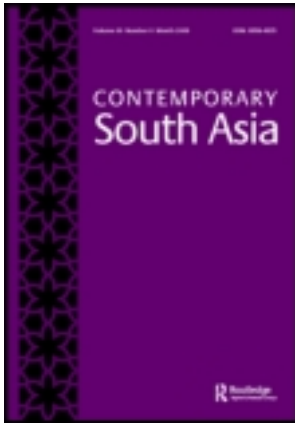


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C. Christine Fair^a & Shaun Gregory^b

^a Security Studies Program, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA

^b Pakistan Security Research Unit, University of Bradford, Bradford, UK

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A state in flux: Pakistan in the context of national and regional change

C. Christine Fair^{a*} and Shaun Gregory^b

^a*Security Studies Program, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA;* ^b*Pakistan Security Research Unit, University of Bradford, Bradford, UK*

Over the past 10 years, Pakistan has passed through some of the most turbulent and difficult times in its history. The war in Afghanistan post 9/11 has put Pakistan on the front line of the war on terrorism and provoked violent Islamic militancy within Pakistan and some grave policy choices for Pakistan itself. Riven in addition by the natural disasters of earthquakes and floods and hobbled by political instability, economic woes, and deep social, religious and ethnic divisions, Pakistan has reached a point of great flux with important national and regional changes imminent. This collection of six essays focus on critical elements of this flux – political Islam, militancy and religious minorities, political patronage and democracy, the economic impacts of the floods and Pakistan's relations with the US and its regional foreign policy – to identify key trends which will shape Pakistan's future.

Keywords: Pakistan; political Islam; minorities; politics; floods; economics; US; foreign policy

Introduction

The last decade for Pakistanis has been exceptionally difficult. The people of Pakistan have been confronted by natural disasters, sustained terrorist and other political violence, political instability, economic misery and social strife. Despite a welcomed return to democracy in 2008, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leadership continues to battle for survival rather than focusing on resolving Pakistan's myriad problems. The PPP-government, led by President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani, has long been battered by allegations of corruption and ineptitude. Over the last year, the civilian government's confrontation with the army, judiciary, political and religious opposition has intensified. Many observers are dubious that this government will serve the length of its five-year term. Equally problematic, Pakistan's relations with the United States seem irreparable with both countries conflicting over preferred policies in Afghanistan and the region.

While the political parties' low standing is not unusual, the normally stalwart Army has sustained repeated humiliations in recent years. Army Chief Kayani has struggled to recuperate the image of the army both within and beyond the rank and officer corps after some eight years of Musharraf-led cooperation with the United

*Corresponding author. Email: ccf33@georgetown.edu

States and unpopular military operations against Pakistanis. Just as the army's standing was improving, it was humiliated in May 2011 when the United States conducted a Navy SEAL operation on Osama Bin Laden's compound in the military cantonment town of Abbottabad itself, the home of Pakistan's Military Academy. The Americans were able to insert several helicopters, stage a 40-min fire fight and abscond with Bin Laden's corpse before the army even detected the invasion. Pakistanis were disturbed at several levels. How, many wondered, could Bin Laden be ensconced in the cantonment towns without being detected? Was their military and intelligence agency incompetent or willingly harbouring the world's most notorious terrorist?

Rather than taking advantage of the army's weakness to assert greater civilian control over the beleaguered organization and its intelligence wing, the ISI, Pakistan's civilian leadership rallied around the military brass and put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the United States for violating Pakistan's sovereignty.

The Bin Laden raid came on the heels of the Raymond Davis affair, simmering tensions over US drone strikes, and Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban. While Pakistan was still reeling from the humiliation, US/NATO executed a flawed attack on the Pakistani border check-point at Salala, in which 24 Pakistani army personnel died. That attack mobilized Pakistan to cease shipments of military goods through Pakistan for Afghanistan, forced the Americans to vacate Shamsi airfield from which it launched drone strikes, and commenced a parliamentary commission to re-evaluate what security ties Pakistan would have with the United States and on which terms. The United States, reflecting cumulative outrage, has cut its military aid to Pakistan and is considering a range of further punitive measures.

With the United States and Pakistan entering highly partisan election processes, leaders in both countries are incentivized to be less compromising, exacerbating the deepening political polarisation and rendering repair of the bilateral relationship unlikely anytime soon.

With the ongoing challenges to the civilian government, the next few years promise further uncertainty and change. While Parliamentary and Presidential elections are slated for 2013, they could happen sooner if the present government's troubles become overwhelming. The outcome of those elections is far from predictable with the trilateral merry-go-round of the PPP, PML-N, and PML-Q, now broken open by the gathering momentum of Imran Khan's Pakistan *Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI) party and by the return of former President and Army Chief Pervez Musharraf to the political fray.

