



PAKISTAN: REGIONAL RIVALRIES, LOCAL IMPACTS

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and Gareth Price*

DIIS REPORT 2012:12

This report is published in collaboration with



CHATHAM HOUSE

© Copenhagen 2012, the author and DIIS
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Cover photo: Protesting Hazara Killings, Press Club,
Islamabad, Pakistan, April 2012 © Mahvish Ahmad

Layout and maps: Allan Lind Jørgensen, ALJ Design
Printed in Denmark by Vesterkopi AS

ISBN 978-87-7605-517-2 (pdf)

ISBN 978-87-7605-518-9 (print)

Price: DKK 50.00 (VAT included)

DIIS publications can be downloaded

free of charge from www.diis.dk

Hardcopies can be ordered at www.diis.dk

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Abstract

What connects China to the challenges of separatism in Balochistan? Why is India important when it comes to water shortages in Pakistan? How does jihadism in Punjab and Sindh differ from religious militancy in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)? Why do Iran and Saudi Arabia matter for the challenges faced by Pakistan in Gilgit–Baltistan? These are some of the questions that are raised and discussed in the analytical contributions of this report.

Overall, the present report aims to illuminate the regional context of Pakistan's challenges, the rivalry and alliances between powerful actors in South and Central Asia and Pakistan's place therein. The analytical contributions address the interplay between the macro and micro level conflicts which undermine the resilience of Pakistan. The rationale behind this perspective is that a comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's challenges requires a consideration of both these levels and, not least, of the dynamics between them.

The report consists of an initial overview of the regional conflicts playing out within Pakistan, focusing particularly on the impacts of Afghanistan, China, Russia, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia. This 'outside-in' analysis is followed by six papers that take their points of departure in local conflict zones in Pakistan, analysing the dynamics between the local and regional tensions. The papers focus on selected provinces, administrative divisions and urban centres in Pakistan, namely: (i) Balochistan, (ii) FATA, (iii) Pakistan-administered Kashmir, (iv) Gilgit–Baltistan, (v) Punjab and Sindh, and (vi) urban Sindh. Thematically they touch upon issues of contested boundaries, sectarianism, and militancy in Pakistan.

The papers were originally prepared for the international seminar, 'Pakistan – the Impact of Regional Rivalries' held on 8 May 2012 and convened in London in a collaboration between Chatham House and the Danish Institute for International Studies. The views expressed in the contributions are those of the individual authors and are not representative of Chatham House or the Danish Institute of International Studies.*

* A meeting summary with recommendations for the international donor community is available at <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/080512summary.pdf>

Acknowledgements

Besides the panellists of the seminar ‘Pakistan – the Impact of Regional Rivalries’ who are contributing to this report, we want to thank keynote speaker Riaz Mohammad Khan, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, and the discussants at the panels, who enriched the perspectives on the themes taken up in this report: Abbas Nasir, Dr. Mariam Abou Zahab and Dr. Robert Bradnock. We also want to thank Rosheen Kabraji and Maja Greenwood for their priceless assistance in the process of planning the seminar and putting together this report.



Pakistan – a stage for regional rivalry

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Introduction¹

Pakistan cannot be addressed in a geopolitical vacuum. Understanding the national priorities and dilemmas of the country demands an understanding of its regional context and the impact of neighbouring countries. Whereas there is a high degree of scholarly and public awareness of the devastating impact of great power games on Afghanistan as a result of Afghanistan's central position in the Cold War endgame, Pakistan's similar position as a central stage for regional rivalries has been less analysed.² This does not mean that Pakistan is not an active player itself, with foreign political priorities of its own. Rather it means that an analysis of the regional power play and its impacts on Pakistan can improve our understanding of the dilemmas of a country that is frequently accused of playing a double game in terms of its relationship with the US in what was initially dubbed the 'War on Terror' in 2001.

The present analysis provides an overview of the regional contentions playing out within Pakistan focusing particularly on the impacts of Afghanistan, China, Russia, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It discusses the major challenges Pakistan faces and the way regional relations and rivalries have compounded these issues under five headings: (a) the troubled borders, (b) ethnic secessionism, (c) the presence of foreign fighters and indigenous militancy, (d) tensions over water and territory and, finally, (e) ideological battles. The collection of papers following this analysis adds a more 'local' dimension to the issues addressed here by focusing separately on selected provinces, administrative divisions and urban centres in Pakistan, and their specific challenges.

Troubled borders

Historically, Pakistan's reputation as America's 'most allied ally' in Asia has significantly affected its relationship with India and also periodically affected its relationship

¹ We want to thank Lars Erslev Andersen, Farzana Shaikh, Janne Bjerre and Ulla Holm for their helpful comments on drafts of this chapter.

² However, some recent analyses focus on aspects of the regional rivalry playing out in Pakistan. For the Afghanistan–Pakistan–India relationship see Qandeel Siddique (2011). *Pakistan's future policy towards Afghanistan: A look at strategic depth, militant movements and the role of India and the US*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies. For Iran–Pakistan relations see Janne Bjerre (2011). *Strained Alliances – Iran's troubled relations to Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies.

with Iran. It has had less impact on its relationship with China, however. Not long after Partition from India in 1947 Pakistan turned, for reasons of security, to the US. The US was in search of strategic partners, given the region's proximity to the Soviet Union and China, while Pakistan faced security concerns owing to its fraught relationship with India. This led to the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with the United States, which was signed in 1954.³ The alliance was strengthened during the Cold War when Pakistan came to share US ideological opposition to the communist regime in Afghanistan and its sponsorship by the Soviet Union.⁴ Mistrust has characterised India–Pakistan relations since Partition, and the heavy amounts of resources allocated to the Pakistani military are a symptom of this mistrust; the Indian army being considerably mightier in terms of manpower than Pakistan's. Since Partition the two countries have fought three wars (1947, 1965 and 1971), as well as the more limited armed battle in the Kargil district of Kashmir in 1999, known as the 'Kargil Conflict'.

Pakistan's border with Afghanistan is another cause of Pakistani insecurity and bilateral tension. The Durand Line that separates the two countries was drawn in 1893, but it separated communities and tribes despite their shared kinship and common ethnicity, language, religion and culture. Pakistan inherited the Durand Line after Partition but it has never been formally agreed or ratified. Living with this uncertainty, Pakistan has been dependent on a friendly government in Kabul, which explains why Pakistan has always had an interest in who governs the country, both in the aftermath of the Cold War, and in relation to the anticipated NATO withdrawal in 2014.

These cross-cutting regional rivalries and insecurities, notably with India and Afghanistan, help explain why Pakistan has prioritised a strong military and, in turn, neglected the building of democratic institutions and pursuit of socio-economic development.⁵ This neglect points to the fact that regional differences and power balances have oftentimes served as an excuse to enable the military to justify its dominant role in Pakistan.

³ This agreement meant that Pakistan was used as a base for United States military reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory. Pakistan, in return, received large amounts of economic and military assistance. The programme of military assistance continued until the 1965 Indo–Pakistan War when the US placed an embargo on arms shipments to Pakistan and India.

⁴ For a comprehensive study of US–Pakistan relations since Independence see Dennis Kux (2001). *The United States and Pakistan, 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies*. Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre.

⁵ For the democratic fragility of Pakistan see Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2012). *Bottom-up Pakistan: Bringing Context and Local Culture into Aid Thinking*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies (forthcoming).

Pakistan's relations with Iran have historically been tense due both to Pakistan's alliance with the US and Pakistan's support for the Taliban in the aftermath of the Cold War (Iran and India have both favoured anti-Taliban forces). Paradoxically, their shared problem of Baloch secessionism, as explained below, has also been a source of tension in their relationship. Though there have been challenges connected to cross-border militancy, the Pakistan–China relationship has – despite the two countries' ideological differences and Pakistan's relationship with the US – been the least conflict-ridden.

Regional rivalries in which Pakistan is not a primary actor itself also play out on the Pakistani stage, and through proxy militancy and foreign money flows Pakistan has been the object of a high degree of external intervention. The heavy Saudi and Wahhabi involvement in Pakistan to counter the influence of Shiite Iran is a prime example of this (as will be elaborated below). At the same time, rivalry between India and China also has spillover effects in Pakistan, and the steady involvement and interest of the US in the region has always meant that Pakistan (like Afghanistan) has been a centre stage of regional and global power play.

