in a country with which Pakistan has fought three wars. In this sense alone its awesome political, diplomatic and historical importance is made clear as he observes, "Never before and probably never again would a team carry such a heavy responsibility of upholding national pride and dignity against the background of hostile threats." (p 13)

Against a backdrop of communal tension and vicious threats from the extremist Shiv Sena Party of India, Khan subsequently takes us through the two Test matches against India and the First Inaugural Triangular Test, incorporating personal and collective challenges, frustrations and hopes for the tour. He intersperses these with stories as diverse as the disappearance of Subhas Chandra Bose to the life of the celebrated mathematics genius, Srinivasa Ramanujan, and even going as far as to acquaint the reader with each team member and their individual struggles, to offer in-depth tactical analyses accessible even to a relative cricketing novice.

It is impossible not to be moved by his passion for the sport, yet whilst the sheer drama of the tour is not to be ignored it is the more unobtrusive events that have the greatest significance. Khan describes how 'ordinary Indian folk... waited two hours in the sun just to wave goodbye to the Pakistan cricket team' (p 24) at Gwalior and, most poignantly, the public reception of the team at Chennai where they received a standing ovation from the 40,000 spectators following their astounding victory. Where sporting competition could so easily descend into a substitute for war, this

heartening event is but one example of the many ways in which Indians and Pakistanis are shown to communicate. Khan comments on its significance:

The positive waves of goodwill that the Chennai crowd emitted surpassed anything that had happened at the popular level in the fifty years' history of Pakistan-India relations. (p 40)

Such discerning observations as these stand out for their extraordinary sensitivity.

In the same vein, Khan's appreciation of the history and unique individual beauty of each place he visits is also quite remarkable, using these visits as he does to discuss wider social, economic and religious issues and particularly to advance the humanitarian interests and reputation of the team. In the final chapter of the Indian tour, 'Cricket, Diplomacy and Match Fixing,' he discusses elements of the tour that have attracted media attention in an attempt to set straight certain misconceptions. In this way, the book acts as both a commentary and a critique as Khan uses it to voice his opinion on everything from Partition to neutral umpiring, providing an extraordinary insight into the mind of a manager with an inspiring faith in his team. Khan himself says he does not wish to wallow in nostalgia and omits nothing from his account, including a most regrettable event at Calcutta involving riotous spectators and the clearing of the stadium for players' safety. However, now and again Khan's pre-occupation with image and reputation threatens to detract from the book's otherwise untarnished credibility. Nonetheless, the work is a tour diary, and must be accepted as such. His analysis of Partition is of particular note as he compares the different ideas of an Indian and a Pakistani on the creation of Pakistan:

...Therefore, every time an Indian talks about common culture and heritage, it represents a dagger thrust to a Pakistani, sparking dark images of regional domination. (p 93)

As a statesman and cricket enthusiast Khan is well qualified to make judgements on social and political matters, but here he endeavours to educate the reader in the plain emotion of the people. Speaking as a citizen and a patriot, his insightful analysis of the national mindset is admirably drawn from experience and his admission of moments of doubt in the integrity of his own team members forces the reader to examine deeper and often more sinister aspects associated with the game.

In a startling contrast to the success of the Indian tour, the second part, set predominantly in South Africa, is perhaps less optimistic as Khan picks up the story four years later with the Pakistan Cricket Team almost in ruins. Disillusionment and deterioration grip the team and with bilateral relations 'at their lowest ebb,' (p 103) Khan again reluctantly takes on the challenge of unifying them for the World Cup. He speculates on the differences and similarities between the countries, not only in political terms but also with regard to the state of the Pakistani team. Certainly, Khan does not fail to appreciate the significance of the location for its comparable divisions, intolerances and racial and religious tensions in its history. Drawing from visits to Soweto, Cape Town and Robben Island in particular, he uses the multi-coloured society as evidence for his notion of cricket as peacemaker, commenting, "I realised that cricket in South Africa, especially the World Cup, was intended to be part of Mandela's vision of a rainbow society." (p 146)

