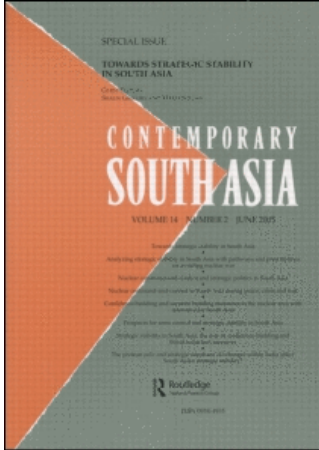


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Shaun Gregory; C. Christine Fair

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# The cohesion and stability of Pakistan: an introduction to the special issue

SHAUN GREGORY & C. CHRISTINE FAIR

**ABSTRACT** *Pakistan is becoming increasingly important in international security calculus, and the future trajectory of this nuclear weapons' state on the front line of the 'War on Terror' is of profound significance not only for South Asia but also for the international community. This article introduces an inaugural set of papers from the Pakistan Security Research Unit, established in 2007 at the University of Bradford, UK, focused on the cohesion and stability of Pakistan. The papers look at both the role of external players such as the United States and Afghanistan and at internal dynamics in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on the role of the Pakistan military, on Kashmir and on jihadis (self-styled holy warriors) in the tribal belt.*

Pakistan has been termed a persistently failing state; that is, a state that exhibits many of the features of a 'failed state'<sup>1</sup> but that somehow manages not to collapse and disintegrate.<sup>2</sup> As doyen of South Asia Stephen Cohen wrote in 2002, the Pakistani state has been failing for many years and the collapse of the state would 'be a multidimensional geostrategic calamity, generating enormous uncertainties', but 'it is simply too big and potentially too dangerous for the international community to allow it simply to fail'.<sup>3</sup> Once again, analysts fear that Pakistan is on the brink of disaster and even cautious voices are airing the possibility that this time the state may be unable to draw back from the edge of the abyss.

Certainly the signs are ominous: the Taliban are back in force along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border; the power of pro-Taliban militants and tribal groups is growing within Pakistan; subnational violence—including the relatively new phenomenon of suicide bombing—has reached Islamabad and Rawalpindi; Al Qaeda are resurgent within Pakistan; the Pakistan Army is bruised, weary and riven by internal dissent as a result of its operations in the tribal areas and the civil conflict in Balochistan. A series of miscalculations by General President Pervez Musharraf in 2007 has precipitated widening dissatisfaction with his militarised

Correspondence: Shaun Gregory, Pakistan Security Research Unit, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP, UK. E-mail: s.r.gregory@bradford.ac.uk

C. Christine Fair, RAND, 1200 S. Hayes St., Arlington, VA 22202-5050, USA. E-mail: c\_christine\_fair@yahoo.com

governance, and has expanded the call for democracy. In an effort to salvage Musharraf's government, the United States has pressured him to increasingly accommodate democracy. At the timing of writing, Pakistan is confronting its most serious crisis of governance and state legitimacy since 1971. Faced with a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and undeniable evidence that Pakistani territory shelters the same, Musharraf is under severe pressure from the United States for making insufficient progress in the 'War on Terror'. Offstage, voices continue to be raised about Pakistan's ongoing role in proliferating nuclear weapons technology,<sup>4</sup> and about the destabilising impact of Pakistan within South Asia and across the international system.

For Washington and London, Pakistan's best hope appears to rest on a political deal that seeks broadly to sustain the *status quo* through continued support of the Pakistan military in key policy areas and thus—at least for the moment—of a weakened Musharraf. That support has clearly evolved in at least two directions: one has been to encourage the revival of Benazir Bhutto's secular Pakistan People's Party as a vehicle to broaden the military's political base and provide a veneer of democratic legitimacy; the other has been to reach directly into the military (to individuals such as recently appointed Vice-Chief of Army Staff Lt General Ashfaq Kiani and newly appointed Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency Lt General Nadeem Taj) to give the United States policy options beyond Musharraf. The pieces on the Pakistan chessboard have therefore been reorganised into what some are casting as a potentially decisive endgame between secular pluralist pro-western forces and religious illiberal anti-western forces. However, this dichotomy is artificial and grossly over-simplistic and, having put the pieces in play, the United States will not now be able to control how the game unfolds.