Ethnic secessionism and the regional game

The border area between Pakistan's tribal areas and Afghanistan has historically been the site of Pashtun separatism in Pakistan. Though Pakistan's support for the Taliban in the aftermath of the Cold War had an ideological dimension, a Taliban-governed Afghanistan also held advantages for Pakistan. The Taliban leaders, who initially came to Pakistan as mujahedeen refugees from Afghanistan (escaping from the communist Afghan president Muhammad Daud) were granted amnesty during the 1960s. This left them favourably disposed towards a country where they had lived and where they received periodic madrassa education (most of them were trained at the Darul Uloom Haqqania which is situated in the small town of Akora Khattak in the Khyber Pakhtunkwa province of Pakistan).⁶ At the same time, the religious ideology of the Taliban (a predominantly Pashtun movement) also served to provide ideological competition to a pre-existing and vigorous Pashtun separatism oriented in favour of a socialist and secular order. Against the background of the trauma of losing Bangladesh in 1971, Pakistan feared the irredentist claims of Pashtun nationalists who did not recognise the Durand Line and wanted independence or unity with their Afghan counterparts. The Pashtun nationalist movement has historically played a significant

⁶ See Ahmed Rashid (2001). *The Taliban: the Story of the Afghan Warlords*. London: Pan Books.

role in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, which constitutes the ‘settled areas’ bordering the tribal areas of Pakistan’s north-western border. The history of the Pashtun nationalists can be traced back to the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, which launched a campaign against the British in 1929, and later allied themselves with the Indian National Congress. Due to their historical connections with the Congress, the Khudai Khidmatgars were not well regarded by the Pakistani state.⁷ In the 1970s they melted into the National Awami Party (now the Awami National Party, ANP) that represented the Pashtun nationalist movements (White, 2008: 95–96).⁸ The Awami National Party has also been associated with Russia since the 1970s and was a loyal supporter of the Soviet Union, which brought the party into conflict with official Pakistani policy in support of the Taliban.⁹

Further south along the western border, Pakistan faces another, similar, challenge in the province of Balochistan. Like the Pashtuns, the Baloch are also a cross-border ethnic community, living in an area encompassing southern Afghanistan, south-eastern Iran and south-western Pakistan. Among the different irredentist claims made by ethnic communities across Pakistan, controlling the Baloch uprisings has been one of the most difficult challenges for Pakistan since the loss of Bangladesh. Baloch grievances against Islamabad have ranged from the inequitable sharing of profits accruing from the exploitation of Balochistan’s rich gas reserves to the lack of Baloch participation in development projects earmarked for the province.¹⁰ Even though Iran and Pakistan share the fear of Baloch secessionism, the issue still causes tensions in their relationship – not least because the separatists in Iran and Pakistan are not driven by the same ideology. Besides targeted killings and kidnappings of Baloch separatist leaders, Pakistan has applied the same approach as that used to contain the Pashtun separatists and has actively cultivated ideological opposition to the Baloch uprising, which has been influenced by Marxist–Leninist national

⁷ For a study of the Khudai Khidmatgars and the emergence of Pashtun nationalism, see Mukulika Banerjee (2000). *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North West Frontier*. London: James Currey.

⁸ The movement is organised primarily as the ANP, which seized power through several coalition governments between the late 1980s and the late 1990s and, more recently, defeated the Muttahida Majlas-e-Amal (MMA) coalition in the 2008 provincial elections in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Since its inception the movement was banned intermittently until the early 1970s, but even today the Pakistan military continues to closely monitor the movement. See Joshua T. White (2008). *Pakistan’s Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and US Policy in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier*. Religion & Security Monograph Series 1. Arlington, VA: Center on Faith and International Affairs, pp. 96–97.

⁹ See Neamatollah Najom (2002). *The Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan - Pakistan’s Leftists and the Soviets*. New York: Palgrave Trademark.

¹⁰ See Selig S Harrison (1981). *In Afghanistan’s Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. See also Frederic Grare (2006), “The resurgence of Baluch nationalism”, *Carnegie Paper* 65, January 2006.

liberation movements. One of the ways in which ideological opposition has been cultivated is by providing safe havens in Balochistan for the so-called Quetta Shura (named after the provincial capital of Balochistan), which is headed by Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. The relationship to the Afghan Taliban is instrumental for Pakistan both to provide ideological resistance to the Marxist–Leninist drivers of the Baloch insurgency and to limit the influence of those factions of the Pakistani Taliban that are targeting Pakistani security forces. Besides Shia-led Iran being anti-Taliban, one of the main drivers behind Iran’s Baloch uprising has been the Sunni movement, Jundallah. Iran has accused Pakistan of providing safe havens for Jundallah, which does not seek secession or union with Pakistan’s Balochistan. Like Iran, the Karzai-led government in Afghanistan is also critical towards Pakistan’s protection of the Quetta Shura. On several occasions Pakistan has held India, along with Afghanistan, responsible for the ongoing nationalist insurgency in Balochistan, accusing them of financing and inciting Baloch nationalists to create unrest in Balochistan.

Chinese interests in the province further complicate the situation of Balochistan. The Balochistan coast is of considerable strategic importance, not only because it hosts two of Pakistan’s three naval bases – Ormara and Gwadar (the third being Karachi) – but also because Gwadar Port links the province to more than twenty countries in the Gulf, to the Red Sea, and to key trading centres in Central Asia, East Africa, Iran, India, and parts of north-west China.¹¹ The port – which shortens China’s route from its African and Gulf interests to the Chinese province of Xinjiang – was built mainly with Chinese capital and labour. The Chinese maintain a heavy presence in the province, where Chinese workers are currently involved in many construction projects. Indeed, the isolated township in the southwest of Pakistan is sometimes considered as a Chinese naval outpost that serves to protect Beijing’s oil supply lines from the Middle East and to counter the growing US presence in Central Asia and India’s influence in the region.¹²

Foreign fighters and indigenous militancy

The story of militancy in Pakistan has at least four major entry points. The first is the story of Pakistan’s use of religio-political movements to weaken ethnic nationalism inspired by socialist or Marxist ideas as described above. The second is the story of the

¹¹ Frédéric Grare (2006). “Pakistan: The Resurgence of Baluch Nationalism”. *South Asia Project*, Number 65. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹² Ibid.

Pakistani army's use of proxy movements to weaken the Indian enemy (elaborated in section 5 below). The third is a story that starts with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. And the fourth is a story that begins with the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. All of them have important regional aspects, and the two last-mentioned in particular imply a high degree of foreign intervention and impact. The patterns of militancy that developed in the wake of the 2001 invasion are especially hard for the Pakistan army to control compared to the other ones. The differences in the 'stories' behind the various types of militancy generally reflect variation in the degree of regional impact on the indigenous militancy.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s, US links to Pakistan were intensified – these links had been strained in the 1970s as the US had started to impose sanctions in response to Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme.¹³ Together with the US and Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan mujahedeen with money, training and manpower.¹⁴ Pakistan also provided the training ground and, as described in detail in other accounts, Pakistan became a central arena for militant religio-political movements: local insurgent groups, proxy movements, and various regional movements with ideological ambitions on behalf of Afghanistan.¹⁵ Especially during the 1980s, areas along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan became a hub for foreign militants (from Arab countries, Chechnya, Uzbekistan and the Horn of Africa) who either wanted to contribute to the Afghan jihad or were organising for jihad in their own countries.¹⁶ For some regional powers – especially for Saudi Arabia and Iran that had just undergone its own Islamic revolution – support for mujahedeen groups was closely related to the question of their own future ideological dominance in the region. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 showed the disastrous consequences of the regional proxy wars – the regional powers' attempt to impact the future government of Afghanistan – that followed the greater US proxy war against

¹³ For a survey of the US non-proliferation sanctions regime against Pakistan see Farzana Shaikh. "Pakistan's nuclear bomb: beyond the non-proliferation regime". *International Affairs* 78(1), January 2002.

¹⁴ They gave military and financial support to seven militant religio-political parties (mujahedeen). These were the Jamiati Islami (led by Burhanuddin Rabbani), Hizbe Islami (led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar), Hizbe Islami (led by Younus Khalis), Mahazi Milliye Afghanistan (led by Sayed Ahmed Gailani), Ittihadi Islam (led by Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf), Jabhayi Najati Milliye Afghanistan (led by Sebghatullah Mujaddedi), and Harakati Inqilabi Islamiye Afghanistan (led by Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi). See Muhammad A. Rana and Rohan Gunaratna (2007). *Al-Qaeda Fights Back: Inside Pakistani Tribal Areas*. Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

¹⁵ E.g. Ahmed Rashid (2000). *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press. See also Muhammad A. Rana and Rohan Gunaratna (2007). *Al-Qaeda Fights Back*. Islamabad: Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the Soviet Union. What emerged was a chaotic Afghanistan split into pieces by warlords with no common vision for the state. In the wake of the Cold War two camps appeared: Iran joined India, Turkey and Central Asia in backing anti-Taliban forces (mainly the Northern Alliance), while Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the Taliban who promised to install order and cohesiveness under the banner of Islam.