Despite the team's failure, Khan concludes with a touchingly optimistic evaluation of the tour. He argues "cricket, more than any other medium... can help build bridges of peace... harmony and mutual respect... both across frontiers as in India and Pakistan or within a country, as in South Africa." (p 179). Although he expresses his thesis in only a few short pages in the final chapter titled 'Cricket: A Bridge of Peace,' this complements fittingly the evidence presented throughout the book, which alone would most likely be enough to convince. In light of this it is easy to think that the game of cricket itself would recede to the background, yet it is impossible not to be caught up in the drama of the game and the fate of the team, which Khan calls 'a national disaster' (p 168). Indeed, many sections read more like a match

report. In this way, Khan masterfully blends the sporting elements with political and historical narrative to complement each other and to support and enhance his thesis. In this there appear two, albeit unclear and blended, themes to the book. The first is undoubtedly and professedly the political message the author wishes to convey. The second is made less apparent in the author's claims about the book but is equally necessary to the work - that is, the book's quality for drama. There are significant, gripping, outstanding moments that he describes with skill and suspense as the commentary conjures an image for the reader.

So, is cricket really, as Khan claims, a bridge of peace? Khan successfully demonstrates that cricket, more than any other sport, has the power to unite nations and more significantly the people of different nations. How it does this is, however, not very clear. As he told the team, "We... had come to play cricket and not to engage in politics." (p 8) He substantiates his argument skilfully. In movingly describing the reception of the Pakistani team by the Indian people, Khan translates the action and spirit of the Indian public towards the enemy:

... let us live in peace. Let us have mutual respect. Let us go our separate ways. Let us free ourselves from the burdens of tension, of military confrontation and poverty. Let us concentrate on building our countries. (p 180)

In this sense there is perhaps a didactic element to the book. However this is confined largely to the final chapter of the book, as is much of the analysis, which is a shame as it would have been refreshing to have more of his interesting conjecture within the main body. Moreover, there is undoubtedly a greater complexity to Khan's premise than perhaps at first appears. Whilst arguably cricket can form a bridge of peace, this undoubtedly need not necessarily be a permanent one. As we see, relations between the nations have deteriorated by the time of the second tour as cricket is used now as a weapon, with India at times refusing to play matches with Pakistan. Nevertheless, the message of the book is convincing and highly encouraging one.

***The Idea of Pakistan* by Stephen Cohen, The Brookings Institution Press, Washington, 2004, ISBN.0815715021, \$32.95.**

Reviewed by Justin Jones  
University of Cambridge

Stephen Cohen opens his latest book, *The Idea of Pakistan*, telling us that it took forty-four years to complete. Drawing from years of reflection, based on a voluminous array of sources and demonstrating an impressive grasp of the field drawn from a career at the Brookings Institute, the book is a brave and ambitious project which examines the institutions, dynamics, history, politics, foreign policy and even the future of Pakistan, all within a broad framework portraying the country as a troubled state incapable of reform and depicting the demise of Pakistan's national ideology. The work is based upon, and vindicates, the notion that Pakistan's internal and external affairs are uniquely intertwined, on account of factors such as the simultaneous internal and external interventions of Pakistan's army and the constant fabrication of the national 'idea' in relation to neighbouring India. Consequently, in contrast to the approach of Cohen's 2001 work *India: Emerging power*, the book focuses as tightly upon Pakistan's domestic politics as its international affairs.