This shake-up of the political landscape is coinciding with the ends of the terms of office in 2013 of both the Chief of the Army Staff General Kayani and the Director General of the ISI General Pasha, both of whom had their tenures extended ostensibly at the initiative of Prime Minister Gilani. This will open the door to significant realignments of the civilian-military relationship, and thus of the overall governance of Pakistan, which is likely to be informed by the settling of personal scores and by the recalibration of relations with the judiciary.

These domestic changes are unfolding in the context of the Afghanistan drawdown decision announced by President Obama in December 2010 which should see US and NATO troops begin to disengage from large-scale counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan by 2014. At the same time, US efforts to negotiate some end to the conflict with the Taliban directly leave many regional actors wary about the prospect for civil war in Afghanistan, and what role Pakistan may play as the

international presence draws down and as it seeks to deny India advantages in Afghanistan.

The United States is currently trying to navigate its drawdown in Afghanistan amidst abject uncertainty about how it can or will engage Pakistan in the near future with many in Washington increasingly advocating for ‘containing’ Pakistan as the US dependence upon Pakistan diminishes with the drawdown of military operations in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the bad state of bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan security communities has, paradoxically, reduced the costs for Pakistan of overt support for the Afghan Taliban, and Pakistan is likely to press its advantages in Afghanistan with all the assets it has in play.

Regionally it is clear that lead states – China, India, Russia and Iran – are already jostling for influence in Afghanistan and the wider region, raising questions about the US role post-2014 and the potential reorientation of Pakistan’s foreign policy in the region.

This is consequently an opportune moment to reflect on the present state of Pakistan and to focus on a sub-set of issues which offer important insight into the dynamics which are likely to be crucial in shaping Pakistan over the next few years. In thinking through these issues it is invaluable to have been able to draw on a set of recent studies of contemporary Pakistan which have provided sound vantage points from which to view Pakistan and to orientate analysis. The studies in particular of Cohen et al. (2011), Leiven (2011), Lodhi (2011), Malik (2010), Shaikh (2009), and Talbot (2012) have provided profound insight into the complexities of Pakistan, laid to rest the idea of Pakistan as a failed or failing state, helped explain Pakistan’s ‘surprising stability’, and structured the discourse (academic and policy) about plausible futures for Pakistan. It has been equally valuable to have the work of Ali (2009), Gul (2010), Nawaz (2009), Rashid (2012), Reidel (2011), Samad (2011), Schofield (2010), and Shahzad (2011) to map out the security landscape in Pakistan.

With these orientations in place the six papers assembled here are intended collectively to give attention to aspects of Pakistan’s predicament which are under-analysed but crucial to understanding and promoting the stability and security of Pakistan over the next few years.

In the first of these Joshua White focuses on the dynamics of political Islam in Pakistan to deconstruct the contemporary trope that two camps in Pakistan – extremists and a ‘silent’ moderate majority – are struggling in an unequal battle for the soul of Pakistan. White argues that the shorthand term Islamic ‘moderate’ is a serious analytic impediment to understanding the richly variegated pattern of political Islam in Pakistan and the different ways in which Pakistanis accommodate Islam. He argues as a result that greater clarity and precision about the complex meaning of ‘moderate’ in contemporary Pakistan would open the door to an understanding that militancy and Islamic extremism *are* being challenged, often in unexpected ways and from unexpected quarters, by moderate Islamic voices in Pakistan, even if these voices do not fit neatly into a western concept of moderate, or divide neatly into distinct camps.

One of the most appalling expressions of Islamic extremism in Pakistan in the past 12 months has been the murders of Salmaan Taseer, the businessman and PPP Punjab governor, and Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, the Roman Catholic Minister of Minority Affairs. Both men were gunned down in Islamabad in the first quarter of 2011 for their support for the amendment or repeal of Pakistan’s widely criticized

shariah ‘blasphemy laws’ and for their support of the Christian woman Aasiya Noreen (Bibi), sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. In the second paper of this collection Shaun Gregory explores the background and context of the murders of Taseer and Bhatti and seeks to understand the phenomena of the widespread support across Pakistan for their killing and their killers. Through the lens of the Christian minority Gregory explains the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan by looking at how relations with their Muslim majority neighbours and with the Pakistani state are structured by historical, cultural, religious, social, political, and legal issues. He argues that in these are to be found the explanations for the widespread antipathy towards Taseer and Bhatti, an antipathy which can in no sense be said to be confined to Islamic extremists. He argues consequently that the experience of the Christian minority supports the proposition that Pakistan is moving in a conservative Islamic direction.