The second invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 complicated the game for Pakistan, which suddenly found its two historic allies, the United States and the Afghan Taliban, facing each other as enemies. This created a dilemma for Pakistan, which Pakistan sought to resolve by playing what the US and its allies have described as a 'double game' that involved publicly supporting the US while covertly backing the Afghan Taliban. At the same time, however, Pakistan also became the target of some Taliban factions (namely the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)), which accused it of having betrayed Pakistan's historic alliance with the Afghan Taliban by choosing to side with invading forces. After the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda members, and their foreign affiliates (more or less organised groups of Uzbeks, Chechens and Tajiks) escaped into Pakistan looking for refuge and sanctuaries from where they aimed to fight against NATO forces. They gradually settled just across the border in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkwa and Balochistan. Enduring the repercussions of the invasion in the neighbouring country, including the huge influx of refugees, Pakistan's main worry remained the question of the future security of its border.

Pakistan is still dependent on a Pakistan-friendly (i.e. Pashtun dominated) government in Afghanistan, and good relations with the Afghan Taliban are therefore judged to be vital. This is the reason why Pakistan has been critical of the US-supported Karzai government which, because of its ties to the Northern Alliance (the Taliban's major opponent in the post-Soviet era), is far friendlier towards India and Iran than towards Pakistan. At the same time, Pakistan is bound to the US by its heavy dependence on US military and financial aid, as well as by its need for conventional weapons imports to bolster security against India. In this second round of intensification of mujahedeen activity in Pakistan, the Pakistani army has carried out military operations targeting Al-Qaeda-related foreign fighters and other movements such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – the largest one of which was carried out in 2003. With the rise of the TTP, which sees the Pakistani government and security forces as legitimate targets, Pakistan is

facing yet another challenge to internal stability. Pakistan's protection of, or lack of active measures against, the Afghan Taliban (i.e. the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani network based in North Waziristan) can, as indicated above, be read against this background: the Afghan Taliban being seen as instrumental in redirecting the attention of the TTP from Pakistan to Afghanistan by convincing the latter about the importance of joining forces against the greatest enemy, the US. In fact Mullah Omar has already issued appeals to the TTP in an attempt to convince them that the proper battleground is Afghanistan and not Pakistan.

As indicated above, Pakistan is also an attractive place for non-Afghan groups organising for jihad in their own countries. Chinese Uighur separatists, organised as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which campaigns for the independence of the Muslim dominated province of Xinjiang, have periodically taken refuge in Pakistan's tribal area, using it as a training ground. Reports indicate that the Chinese separatists may have developed ties to the Pakistani Taliban, leading to that China and Pakistan have been able to declare a common front against the East Turkistan activists and the Pakistani Taliban.¹⁷ China's active foreign policy in Central and South Asia during the last decade, especially in relation to Pakistan, stems as much from efforts to curb the activities of ETIM as from its quest for energy security. China has invested heavily in developing rail links to Pakistan, and a proposed rail link connecting Gilgit–Baltistan to the Xinjiang region (running from Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province to the Pakistani port of Gwadar) is part of China's efforts to enhance easy access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf.¹⁸ An integral part of Sino–Pakistan ties is China's support to help develop Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. However, these enhanced ties centring on the development of rail links and nuclear co-operation could prove to be troublesome for India as currently the only route for Chinese goods is through India. Furthermore, the proposed railway would have to pass through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a territory claimed by India, and India thus conceives of the project as a serious security threat. However, it is the growing nuclear co-operation between Pakistan and China that remains of the greatest concern to India.

¹⁷ See the articles "China urges Pakistan to act against TIM militants: Report". *The Express Tribune*, 31 May 2012. "China officials sees militant links in Pakistan", *Dawn*, 7 March 2012.

¹⁸ This ambitious plan has been on the drawing board for many years. It has advantages for both parties. Beijing would have direct access to the Arabian Sea; currently, 80 per cent of China's oil travels through the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca, an area plagued by piracy. More importantly, in case of war, China's enemies could easily block its oil supplies. Pakistan would especially benefit from increased traffic through Gwadar port, which was built with Chinese capital and assistance and opened in 2008.

The IMU, which has a strong support base in the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan¹⁹ – has also been active on Pakistani soil since 2001. Founded in 1998, its original goals were to overthrow the Uzbek President Islam Karimov and create an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. In the wake of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, IMU developed ties with both Al-Qaeda and the TPP, and after years of targeting the Pakistani military and pro-government tribal elders, the IMU became an increasingly active part of the insurgency in Afghanistan.²⁰ Interestingly, Russia–Pakistan relations have improved considerably lately, owing largely to Russia’s support for Pakistani operations against foreign fighters (mainly al-Qaeda and IMU). Pakistan’s recent diplomatic activities with Russia also reflect Pakistan’s efforts to reach out to potential regional partners in the wake of its strained ties with the US, which have continued to deteriorate since NATO air strikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers at the Salala checkpost in November 2011. Even though Pakistan re-opened the NATO supply routes to Afghanistan after a protest blockage, the US–Pakistan relationship remains highly sensitive, not least because of sentiments about and critique of the alliance among both the US and Pakistani populations. Developing stronger ties to Russia also offers tempting energy and economic objectives that could lead to advantageous geopolitical outcomes between the two countries; Russia has also shown an interest in investing in or helping to build the proposed but troubled TAPI gas pipeline.²¹

Tensions over water and territory

India’s continued claim over the princely state of Kashmir places Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit–Baltistan under constitutional ambiguity. But the two regions have been treated differently. Until 2009 Gilgit–Baltistan was administered directly from Islamabad – on the one hand Pakistan argued that as a result of a rebellion in Gilgit–Baltistan, the area had joined Pakistan separately from the rest of the former princely state. But Pakistan refused to integrate the region into Pakistan ‘proper’ in case it undermined Pakistan’s argument that the whole of the princely state was a contested region. Furthermore, Pakistan also hoped that in the event of a plebiscite, the votes of Gilgit–Baltistan in favour of accession to Pakistan could almost certainly be guaranteed. However, underlying Pakistan’s reluctance to incorporate Gilgit–Baltistan

¹⁹ Most of Tajikistan’s population belong to the Persian-speaking Tajik ethnic group, who share a common language, culture and history with Tajik populations in Afghanistan and Iran. The Tajiks in Afghanistan have long been supported by India against the Pashtuns, who are generally favoured by Pakistan.

²⁰ See the backgrounder “Uzbek militancy in Pakistan’s tribal region” at http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/BackgrounderIMU_28Jan.pdf (accessed 17 August 2012).

²¹ See “Russia’s quiet rapprochement with Pakistan”. *Asia Times Online*, 8 June 2012. At http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NF08Df01.html (accessed 17 August 2012).

are two further factors, which have also fuelled suspicion among the people of the region. First, there is significant opposition among religious parties to the idea of granting autonomy to a province where the majority population is Shia and, second, there are concerns within the military establishment that ceding autonomy to a region lying between Afghanistan, China and Indian-controlled Kashmir, might compromise the security of Pakistan.

But the sense that Shias in Gilgit–Baltistan were being unfairly denied their rights has fuelled sectarian tension within the region.²² This in turn has been driven by events. The opening of the Karakoram Highway in 1986 created economic opportunities for the region but also led to demographic shifts in the area as predominantly Sunni Pashtun and Punjabi traders moved in. The Karakoram Highway is itself a manifestation of China's regional interests and the idea of Pakistan as a corridor for Chinese goods travelling through the country to the port at Gwadar.

While the true scale of foreign interference on religious lines is far from clear, Chinese moves to open up the region have clearly brought both good and ill. China's main interests in Pakistan – as indicated above – are twofold: it clearly sees the economic opportunities of better transport links but at the same time fears the threat of instability stemming from extremist Sunni ideologies entering Xinjiang. Ironically, improved transport links have encouraged population movements into Gilgit–Baltistan where they have come into conflict with the local Shia population. This, in turn, has fuelled tensions among the local population. The post-2009 governance structure of Gilgit–Baltistan, which reflects the acceptance that a plebiscite is unlikely, is similar to that in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, though with fewer powers. Nonetheless, it does provide an opportunity for the local population to gain greater buy-in to Pakistan, but it has taken place at a time when voices from sectarian outfits have grown louder.