The work opens with two chapters that discuss consecutively the 'idea' and 'state' of Pakistan, with the interplay between these two concepts constituting the primary argument permeating the book. The first chapter traces the pre-partition 'idea of Pakistan,' linking it to a long-standing sense of cultural and historical distinctiveness among certain Indian Muslims, and the belief that *izzat* (religious honour and pride) could be preserved only within the context of statehood. The second chapter examines the collision between this idea and the actual 'state of Pakistan,' demonstrating how developments within the state continuously introduced shifts in the national ideology. Jinnah's initial 'idea of Pakistan,' a secular democratic model, suffered from an essential

weakness, at odds at once with the communal excitement of 1940s India, and the region's multiple ethno-linguistic identities. On account of this weakness, numerous attempts were subsequently made at re-crafting a more viable unifying national ideology. A key moment came with the first period of military rule under Ayub Khan, which 'began the process of official myth-creation' and the manufacturing of a national identity, shifting the idea of Pakistan from that of a Muslim homeland to a fortress. From this point, the national image has been constantly manipulated.

Cohen here introduces one of his key concepts: the 'Establishment,' defined as a 'moderate oligarchy' consisting of an intertwined and family-based elite rooted at the heart of the country's multiple institutions and bureaucracies. The Establishment, he argues, represents a 'stable informal political structure', which is responsible for the fabrication of 'the idea of Pakistan' through these institutions. It is bonded by a consensual worldview: it is conservative and unenthusiastic for social or political reform and, while nominally supportive of democracy, sees it as a liability when in full civilian control.

The subsequent two chapters discuss Pakistan's army and politicians, in each case examining their contributions and influences upon the idea of Pakistan. The army is the most important component of Pakistan's Establishment and is the key factor in shaping Pakistan's identity since 'the army continues to set the limits upon what is *possible* in Pakistan.' The army's growing self-image as the guardian of the state and its increasing recourse to Islam as a sloganeering and motivating force is discussed. 'Political Pakistan' follows this with a discussion of Pakistan's political leaders, suggesting that the pervasive control of the army, the mismanagement and failure of past democratic regimes, together with poisoned inter-party relations and increased army manipulations of elections and electoral coalitions have all eroded Pakistan's initial democratic model and further distanced the prospect of civilian rule's re-instatement.

Two alternatives to the Establishment idea of Pakistan are then discussed: Islamism, and ethno-linguistic regionalism and separatism. Since the 1970s, the Establishment has responded to the secession of East Pakistan by grooming a moderate language of

Islam as a needed 'vehicle for nation-building,' a process energised during Zia ul-Haq's attempts to re-shape the idea of Pakistan. Concurrent with this was a rise of separatist movements among Pakistan's numerous minorities, a process exacerbated by the perceived Punjabi-centric army's dominance of public life, which demonstrates the failure of the Establishment's nation-building project. Ironically, Cohen suggests, it is the language of the homeland and national self-determination, applied by the state to propagate its idea of Pakistan, which has influenced the rhetoric and demands used by those who feel smothered by Pakistan itself. The 2002 elections vindicate both theses, revealing a reversion from the 1990s trend of government by national secular parties to the success of the Islamic and regionally specific M.M.A. coalition.

The theme pervading Cohen's detailed analysis is 'the continuing loss of confidence in the very idea of Pakistan - and confusion over what, if anything, Pakistan stood for.' The Establishment has failed to create a viable ideological foundation for the nation, since the homogenised national image projected by its governmental machine is at odds with the diversity of peoples and approaches within the nation itself. There is a need for a 'new organising idea that will provide more space for sub-nationalism,' yet the all-powerful military is 'unlikely to be able to fabricate an identity compatible with Pakistan's multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian realities.'

The successive chapter darkens the picture further with an analysis of Pakistan's 'alarming demographic and social indicators,' including a combination of uncontrolled population growth, urbanisation, unemployment and an education system that is 'broken, perhaps beyond repair' at all levels. The recent bout of economic growth is predicated upon sustained peace with India and the continued interests of international donors in Pakistan's affairs, which may not be sustained.