In the third paper the focus shifts to the politics of Pakistan. Alexander Evans considers the prospects for change and continuity in the Pakistani political landscape in terms of how politics functions rather than in terms of the specific actors who occupy positions of power. Drawing on historical analysis, and on deep insight into the contemporary political dynamics of Pakistan, Evans argues that continuity and gradualism are ‘hard-wired’ into Pakistani politics due to the overarching importance of patronage networks. These networks are not immune from social, economic and political change although these tend to reshape rather than restructure the system. He further argues that Pakistani nationalism, despite some dissent from within the Balochi community, also functions as an important force for stability and as a brake on rapid political change, a point reinforced by the failures of either the earthquake of the 2005, or the devastating floods of 2010 and 2011 to provoke significant political change. While accepting that the patronage political system does little to address social injustice or to undercut political violence, Evans nevertheless concludes that it serves as an important bulwark against the influence of Islamism.

While, as Evans concludes, the floods of 2010 and 2011 appear to have had little or no significant direct political implications for Pakistan, the nature and scale of the floods – particularly the 2010 floods which impacted 20% of the Pakistani landmass at its highpoint and directly affected the lives of around 20 million Pakistanis – did have important and far-reaching economic consequences. In the fourth paper the economist Robert Looney provides a detailed economic overview of the impact of the floods. He first reflects on the complexities of seeking to assess the economic impact of the floods and then presents a model to understand that complexity. Looking at short-term and long-term impacts, Looney considers three economic sectors – agricultural, manufacturing, and services – before looking at the implications of these for fiscal, monetary policy, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with dire conclusions. He then considers the social dimensions by looking at the floods’ impact on poverty, refugees and the impact on the rural neo-feudal system which operates across much of Pakistan. The limited impact on the latter would seem to reinforce Evans’ assessments. Looney concludes that an aid-based recovery strategy for flood victims is likely to be less successful than one based on stimulating and supporting entrepreneurial activity.

The final papers of the collection look beyond the national context to Pakistan’s relations with the United States and to the wider regional context. In the fifth paper C. Christine Fair, looks back over a decade of US–Pakistan relations since 9/11 in

order to understand the particular complexities and tensions of a tumultuously bad year for US–Pakistan relations in 2011.

With a foundation in the historical continuities of US relations with South Asia pre-9/11, Fair assesses US policy failures post 9/11 in particular in the conceptual decoupling of Pakistan from the regional context and the narrow perception of Pakistan as a theatre and instrument of US objectives in the ‘war on terror’. Fair argues that these US policy mistakes pushed Pakistan in some unwelcome directions, particularly into supporting the Afghan Taliban and in supporting Islamic terrorist groups as instruments of state policy. Fair shows that US–Pakistan relations have been on a deteriorating trajectory for some time, culminating in the disastrous confrontations in 2011. She argues that the present impasse has no ready solutions and that Pakistan is drifting towards pariah status, and is in danger of becoming an ‘Islamist variant of North Korea, inward looking and combative’. This she argues is likely to have hugely consequential implications for regional and international security.

In the final paper Lisa Curtis looks at Pakistan’s regional foreign policy in the light of US–Pakistani tensions. She argues that Pakistan is rethinking its regional relations and in particular has begun to restructure its relationships with China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in anticipation of declining partnership with the United States, and driven in part by Pakistan’s deepening economic woes, including those resulting from the 2010 and 2011 floods.

Curtis argues that China is not presently willing to bankroll Pakistan or yet to step fully into the kind of security relationship Pakistan has formerly enjoyed with the United States and that consequently Pakistan will retain an interest in good relations with the US, above all for economic support and military aid. But Pakistan is also beginning to build longer-term regional relations which will reduce its reliance on (and thus the leverage of) the United States, and which will broaden its partnership options in the context of rising Chinese power and weakening US reach. An important element of this will remain Pakistan’s ability to play its ‘friends’ off against each other – the US against China, and Saudi Arabia against Iran. Curtis concludes with the assessment that the economic focus of Pakistan’s renewed engagement with its regional neighbours may yet provide a means to help Pakistan escape its present economic woes.

The debates at the heart of this special issue – understanding moderate political Islam in Pakistan, the erosion of Jinnah’s plural tolerant vision for the country, the stability or otherwise of Pakistan’s political culture, the economic challenges of the country in the wake of the floods, Pakistan’s turbulent relationship with the United States, and the restructuring of Pakistan’s regional relations – are amongst the most crucial for the future of Pakistan.

The years ahead for Pakistan are likely to be as turbulent and event filled as the past decade and it will remain of overarching importance for the regional states and the international community to continue to seek to understand Pakistan and, where possible, to work with Pakistan in the collective interest. Change seems imminent in Pakistan and the direction and pace of that change will be informed in important ways by the character of political Islam which shapes the polity, by the relationship between social justice and political stability, by the stabilities and instabilities of the economy, by whether or not the US and Pakistan can find a more constructive relationship, and by the role Pakistan chooses and is able to play in the region. The papers which follow offer some tentative responses to those questions.

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