Some Sunni sectarian movements have suggested that the move was intended to create a Shia enclave within Pakistan. At the same time, the notion that Shia clerics in Gilgit–Baltistan are heavily influenced by Iran has led some to see the region as the key area for a religious proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, with the latter encouraging local Sunnis. Others believe that India has taken advantage of instability to foment dissent within Pakistan. However, one of the main causes of instability within Gilgit–Baltistan stems from resentment at the region's constitutional status.

²² See also "Pakistani Shiites are 'victims of Regional Politics'" *Deutsche Welle*, 23 August 2012. <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,16188813,00.html> (accessed 24 August 2012).

The fact that the majority of the province's population is Shia Muslim adds to the historic controversy over what role religion, and in particular Sunni Islam, should play in the institutional setup of Pakistan.²³

The ambiguous status of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and, in particular, India's continued claim over the territory – has also worked to undermine the region. Although, there have been some promising, if fledgling, steps in recent years to enhance the nominal autonomy enjoyed by Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, in essence the region sits firmly under the authority of Islamabad. While the promotion of inter-Kashmiri trade has helped create new constituencies supportive of peace, and served to dilute India's stated position, the gains accruing from these measures have largely been neutralised by the fact that Azad Jammu and Kashmir is neither a province of Pakistan nor formally integrated into Pakistan.

While the downsides of mutual non-cooperation with India are clear, there are some signs of recognition of the benefits of enhanced cooperation. Along with trade, water is an issue that has risen on the agenda in both India and Pakistan and 'collective management' of shared rivers has been discussed between the two countries. The waters of the Indus River and its tributaries like the Jhelum have long been one of the main points of contention between the rival neighbours and a major concern for Pakistan, whose agriculture-dominated economy is heavily reliant on the Indus and its tributaries. In contrast to those who claim that Pakistan's greatest threat is militancy, some argue that it is water shortage that could come to pose the most pressing challenge for the Pakistani state in years to come.²⁴ Water shortages in Pakistan are frequently blamed on Indian actions in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Even if collective management is accepted there is a vital role for the people of Kashmir on both sides of the border. Given the deep tensions between India and Pakistan such an arrangement would most likely give birth to new sorts of challenges. Added to this, the governance structure of Pakistan-administered Kashmir may well be ill-suited to such a function. Like Gilgit–Baltistan, its ambiguous status stems from the fact that the territory is disputed and its governance exists under an interim arrangement. While in theory it is an autonomous territory, in practice Islamabad exerts a strong influence on affairs in the region. The Kashmir Council,

²³ For an extended discussion of the political, economic and geostrategic implications of Pakistan's uncertain relation to Islam see Farzana Shaikh (2009). *Making Sense of Pakistan*. London: Hurst.

²⁴ Anatol Lieven (2011). *Pakistan – a Hard Country*. London: Allen Lane.

chaired by the prime minister of Pakistan, functions as a parallel government and has exclusive control over a range of issues. The local government is therefore sidelined on most important issues.

Water relations between the two countries have been framed under the terms of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty (dividing the control over the region's rivers) as well as disputes around dams built on the rivers by India. A recent dispute centres on the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project – an Indian barrage project that Pakistan claims violates their accord and would allow India to manipulate the flow of water. The water disputes have, over the past few years, become more complicated as religious groups, such as Lashkar-e Taiba, as well as a broader grouping of parties within the Difa-e Pakistan (defence of Pakistan) movement, have instinctively blamed water shortages on India as a means of mobilising anti-Indian sentiment.

Besides territory and water, the Pakistan–India relationship is also burdened by mutual accusations about the support to proxy movements causing unrest within their respective territories. Pakistan's intelligence service – the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI's) historical use of Lashkar-e Taiba as a proxy against India is pointed out frequently (the 2008 Mumbai attacks being the most spectacular of these occasions), though the present-day relationship between ISI and Lashkar-e Taiba as well as Pakistani militant outfits fighting in Kashmir, remains unclear.²⁵ Conversely Pakistan accuses India and its secret service – Research Analysis Wing (RAW) – to be aiding and abetting the insurgency in Balochistan by offering training, weapons and ammunition through its presence in Afghanistan.²⁶ In this context it also makes Pakistan uneasy that India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan and through this exercises considerable influence over Afghanistan.

Ideological battles

The notion of Pakistan as an arena in which Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia can fight proxy wars against each other was commonplace in the 1990s. But since the Western intervention in Afghanistan and the rise of Sunni extremism in Pakistan, concern about Iran's influence in Pakistan has generally declined.

²⁵ See Stephen Tankel (2009). *Lashkar-e-Taiba: From 9/11 to Mumbai*. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. Can be downloaded from http://www.ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/Tankel_01.pdf (accessed 16 August 2012). See also Stephen Tankel's book (2011) on Lashkar-e Taiba: *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba*. London: Hurst and Company.

²⁶ See Lieven (2011).

Saudi money has been flowing into Pakistan since the 1980s, when the state and private donors funded a proliferation of religious seminaries. Saudi Arabia was a major backer of the military regime of General Zia ul-Haq, who seized power in 1977 and initiated an Islamisation campaign throughout Pakistan. Besides China, Saudi Arabia is Pakistan's other 'big friend' in the region and, over the years, Riyadh has invested billions of dollars of its oil wealth in Pakistan (much of this for missionary purposes through religious seminaries and charitable organisations), and close to a million Pakistanis currently live and work in Saudi Arabia; their remittances home constitute a vital source of income for Pakistan. As a tribute to Saudi Arabia and their friendly relations, Pakistan has named mosques and towns after Saudi kings. The bulk of Saudi support in Pakistan has however been aimed at the Ahl Hadith movements – also known as the Pakistani salafis whose doctrines resemble the Saudi Arabian version of salafi Islam. The formation of militant sectarian organisations such as the Sipah-e Sahaba and Sipah-e Mohammad is often put forward as an example of the consequences of the foreign, Saudi, influence. This influence is especially marked in Punjab and Sindh, which have become recruiting grounds for sectarian violence inside Pakistan. Today the heavy Saudi ideological influence is reflected in the emergence of hybrid forms of sectarian ideology. For example studies of the TTP show that the classical Deoband and Hanafi orientation of the Taliban has been considerably influenced by Salafi sources and Wahhabi literature.²⁷ This development has taken place in tandem with the Pakistani Taliban delinking from its original identity of being a Pashtun movement and becoming integrated with Punjabi militant outfits such as Jaish-e Muhammad, Lashkar-e Jhangvi and Sipah-e Sahaba (that share an anti-Shiite outlook) and are sometimes collectively labelled the 'Punjabi Taliban'.²⁸

Nonetheless, along with spreading concerns relating to the growing influence of Wahhabi thinking in Pakistan, many of Pakistan's ethnic conflicts have extraterritorial implications, with the Baloch population spanning Iran and Afghanistan, and the Pashtun population split between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

²⁷ The name Deoband originally designates a city in India where an influential religious seminary (*madrassa*) tradition was initially established in 1866 by the Darul Uloom Deoband. The theological position of the Deobandis was heavily influenced by the 18th century Muslim reformer Shah Wali Allah, who addressed what he saw as the decline of faith/moral degeneration reflected, among other things, in the increasing superstition among Indian Muslims, by approaching metaphysical issues with a rational interpretation. Although they share the Salafis' critique of western influence and the call to authenticity, the Deobandis are strict believers in *taqlid* (adherence to prior religio-legal rulings).

²⁸ Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2011). *Guardians of God – Understanding the religious violence of the Pakistani Taliban*. Doctoral dissertation. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

The Baloch conflict – aspects of which have been explained above – is multilayered. There is the separatist element that takes the form of Baloch versus central government (which is commonly equated with military or security personnel as well as non-Baloch, notably local Punjabi settlers). In addition there is an ethnic element: as the number of Pashtun settlers in the province has risen owing to migration from war-affected areas in Pakistan's north-western regions, so too has hostility between Balochs and Pashtuns. But there is also a sectarian element, which compounds the challenges in Balochistan. Sunni sectarian extremists have killed hundreds of Shia Hazaras in the past decade and international concern about human rights abuses in connection to the Balochs has helped unnerve the Pakistani state. These extremists are allegedly supported by movements linked to (private donors in) Saudi Arabia. The Hazaras are Balochistan's third major ethnicity (of Mongolian origin from the central highlands of Afghanistan) and Iranian donors have most likely supported the prosperity of the Hazara community.²⁹ The separatist, ethnic and sectarian disputes are thus all muddled in the regional disputes. Both Iran and Pakistan share a desire to crack down on Balochi separatism, but Iran's suspicion of Pakistani support for the Sunni extremist group, Jundullah, has undermined this common purpose. While the scale of Indian support is questionable, it is clearly the case that at times Afghanistan has provided sanctuary for Baloch militants.