The penultimate chapter, 'Pakistan's futures,' is one of the most interesting, considering a number of possible scenarios for the country within a five-eight year time-frame, ranging from prospects of failure, including war, economic collapse or a takeover by Islamists, to those of promise, such as the emergence of progressive leadership or the cementing of regional peace and

security. But unlike many less thorough and more reactionary recent studies of Pakistan, Cohen is tempered in his forecasts. He predicts that 'the present system is likely to continue' in the immediate future, and could 'continue indefinitely.' The persistent dominance of the oligarchic Establishment, embedded at the centre and resistant to reform, will prevent any change of direction in domestic or external affairs. As the chapter concludes, 'given the omnipresence of the military, Pakistan will likely remain a national security state, driven by security objectives to the neglect of development and accountability and unable to change direction.' The final chapter, 'American Options,' outlines an appropriate American policy towards Pakistan, essentially a balance of short- and long-term objectives including a carefully guided provision of military assistance, economic aid and education programmes, all conditional upon positive performance by the military and the loosening of constraints upon democratic institutions.

Cohen's work is therefore hardly optimistic about Pakistan's prospects, and reasons against those interpretations of Musharraf's leadership as signifying a bold turnaround. The latest period of military rule is perceived as simply a further consolidation of 'the central feature of the state for forty years,' namely, a personalised 'military establishment that wants the façade but not the substance of a democracy,' lacking both the will and imagination for genuine social or political change. It is interesting to contrast his argument with his 1984 work, *The Pakistani Army*, in which he suggested that the civil-military balance in Pakistan was undergoing significant shifts and expressed hope that successful democracy could be restored, following the retreat of the army and the demonstration of competence by civilian politicians. Cohen's loss of hopefulness follows a twenty year period that has witnessed the further entrenchment of the army in state structures and the demeaning of democracy through the country's civil and economic ruination in the 'democratic' 1990s. As he remarks, the country has fewer possibilities open to it than twenty years ago.

Some questions raised by the book remain unanswered. Firstly, the central notion of the 'idea of Pakistan' causes some difficulties. Cohen traces the idea to notions of distinctiveness



among colonial-era Muslims, yet South Asian scholars such as Ayesha Jalal have recently led the field arguing that 'Pakistan' was the creation of a political bargaining game, rather than of any common ideal adhered to by India's multifarious Muslims. Cohen, in emphasising an 'idea,' sometimes hinders to convey this original 'idelessness of Pakistan,' its remoteness from normative identities. In a similar vein, Cohen's frequent emphasis on a single dominant 'idea of Pakistan,' that of the Establishment, occasionally undermines his own arguments for the plurality of 'ideas,' or indeed for the deficiency of a coherent national image.

Furthermore, some would doubtless dispute Cohen's assessment of some of Pakistan's key institutions, notably the military. He largely interprets the army as a status-quo power, unlikely to succumb to radical elements or allow significant restructuring of Pakistan's political and economic order. However at certain points, especially under Zia ul-Haq, the military was anything but benign and shares responsibility for the country's turbulence and instability, not only its democratic deficiencies. One could also suggest that Cohen would have benefited from deeper introductions and conclusions, both to individual chapters and the book itself, to emphasise the multiple broad arguments and themes permeating the text. The work sometimes feels like a set of interlinked chapters rather than a single work, although this is more than compensated by the tremendous grasp and perceptive use of detail within individual sections.

These are, however, small grievances. For the depth of its research, its original perspective, and for its cautious and tempered discussion which neither overlooks nor underestimates the nation's complexities, the book will likely and deservedly be a major contribution to academic discussions of Pakistan. Tellingly, the authority of the argument is further evidenced by events in Pakistan since its completion. President Musharraf's relinquishment of his promise to resign as army chief by the close of 2004 on the basis of 'security concerns' seems to fulfill Cohen's predictions of an immediate-term Pakistan in the continued grip of the security-obsessed military network, hesitant to exercise reforms or re-admit democratic freedoms. For now, the 'future Pakistan' depicted so eloquently by Cohen appears to be the correct one.