At this point of transition—to the degree that word captures the elements of continuity and change—it is essential to understand how Pakistan has arrived at this latest point of crisis, the dimensions of that crisis and, in particular, to assess the present state of cohesion and stability in the country. Without these insights, the risk must be that broad continuity of policy, even as the 'least-worst' option, will simply deliver more of the same, compounding Pakistan's problems and piling error upon error. A richer understanding, while not necessarily leading to policy changes, might at least facilitate the nuancing of policy to mitigate some of the least desirable outcomes in some areas and support meaningful progress in others.

As a contribution to this discourse, the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU)<sup>5</sup> was established at the University of Bradford, UK, in March 2007. Its aim is to bring together a large group of leading international scholars, writers, journalists and former policy-makers specialising in the security of Pakistan and, in turn, link to a far more extensive global community of organisations and individuals working in this field. The work of the PSRU focuses on three inter-related themes; the cohesion and stability of Pakistan, extremism and terrorism, and nuclear weapons issues. This special issue of *Contemporary South Asia*, written, in all but one case, by PSRU associates, is organised around the first of these themes.

### The special issue

Pakistan has long cast itself as the victim of external forces, and any analysis of the country's current predicament must begin by engaging with these perceptions. One of the most important set of questions this raises is to what degree is the present crisis in Pakistan the working through of external pressures and dynamics over which the state has had little or no control? To what extent is the crisis to be understood as the consequence of policy choices that were either wholly or largely in the hands of Pakistan's ruling elite?

In 'Leverage and largesse: Pakistan's post-9/11 partnership with America', the first of the papers in this collection, Robert Hathaway provides an overview of the US–Pakistani relationship since 9/11, and seeks to understand what impact American policy towards Pakistan, and the Musharraf Government's close formal alignment with the United States, has had on Pakistan's cohesion and stability. Hathaway argues that, in important respects, the partnership has brought the Musharraf Government substantial benefits, including international legitimacy, the lifting of US sanctions, debt relief, access to sophisticated technology, a positive American role in reducing tensions with India, as well as massive amounts of economic and military assistance. Yet, despite all this, the vast majority of the Pakistani people presently have an unfavourable view of the United States, in part because of its military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, but in good measure precisely because the policies of the George W. Bush administration have served to sustain Musharraf's increasingly unpopular hold on political power. Hathaway argues that, for fear of exacerbating Pakistani apprehensions of abandonment and pushing Pakistan towards coercive policies, the United States has shied away from seeking to constrain the Musharraf regime as it might wish. As a consequence, the Bush administration failed to spell out at what point Pakistani misbehaviour would cause the United States to rethink the virtues of offering Musharraf's government a virtual blank check. Hathaway concludes that the United States, as a consequence, has been party to the deteriorating situation in Pakistan and, in particular, has failed to lay the groundwork for an enduring bilateral relationship with Pakistan, which serves American interests, after Musharraf.

In 'Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences', Marvin Weinbaum and Jonathan Harder assert that Pakistan's Afghan policies have had a deep impact on the former's political landscape and society. They examine how Pakistan has pursued a two-track foreign policy toward Afghanistan that has often encompassed incompatible goals. Weinbaum and Harder argue that Pakistan's leaders have frequently ignored the long-term and wider implications of their policies, both for Pakistan and for the region more broadly. Their analysis is particularly insightful in exploring the consequences of Pakistan's Afghan policies for Pakistan's national identity and social cohesion, and the way in which Islamabad's approach to the challenge of Pashtun nationalism has contributed to the development of ethnic assertiveness and Islamic radicalism. Weinbaum and Harder also explore the role of Pakistan's Afghan policies in transforming Pakistan's border regions with Afghanistan and the wider implications of these changes for the Pakistan

state's legitimacy and authority, not least in relation to the Pakistan Government's ambivalence towards militant extremists. Finally, the authors consider the costs and rewards of Pakistan's Afghan policies internationally, Pakistan's strategic partnership with the United States, including its impact on the domestic economy and public attitudes, receive particular attention.

Weinbaum and Harder conclude that Pakistan's Afghan policies have profoundly and negatively impacted Pakistan's political stability and social cohesion, arguing that these policies carry a heavy responsibility for intensifying Pakistan's ethnic fissures, weakening it economically, fuelling religious radicalism, and bringing about an attenuation of the state's legitimate authority. This in turn, they argue, has affected the balance of political power within Pakistan, most of all by reinforcing military ascendance. Further, Weinbaum and Harder argue that, in formulating its Afghan policies, Pakistan's leaders seem often to ignore the long-term and wider implications of their decisions both at home and abroad. Preoccupied with foreign policy goals such as achieving American military aid, gaining strategic depth and avoiding encirclement, Islamabad has turned a blind eye to domestic radicalisation and the impact of this radicalisation on its ability to govern within its own borders. It has acted too often out of convenience rather than conviction in choosing its allies, with the government's credibility among its own people a frequent casualty. Pakistan has also failed to recognise the inherent contradictions of its two-track policy, between reserving a Pashtun card in the event of a failing Afghanistan and normalising its economic and political relations for the benefit of both countries.