Similar concerns affect the situation in Gilgit–Baltistan. As Sunni extremism has spread in Pakistan, so has the importance of Gilgit–Baltistan as Pakistan's only Shia majority region. Until 2009 this led to the territory being ruled from Islamabad; the low degree of autonomy led to resentment within the area. Conflicts between Sunni and Shia have erupted in Gilgit–Baltistan over the years, but the rise of Sunni extremism in general in Pakistan has led to increasing tension, frequently fuelled by unfounded newspaper articles and social media commentary suggesting that the Ismaili Shia community in Gilgit–Baltistan plans to secede from Pakistan. In this case the government has taken steps to empower the residents of Gilgit–Baltistan, but the situation of the non-Sunni population there, as elsewhere in Pakistan, will remain insecure in an environment where religion and ideology are utilised in power games and in the Pakistani state's strategy to secure its borders.

While it is widely believed that Iranian support for Pakistan's Shias has been reduced over the past decade (note that this support was generally focused on

²⁹ See Lieven (2011): 347.

Imami Shias rather than the Ismailis of Gilgit–Baltistan), some radical elements from Iran may continue to offer some assistance. But a greater level of support is clearly provided for extremist Sunni groups in Pakistan, if not officially then unofficially, and this radicalisation in turn leads to a response from Shias. Problematically, even if support has declined, the ideology remains, as does a widespread openness to conspiracy theories that blame unrest solely on external actors.

In part, concern about external actors stems from Pakistan's underdevelopment. Just as Western countries fund development programmes in Pakistan, so too do wealthier Islamic countries. Unsurprisingly, Iranian support is focused upon Shia communities, while support from the Gulf and Saudi Arabia focuses upon Sunnis. In many cases this developmental work may well provide a smokescreen for more subversive ideological propagation. However, this radicalisation reaches a receptive audience both because of underdevelopment and because it provides a means for Pakistan's middle class to renegotiate power.

This is clearly the case in south Punjab, where the middle class has proved most receptive to radical Sunni militancy. While the number of militant groups has flourished, there is a substantial overlap as well as a division of responsibilities with some groups focusing on jihad and others on humanitarian work (most of these movements like e.g. Lashkar-e Taiba are 'holistic' movements, undertaking many 'functions' simultaneously i.e. missionary, charitable, educational and militant jihad. While the humanitarian aspect may be overstated, these functions and their legitimacy among some segments of society enable groups to form a partnership with the state. At the same time it allows the state to absolve itself of its social service delivery functions by allowing religious groups to fill the gaps – gaps that the religious groups are by no means able to fill to a sufficient degree. This vacuum in turn increases the attractiveness for wealthier Muslims outside of Pakistan to fund such groups. Hence both the weaknesses of the Pakistani state and its historical choice to ally itself with proxies to secure its borders, have significant repercussions that have visibly eroded its capacity to withstand external interventions and influences.

Concluding remarks

Pakistan matters for the US. This is not only because of the contemporary significance of NATO supply routes to Afghanistan through Pakistan, but also because Pakistan

is essential to safeguard the United States' long-term interests in Asia, including the search for new markets and the monitoring of the development of its greatest international rival, China. Pakistan also matters for China. For China, Pakistan is a corridor for a trade and energy venture reaching all the way to the Persian Gulf. At the same time, China needs to keep good relations with Pakistan as a means of controlling the activity of Uighur separatists and neutralising US influence in the region. Pakistan with its population exceeding 170 million people also matters to Saudi Arabia – custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina – and its ideological mission of manifesting itself as 'religious superpower' vis-à-vis other Muslim countries.

From a Pakistani perspective, developments in Afghanistan, India and Iran are at the top of its regional security concerns. The importance of Afghanistan is closely connected to the challenges of Balochistan – a province affected by separatist, sectarian, ethnic and proxy militancy. It is also a province that has both military strategic importance and is a potential 'goldmine' with great mineral wealth. For Pakistan, Afghanistan and its developing relations with India are a matter of concern, not least because of fears that Balochistan could become 'a second Bangladesh.' India matters for Pakistan because of water shortage and the controversies around shared rivers, but also because of the territorial disputes that continue to affect Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit–Baltistan. And finally, Iran matters for Pakistan because of the sectarian polarisation and violent clashes that are playing out on Pakistani soil – not only in FATA, Balochistan and Gilgit–Baltistan, but to a large extent also in Sindh and Punjab.

Understanding Pakistan in its regional context enhances our ability to understand the dilemmas and challenges of a country that receives bottom marks in various 'fragile state' indexes – especially when it comes to the state's ability to respond to group grievances and tensions in civil society.³⁰ Though there is no doubt that the regional power play compounds the local challenges Pakistan is facing, they should not become an excuse for not addressing local level grievances i.e. issues of recognition of particular ethnic and religious groups, issues of service delivery and developing a justice infrastructure, increasing local level democratisation, and dealing with the fundamental problems of poverty, illiteracy and corruption that reduce Pakistan's resilience when it comes to external influences. Interpreting tensions and conflicts

³⁰ Fund for Peace (2012). *Failed States Index*. Foreign Policy & Fund for Peace. Washington DC <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/library/cfsir1210-failedstatesindex2012-06p.pdf> (accessed 16 August 2012).

within Pakistani society through a prism of great power rivalry is more convenient for the state and military establishment than to tackle the particular social, economic or other domestic factors that cause unrest. Still, improving matters for Pakistan requires considering both aspects: regional security and a fundamental reform of Pakistan's political culture.



The Baloch insurgency and geopolitics

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The conflicts and tensions in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan Province, with its strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and West Asia, have reinforced regional rivalries and insurgent movements during the recent decade. The Balochi separatist insurgency and regional rivalries peaked in the aftermath of the heightened post 9/11 international involvement in the region. Factors contributing to instability in Balochistan include: failure of regional cooperation; increased domestic oppression of Balochi minorities in Iran and Pakistan; a failure of the Pakistani political and military elite to agree on a political framework to resolve the fundamental clash of interests; and uneven resource distribution. These factors now top the list of domestic challenges that Pakistan's government faces.

After 9/11, the Pakistani government used the province of Balochistan to foment and support the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan as part of its efforts to influence the composition of any future political system, and as a bulwark against regional arch-rival India's influence in that country. But the province's relations with the Pakistani government have been defined by successive Balochi insurrections against the Pakistani military's stranglehold on the resource-rich region. This vast province is strategically located bordering Iran and Afghanistan, and is hemmed in by the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. Rich in hydrocarbon resources and minerals, including one of the world's largest gold mines, the region also has a long shoreline on the Arabian Sea along one of the busiest shipping routes in the world, and is home to the increasingly important strategic port at Gwadar.

Separatist insurgency

Thousands of separatists, soldiers, political leaders and civilians have died since the 2004 onset of the latest Balochi insurgency. Nearly 200,000 people were displaced, some of who were ethnic Punjabis (who had lived in Balochistan for generations and were called 'settlers'). Some of them returned when the violence subsided, only to leave again when a new cycle of unrest began.

Both home-grown and regional insurgent groups are active in Balochistan. The provinces' regions inhabited by ethnic Balochis share the Iranian Plateau with the

Balochis of Iran's south-eastern Sistan-Balochestan province. In Iran, where ethnic Balochis make up around two per cent of the country's population of 80 million, the group lives under severe political and cultural oppression as a Sunni Muslim minority under the nation's Shiite clerical regime. Balochistan's northern Pashtun-populated districts are linked to southern Afghanistan's Pashtun regions through geography and tribal ties. These regions have hosted Afghan refugee communities since the early 1980s and today serve as the main sanctuary for the Afghan Taliban.

While Balochistan makes up nearly half of Pakistan's 800,000 square kilometre territory, its population (nearly half of whom are ethnic Pashtuns) accounts for less than five per cent of the country's 180 million people. Balochi separatist factions, largely headed by new, young leaders, are presently engaging in the fifth Balochi rebellion in Pakistan's 64-year history – insurgencies were crushed in 1948, 1958, 1962, and from 1973 to 1977. 'Kill-and-dump' operations are the hallmark of the latest Balochi insurgency. According to human rights watchdogs, hundreds of suspected militants and activists have been caught in the net of the 'enforced' disappearances of the military, intelligence agencies and the paramilitary Frontier Corps. Some of them have been found killed after torture.