In the next paper, 'The role of the military in the cohesion and stability of Pakistan', attention turns to the internal dynamics of Pakistan. Shaun Gregory and James Revill examine the effects of Musharraf's period of military rule in terms of the cohesion and stability of Pakistan. To do this, the paper analyses the military's role in four indicative areas; that is, democracy and civil society, provincial state cohesion, religious extremism, and the national economy. Their findings challenge the shibboleth that military rule brings social cohesion and political stability to Pakistan in times of crisis.

In relation to democracy and civil society, Gregory and Revill argue that the Musharraf Government has worked assiduously to suppress secular pluralist political opposition and civil society, take either direct or indirect control of non-military state institutions, severely curtail the freedom of the press, and co-opt religious political parties at the state and federal level to shore up military rule. The consequences of this have been to marginalise secular pluralists political forces in Pakistan, vacating much of the political space for colonisation by religious parties and extremists. Gregory and Revill then discuss the extent to which confrontational military policies towards the provinces have contributed to the escalation in violence in the North West Frontier Province, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and Balochistan in particular, and have led to the fraying of the federation. They argue that the integrity of the federal state is under serious strain, perhaps the most serious since 1971. Gregory and Revill also examine the Musharraf Government's ambiguous attitude to religious extremism by considering the

Pakistan military's handling of extremist sectarian groups, the Lal Masjid incident, the revitalised Taliban, and the Pakistan Army's support for the Islamist Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal. Finally, Gregory and Revill briefly discuss the Pakistan military's predation of Pakistan's economy and argue that, notwithstanding the strong macro-economic performance of Pakistan and some positive indicators, the military's kleptocratic expansion into the economic realm has emerged as a serious impediment to trickle-down wealth redistribution in Pakistan and thus to better micro-economic indices.

Echoing the findings of Hathaway, as well as those of Weinbaum and Harder, Gregory and Revill conclude that, while the United States and Afghanistan undoubtedly shape Pakistani policy in some areas, no such external calculus drove the Pakistan military to repress secular politics and civil society, to disregard the legitimate claims of the federal states, to court religious extremists and terrorists, and to assume control of a large slice of the Pakistani economy. Rather, they argue, the explanation for all these actions lies almost entirely in the determination of the Pakistan military—and the privileged elite it supports—to place its own interests before those of the people of Pakistan. This elite aggrandisement has had, and will continue to have, a deeply corrosive impact on the cohesion and stability of Pakistan.

The economic theme and the focus on the military is picked up in 'Pakistan's economic and security dilemma: expanded defence expenditures and the relative governance syndrome', in which Robert Looney and Robert McNab provide a comprehensive and detailed economic examination of the relationship between defence expenditure and economic performance in Pakistan. According to the authors, statistical studies have typically suggested that, depending on the circumstances, defence expenditures could either aid or hinder economic growth. However, these studies have usually been silent on the key role governance structures played in affecting the environments in which defence expenditures occur. Looney and McNab's findings for Pakistan suggest that, unfortunately, defence expenditures have outrun governance to the extent that their impacts on the economy are negative. Furthermore, they argue that this effect is likely to persist even if defence expenditures are significantly reduced.

For Looney and McNab, the above findings serve as a significant warning for Pakistan as to the tradeoffs associated with the current and projected increases in defence expenditures; in particular, that the capacity for, and level of democratic governance has suffered under Musharraf's government, further inhibiting the ability of Pakistan to manage increases in defence expenditures. Drawing from these findings, the authors believe that, if Pakistan continues to aggressively modernise its armed forces, it will at some point need to mobilise increasing amounts of revenue. As this revenue is unlikely to come from additional taxes, given Pakistan's historically poor performing tax system, it will be raised from either shifting resources within the current budget, debt or from significant increases in external aid. Looney and McNab assert that a destructive cycle is in play: their findings (and the literature) suggest that the opportunity cost of increased defence expenditures will be relatively high in the long run and, as a

consequence, Pakistan's economic infrastructure will continue to deteriorate, further degrading its ability to generate economic growth and increasing domestic instability. This destructive cycle of increased defence expenditures—reduced economic growth could be mitigated if Pakistan is able to increase institutional capacity and quality, yet, as instability rises, the ability and willingness of the government to implement governance reforms is likely to decline.