In the case of the Balochi insurgency, the government seems to be following the Sri Lankan model of targeting suspected Balochi separatists. Pakistani forces often battle the insurgents in the vast desert region and have killed several key leaders. Supporters of the insurgency are kidnapped and their decomposing corpses are found weeks or months later, dumped by the side of a road. Balochi nationalists accuse the Pakistani security forces of orchestrating these killings. The government counters by denouncing the separatist insurgents who have killed ethnic Punjabi migrants and politicians loyal to them. Since the accession of various Baloch regions into Pakistan, independence-minded Balochis have frequently clashed with the federal government over the control of resources in the region, and now even moderate nationalists fear hard-line militants are pushing them to completely abandon electoral politics as relations with the government continue to deteriorate. The killing of hundreds of ethnic Hazaras (a tiny minority in Quetta) adds to the multilayered conflict in the region. The Hazaras are predominantly Shia and are often targeted by Sunni extremists.

Regional interests

Competing regional interests further enhance Balochistan's status as a battleground. Pakistan has publicly accused India of supporting Balochi separatists, and is suspicious

of an Indian-financed road network linking south-western Afghanistan to the south-east Iranian port of Chabahar, a predominantly Balochi city. The Indian government as well as Balochi separatists reject these claims. Iran has invested in the Chabahar Arabian Sea port project hoping to attract business from across Central Asia. Over the last decade, China has invested \$200 million in the development of Gwadar, downstream on the Arabian Sea shoreline. Many observers believe the project showcases Sino-Pakistani cooperation and may signal China's possible role in shaping the future destiny of Afghanistan. India, a competitor of both China and the US, eyes such cooperation with suspicion.

Balochistan is also a key component of the regional rivalries centred in Afghanistan. The Pakistani government has fuelled its fight against the Balochi insurgency by occasionally diverting resources given by the West to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The US and its allies considered ending the Balochistan sanctuary of the Mullah Omar-led Afghan Taliban as a top priority to salvage transition plans and force the Taliban to the negotiating table. This created further friction in the already deteriorating relations between Pakistan and the US.

The Pakistani government has also accused the Afghan government of sheltering Balochi rebel leader Brahmadagh Khan Bugti for years. Some in the Pakistani government saw this as a rerun of the 1970s, when Afghanistan supported a Balochi insurrection and later sheltered the insurgents. In March 2012, however, Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik announced that Afghan President Hamid Karzai had shut down all Balochi training camps in Afghanistan. This could be due to the fact that the Afghan administration still looks at Balochistan as the primary sanctuary for the Taliban in Afghanistan. Some Balochi activists allege that one reason for the increased effort by Pakistani forces to crush the latest insurgency is so the Afghan Taliban sanctuaries in Balochistan could remain protected.

Cooperation and conflict with Iran

Despite differences over the future shape of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan appear to be on the same page in dealing with their respective Balochi populations. In the summer of 2010 Iran and Pakistan signed a \$7 billion gas pipeline project that envisions meeting energy-hungry South Asia's needs for decades. The Pakistani government is under considerable pressure from Saudi Arabia and the US to step back from the project. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) route has support from the Asian Development Bank as well as key Afghan partners (and even some

insurgents), but its viability will remain in question for as long as Balochi insurgents continue to blow up gas pipelines – yet another factor influencing efforts on both sides of the border to suppress the Balochi insurgencies.

However, not all is well between Pakistan and Iran. Some officials in the Pakistani government are suspicious about Iran providing assistance to Balochi separatists or allowing India to use its territory to do so. Iran has publicly accused Pakistan of sheltering members of the Iranian terrorist group Jundullah, which is mostly composed of extremist Sunni Balochis fighting against the Shiite government. Jundullah's erstwhile leader, Abdul Malik Regi, studied in a famous Deobandi madrassa in Karachi. However, secular-minded Balochi separatists in Pakistan have always distanced themselves from Jundullah's activities. Unlike in the past, when insurgents followed tribal leaders, this time around Balochi separatists appear loyal to a new breed of middle-class leaders. Satisfying them will take much more than the government offering cabinet slots and an amnesty. Indeed, major Balochi separatist leaders recently rejected amnesty offers.

The Pakistani government's obsession with shaping the destiny of Afghanistan is actively contributing to destabilisation in its own backyard with the situation in Balochistan deteriorating rapidly. Like Afghanistan, Balochistan will need regional cooperation to see development and a permanent settlement. The military's push for crushing what it views as treacherous Balochis only pushes a settlement further away.

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Militant groups in FATA and regional rivalries

Ashraf Ali, Director, FATA Research Center

After the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, it was widely believed that the Taliban chapter in Afghanistan's history had definitively come to an end. The Taliban, however, termed it a tactical retreat and, a couple of years later, they managed a successful and even more aggressive comeback on Afghanistan's political stage.

This comeback gave rise to many questions, but the most striking one was how a politically demoralised, militarily weakened, socially scattered and dispersed force which had vanished into the mountains could, so abruptly, emerge from their hideouts with a new zeal and spirit, and cause so much trouble to the world's most powerful military power: the USA and its allies?

Analysts who have closely watched the events that followed the fall of Kabul to the allied forces believe that the Pakistani Taliban have played a vital role in pushing the parent Afghan Taliban movement to strike back and wage a full-fledged war against NATO forces in Afghanistan.

The emergence of the Pakistani Taliban

Several factors are responsible for the rise of the Pakistani Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

1. Exploiting the Pashtunwali

After the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, a majority of the Taliban found sanctuary with their sympathisers in the bordering tribal belt of Pakistan. Exploiting the local social norms of *Pashtunwali*, the Taliban seized an opportunity to re-organise themselves during their time in FATA and garner the support of those who had already developed anti-American feelings in the area.

This bond of friendship and sympathy between the locals and the Afghan Taliban deepened when the Pakistani government then sent 70,000 troops into the area. Considering this a breach of the agreement reached in 1901, the tribesmen declared open war on the government.

Exploiting the situation, the militants moulded public opinion in their favour by announcing that the government had attacked tribal traditions and damaged the independent status of the tribal areas and therefore harmed their unique social and cultural values.

With similar norms, values, customs, traditions, language and, of course, religion, the Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line shared enough to define their common interests. Inter-marriages and joint commercial ventures brought the Afghan Taliban even closer to the Pakistani Taliban with the purpose of waging war on their respective enemies.

2. The MMA factor

In the general election of 10 October 2002, the conglomerate of six politico-religious parties, the Muttahida Majlas-e-Amal (MMA), registered a sweeping victory over its Pashtun secular nationalist rivals in the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* province (then North West Frontier Province), which provided an opportunity for the militants to acquire a larger power base. For example, Maulana Fazlullah, the leading personality of the Swat insurgency, attained his revered status in militant circles primarily because of the government's indifferent attitude towards his seditious speeches on his illegal FM radio channel from the Swat Valley. Eventually, to defeat Maulana Fazlullah and his followers, former President Pervez Musharraf had to dispatch 18,000 security force troops to the valley.

3. FATA's strategic location

FATA's strategic location allows free movement for the Taliban on both sides of the border. They have used the porous border to host meetings and plan their operations.

The Pakistani Taliban, besides offering sanctuary to the embattled Afghan Taliban, provide training facilities for new recruits in preparation to launch attacks on the NATO forces in Afghanistan. Most importantly, the tribal areas are used as a base for the training of suicide bombers. The Pakistani Taliban assists the Afghan jihadis by providing logistical support and transportation to their destinations in Peshawar, Quetta, Lahore and Karachi. Furthermore, most of the Afghan militants come to Pakistan via tribal areas during winter to recuperate before the spring offensives.

4. Anti-Americanism

On 30 October 2006, a US missile attack on a religious seminary in Bajaur agency left 80 students killed and three more injured. Reacting to the incident before a gathering

of more than 20,000 people at a football ground in Khar, Bajaur Agency, Maulana Faqir stated that “by killing 80 students, America has produced more than 80,000 suicide bombers and we will soon take the revenge.” Maulana Faqir, who was until recently the deputy head of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, is wanted by the Pakistani authorities for allegedly hosting Al Qaeda’s Aiman Al Zawahiri at his home.

A week later, the Taliban attacked a Pakistani army base in Dargai in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa killing 42 new recruits and injuring another 20. The incident also sparked a series of suicide bomb attacks that rocked the country in the following months.

5. The War of words

The anti-Americanism and hatred against the West was more deeply ingrained into the hearts and minds of the people by the Taliban’s propaganda against the coalition forces in Afghanistan through DVDs and printed materials. DVDs depicted atrocities inflicted on innocent civilians by the coalition forces: American bombings of mosques, hospitals and wedding ceremonies made for effective propaganda for the jihadi zealots and for prospective suicide bombers to wage jihad. This propaganda prompted US officials to admit, “America is losing the war of words against the Taliban”.

The Pakistani Taliban has been instrumental in producing these DVDs in studios set up in tribal areas, as well as in marketing them. Peshawar’s Karkhano and Nishtarabd markets are flooded with jihadi DVDs.

Militant groups in FATA

The political and judicial vacuum in FATA encouraged the local militants to form an umbrella organisation under the banner of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in 2007. Today, close to 150 militant groups are operating in and around FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) with 116 in FATA alone. A total of 23 groups are active in South Waziristan agency, 38 in North Waziristan, 8 in Khurram Agency, 6 in Khyber, 6 in Mohmand and 10 each in Orakzai and Bajaur areas, while a semi-autonomous area, Darra Adam Khel, plays host to five militant groups. There are 31 groups operational in KP. North Waziristan is host to more than three dozen militant groups providing a base to Uzbeks, Chechens, Kazakhs, Punjabis and Arabs as well as a large number of local militant groups. Hakimullah Mahsud is the head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, an organisation operational in all seven sister agencies.

Hafiz Gul Bahadar and Mullah Nazir's groups hold command in their respective North and South Waziristan agencies. Fazal Saeed Haqqani's Tehreek-e-Taliban Islami Pakistan, a splinter group of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, holds sway in Kurram Agency while Mullah Toofan is the man in command of the local chapter in Orakzai agency. Mangal Bagh is the head of Lashkar-e-Islam in Khyber Agency and his rival group, Ansar Ul Islam and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's Tariq Afridi group are from Darra Adam Khel. Abdul Wali, alias Omar Khalid, who is head of the Mohmand chapter of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, is operating from Afghanistan's Kunar and Nooristan provinces together with Maulana Fazlullah who was ousted from the Swat valley in 2009. Maulana Faqir Muhammad, the deputy head of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and head of his local chapter in Bajaur was recently removed from his position. Maulana Faqir Muhammad who had been in hiding in Afghanistan since the military offensive against his brigade began in August 2008, is now reportedly back in business in Bajaur.

The role of regional powers

Due to its proximity to the former USSR and China, Pakistan's role in the Cold War and later as a frontline state in the US-led War on Terror left it exposed to foreign interference. This development, subsequently, paved the way for international jihadi organisations like Al Qaeda, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to enter FATA, which provided grounds for regional actors to interfere.

China's concerns about growing Islamic militancy in Pakistan have kept them deeply involved in the region. That China's Uighur separatists from the western province of Xinjian may find a safe haven in Pakistan's tribal areas is a growing concern for Beijing, in addition to the increasing number of attacks on Chinese nationals in Pakistan over the last few years.

Saudi Arabia is a major financier of Pakistan, and its growing influence worries Iran. The presence of the sunni-militant group Jundullah is a major concern for Iran, but at the same time Iran also operates in FATA through militant outfits such as the Mehdi militia, and the Hezbollah and Haidary militias.

The activities of the United States in Pakistan are an open secret. Over 300 drone strikes, with 264 strikes between 2009–11 alone, speak volumes about US activities in Pakistan. The killing of two Pakistani citizens in 2011 by a CIA operative in Lahore, followed by the operation against Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad and the Salala air

raid in November that left 26 Pakistani soldiers dead are some of the glaring examples of violations of Pakistan's territorial integrity.

The justification put forward by Afghanistan and the United States is that the Pakistan-based militants are involved in cross-border attacks against NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan. Pakistan is accusing Afghanistan and the United States of harbouring Baloch insurgents and the fugitive Pakistani Taliban militant leaders Maulana Fazlullah, Omar Khalid and Maulana Faqir Muhammad, who have been operating from Nuristan and Kunar provinces against the Pakistani military.

Pakistan's price

Pakistan remains the great loser in the War on Terror. Pakistan's moral and material losses are huge and on the international front, Pakistan has earned the name of being a foul player.

In addition to losing almost 40,000 people, including 5000 police and soldiers, Pakistan's financial losses have exceeded 70 billion dollars. More than 70 journalists have been killed since the War on Terror started. More than 1000 schools have been blown up, depriving thousands of children of the opportunity to go to school. Drone attacks have become a daily occurrence. During this time, Pakistan saw the world's largest mass displacement in 2009 and hundreds of thousands of displaced people are still living in camps. Kidnapping, torture and killing have become terrifyingly common. According to conservative estimates, close to 1500 tribal elders and *Maliks* have been victims of targeted killings. Roadside bomb attacks and suicide attacks have had dire effects on the mental health of the civilian population. According to a report released by WHO, approximately 4% of the population suffers from severe psychiatric disorders.

Ways forward

Peace and stability in Afghanistan hinge on two important factors: a reconciliation process with the Taliban, and a regional understanding with the neighbouring countries to stop interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs, and thereby give peace a chance. Pakistan has a decisive role to play in both these factors and it can choose to play either a positive or negative role.

Similarly, there is a growing realisation of Pakistan's legitimate concerns in Afghanistan. President Karzai's statement during former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani's visit

to Kabul last year was reflective of this. Realising its role as an important actor in the Afghan debacle, Pakistan and Afghanistan now strongly feel that the time for the blame game is over. Pakistan has to play its role in resolving the longstanding issue by pressing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table. Saudi Arabia could play an important role by offering space for negotiations.

Moreover, for a stable region, Pakistan needs to abandon its India-centric policy and the idea of resolving its disputes with India on Afghan soil. Pakistan extending the status of Most Favoured Nation to India is a welcome move, but it needs to inch even further ahead and halt its ideological support to Kashmir-based militants. In turn, India has to satisfy Pakistan by stopping its foul play in the disputed areas. The US can play a vital role in resolving the Pakistan–India irritants with Kashmir as the main issue.

Pakistan needs to satisfy the US demands to: take action against Pakistani militant groups such as the Haqqani network; bring the Taliban to the negotiating table; provide safe passage to NATO supplies; and mainstream FATA into international politics. But the US, too, has to supply a satisfactory answer to Pakistan's grievances. The US needs to prove that it is not an opportunistic partner, but a trusted friend and that it will respect Pakistan's sovereignty. The US needs to stop harbouring the Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan and it has to engage Pakistan in trade rather than donating aid. A key and decisive role for its part in these matters may pave the road for a graceful exit from Afghanistan.

President Zardari's announcement in the tripartite meeting with Iran's President Ahmadinejad and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in February 2012 that the gas pipeline project will proceed was received warmly in Iran. In the wake of international sanctions imposed on Iran, President Ahmadinejad praised Pakistan's support. This may lead to a better understanding within both countries of issues confronting the region, especially Afghanistan.

The challenges may be multiplied post US withdrawal, but I would argue that things have not yet gone irreparably wrong.

A strong political will, mutual understanding and coordinated efforts on the part of Pakistan as well as the regional actors and the world community in general are crucial. Pakistan should develop a well defined, well designed and well thought out counter insurgency plan. In case of failure, not only Pakistanis and Afghans, but the whole world will have to bear the consequences for many years to come.

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Domestic politics and regional tensions in Pakistan-administered Kashmir

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The focus of this paper is to examine the domestic politics and regional tensions in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the narrow strip of land bordering Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir in the east, Pakistan-administered Gilgit–Baltistan in the north-east, and the Pakistani provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Punjab in the north-west and west respectively. The themes that will be addressed are as follows: to what extent have external actors, specifically Pakistan’s neighbour, India, affected tensions within the region? How could India be encouraged to assist in stabilising the region? To what extent is the government of Pakistan blaming external actors for its own failings in the region? The paper will first briefly outline the region’s history in order to put into context the current political, economic and social tensions.