Ironically, argue Looney and McNab, one of the most effective means of improving growth prospects—and hence security—may be denied to Pakistan due to the almost singular focus of Islamabad (as well as Washington in terms of US policy towards Pakistan) on security-related issues. Sadly, the short-sighted diversion of scarce resources to increased defence expenditures may, in the long-run, destabilise Pakistan and create even greater levels of insecurity in the region. Looney and McNab conclude that improved governance is the only option open to the Pakistani authorities in their attempts to neutralise the adverse impacts of military expenditures.

This issue concludes with two papers that examine different aspects of two of Pakistan's most important security issues. In the first of these, 'Kashmiri separatism and Pakistan in the current global environment', Victoria Schofield reviews the extent to which, following the Kargil conflict and 9/11, it has become difficult for Pakistan to continue its covert support of the Kashmiri separatist movement while at the same time assisting the United States and its allies in the global War on Terror. In her paper, she explains the origins of Pakistan's support for the Kashmiri separatist movement, and examines the potential that the dispute between India and Pakistan over the state of Jammu and Kashmir (still has to act as a de-stabilising factor in Pakistan and in the region. Schofield argues that the Kashmir issue no longer has the same explosive characteristics it had 20 years or even 10 years ago, and that a genuine attempt has been made by the Pakistan Government to curtail cross-border terrorism. This, she states, has not been entirely successful, mainly because the militant groups have succeeded in establishing a momentum of their own and because, after 60 years, there remains a general reluctance among the Pakistani elite, particularly the army, to let go of the Kashmir issue without some tangible political gain. Notwithstanding the potential of Kashmir to reignite conflict between India and Pakistan, the issue appears, at least for the moment and in the context of the latter's preoccupation with the conflict to its west, to have been drained of some of its potency in the Pakistani polity, and thus to have declined as a force for unity in the country.

In this issue's concluding paper, 'Who Are Pakistan's militants: what says the data?', Christine Fair presents preliminary findings from a survey of 141 militant households in Pakistan, commissioned by the US Institute of Peace in 2004. Contrary to popular belief, the militants in this sample are well educated and are not predominantly from Pakistan's religious seminaries. However, conditional upon being well educated, they evidence unemployment rates that are substantially higher than Pakistan's average in recent years. Fair argues that this is probably the result of group selection effects because most of those militants served and died in Kashmir where operational requirements demand higher aptitude operatives. Had

the sample included more persons who served and died in Afghanistan where operational requirements are relatively more relaxed, more *madrassa* (Islamic school) participation may have been observed. For Fair, militancy in Pakistan is a particularly challenging policy problematic because such groups have been state actors, even if in recent years some of those groups have turned against their erstwhile sponsors. Thus, militancy is unlikely to disappear until Pakistan makes a strategic decision to abandon the use of proxies as tools of foreign policy.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, at this juncture, Pakistan may be unable to develop and prosecute effective policy measures to contain these groups and the risk they pose to Pakistan, the region and the international community. Moreover, it is unclear what, if any, role the international community can take in helping Pakistan change course. At a minimum, it must be willing to persuade both India and Afghanistan to resolve their border disputes with Pakistan in ways that recognise Pakistan's equities (unfortunately, something neither are likely to do). The international community must also be more pro-active in conditioning the security calculus of Pakistan's strategic elite by re-optimising both the kind of aid it provides to Pakistan and the conditions under which it does so.

## Notes and references

1. For more on this, see Aidan Hehir, *Is Pakistan a Failed State?*, Pakistan Security Research Unit Briefing Paper No 15, June 2007, (<http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief15finalised1.pdf>).
2. See, for instance, Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p 327; Larry Jay Diamond, 'Is Pakistan the (reverse) wave of the future', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 11, No 3, July 2000, pp 91 – 106; and Pamela Constable, 'Pakistan's predicament', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 12, No 1, January 2001, pp 15 – 29.
3. Stephen Cohen, 'The nation and the state of Pakistan', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 25, No 3, 2002, pp 109, 118.
4. Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark, *Deception: Pakistan, the United States and the Global Nuclear Weapons Conspiracy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007).
5. For more information, see the PSRU website, (<http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/display/ssispsru/Home>).