Historic origins

The region of Pakistan-administered Kashmir – known officially in Pakistan as the Azad [Free] government of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) – owes its existence to the contested status of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir since the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947. The former princely state also comprises the valley of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh (administered by India and known as Jammu and Kashmir), and Gilgit–Baltistan (administered by Pakistan). For the sake of simplicity, I have used the shortened name by which Pakistan refers to the region i.e. AJK. It is understood that this name is contested by India. AJK’s boundary in the east constitutes the ‘ceasefire’ line where Indian and Pakistani forces stopped fighting at the end of the first Indo-Pakistani war (1947–1949). Renamed the ‘Line of Control’ after the 1972 Simla Agreement, neither India nor Pakistan recognise the Line of Control as an official international border.

As a result of the de facto partitioning of the state, pre-Partition links between AJK and Indian Jammu and Kashmir were severed, dividing families and cutting across established administrative units: for example, whereas Poonch district is in Pakistan-administered AJK, Poonch city remained in Indian Jammu and Kashmir. Even though in the present day the ten districts of AJK have developed their own interdependence and identity, the hostile de facto frontier with India has hindered regional, economic and social development and co-operation.

The population living in AJK, covering an area of over five thousand square miles (over 13,000 square kilometres), is estimated at over four and a half million – compared with an estimated 180–190 million living in Pakistan. Almost half of the population in AJK lives below the poverty line. The land space, between ten and forty miles wide, extends for two hundred and fifty miles. Five main languages are spoken including the national language of Urdu. Other languages are Pahari, Mirpuri, Gojri, Hindko, Punjabi and Pashto. Since there are no indigenous Kashmiris living in Pakistan administered Kashmir, the Kashmiri language is not among the main languages spoken. There are now approximately one and a half million Kashmiri refugees in Pakistan. While the literacy rate in AJK was noted as 62% in 2004, only 2.2% were graduates, compared to the average of 2.9% for the whole of Pakistan.

As AJK is not a province of Pakistan, it does not have official representation under the constitution of Pakistan. Instead, for the past 64 years it has remained a semi-autonomous territory with its own President and Prime Minister – its status officially described as a ‘disputed’ territory pending agreement between India and Pakistan over the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. Until such time, successive governments in Pakistan have exerted administrative control through the political elite. In 2011, a Pakistan Peoples Party government was elected and Chaudhry Abdul Majeed became Prime Minister. So long as nominal ‘autonomy’ is assured, political leaders in AJK have been prepared to work with the status quo. Friction, however, remains between the population and the state government, and between the state government and the federal government in Islamabad.

Tensions with India

There is no doubt that the arbitrary formation of AJK has created longstanding tensions between India and Pakistan. From an Indian perspective, the region is legally part of India, and is considered to be ‘occupied’ by Pakistan. As a result, what the Pakistanis call AJK and in neutral circles is classified as Pakistan-administered Kashmir is known throughout India as ‘Pakistan-occupied Kashmir’ (POK).

India bases its claim to the territory on the fact that in 1947 the then Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, signed an Instrument of Accession, granting control of the whole state (also including Gilgit–Baltistan) to India. In the 1950s the prior agreement between the two governments to hold a plebiscite to determine the state’s future was set aside by India on the grounds that elections, which had been held in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, were an adequate substitute to express the

will of the people. From the perspective of the inhabitants of AJK, the fact that the plebiscite has not been held reinforces the region's unresolved status.

That the border in the east is still only a 'ceasefire' line also means that both sides of the line are heavily fortified. Following the outbreak of violence in the Kashmir valley in 1989, Indian shelling of the Neelum valley gorge in the north destroyed roads and homes, leaving the region in a state of siege for over a decade.

Although a ceasefire along the Line of Control has been in force since 2003, the inhabitants continue to live in close proximity to a mined combat zone, which, on the Indian side, now includes the construction of an electrified wire fence. People remain ever fearful that shelling could resume whenever relations between the two countries deteriorate or in retaliation for cross-border infiltration from Pakistan into the valley of Kashmir.

Militancy

In addition to the militarisation of the border regions, India's continuing non-recognition of Pakistan's de facto control over AJK has added to tensions in the region. This has to be put into context with Pakistan's stance in relation to the Kashmir valley, especially since the start of the 1989 insurgency. Although the Pakistani government maintains that its support of the valley separatists has only been diplomatic and moral, as authenticated by the Indian government and independent observers, there is little doubt that Pakistan, through the Inter Services Intelligence agency, has also sustained the insurgency both financially and militarily by supporting militant organisations based in AJK. Despite pressure from both India and the United States to curtail their activities, the 'jihadi' groups in Pakistan have retained a presence in AJK, most visibly in the wake of the 2005 earthquake when, operating as Jama'at ud Dawa, members of the radical Lashkar-e-Tayba (founded in 1993; banned by the USA in December 2001 following the September 11 attacks; banned by Pakistan in January 2002) were seen openly collecting funds for reconstruction and relief work.

The United Jihad Council, set up in 1990, and now led by Syed Salauddin, remains based in Muzaffarabad. Although militant activity emanating out of AJK into the valley has been reduced, until the Indian government is confident that what it terms 'cross-border terrorism' is at an end, it is extremely unlikely that any Indian government would take steps forward to move towards a political settlement by renouncing its claim to Pakistan-administered Kashmir. To do so would require a change to the

Indian Constitution, which no Indian government has so far indicated a willingness to set in motion.

Regional stability

Encouragement in stabilising the region could come from third party facilitators empowered to give the necessary guarantees to both countries that neither region will be used as a launching pad for aiding and abetting anti-state behaviour. The prototype for facilitation was provided in 1999 when, following the incursion from Gilgit–Baltistan into the mountains north of Kargil in Ladakh, President Bill Clinton urged Pakistan to respect the ‘sanctity’ of the Line of Control by withdrawing the forces which had taken over Indian army posts. However, Indian insistence that the issue should be resolved bilaterally has prevented any meaningful third party involvement and the ‘personal interest’ Clinton promised to take in resolving the Kashmir issue never materialised. Although proponents of third party mediation believe the United Nations should take a more proactive role, the United Nations Military Observer Group, present in the region since 1949, only has a mandate to monitor the Line of Control.

At an economic level, promoting intra-Kashmiri trade has gone some way to promoting greater stability. Initiated by both governments in 2008, following the opening of the Line of Control in 2005 and establishment of a bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad and Rawalokot and Poonch, the benefits are self-evident, especially for the local inhabitants. Such initiatives should not only be seen as simple trade ventures, but also as potential tools for people to people diplomacy.

Educational exchanges, tourism, visits to religious shrines, intra-Kashmiri dialogue on health and environmental issues could also assist in encouraging people-to-people contact, thereby reducing tensions. But obstacles remain. Local roads need to be improved as well as banking facilities and communications. A water shortage throughout South Asia due to rising populations and climate change also has the seeds for future conflict.

AJK as seen by Pakistan

In contrast to what is highlighted in the Pakistani media as the disturbed situation in the Kashmir valley, there is a tendency for successive Pakistani governments to portray AJK positively. This does not mean that tensions do not exist, particularly

in relation to the political control exerted over the state by Islamabad rather than from any external stimuli.

According to the terms of the 1974 Interim Constitution Act, the 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council' (headed by the Pakistani Prime Minister) retains virtual control of all the major activities in the state. These include hydropower generation, banking and finance, the stock exchange, telecommunications, oil and gas, tourism, mines and mineral exploration, aviation and air travel, state property, leasing and insurance and tax collection. The local grievance is that, in these areas, the Azad Kashmir government has no say in policymaking.

There has also been friction between the state government and the local inhabitants with complaints against 'the insincere policies' of the government in relation to the resettlement of those who remain affected by the construction of the Mangla Dam. Built in the 1960s as a result of the Indus Waters Treaty, granting India the use of the three western tributaries of the Indus (the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi), and Pakistan control of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, shifting water levels continue to cause hardship in surrounding areas. This poses a potentially serious socio-political challenge in the affected areas.

The state government has also been criticised for the slow process of reconstruction in areas worst hit by the devastating 2005 earthquake, especially in Muzaffarabad, Bagh and Rawalakot. And there is growing alienation among the young due to rising unemployment in both the public and private sectors. Observers have pointed out that current estimates show that around 300,000 jobs are required to cater for the needs of the youth in the next five to seven years. Allegations of corruption are rife. When discussing intra-Kashmiri trade, other commentators point at how government officials create unnecessary difficulties by asking for bribes and favours.

At a constitutional level, while discussion periodically takes place about reuniting the two regions of divided Kashmir as an independent or semi-autonomous unit, most people in AJK concede that their political future remains with Pakistan. There is no movement to join India, Sikh and Hindu minorities having fled either at Partition or soon afterwards. Pragmatists also accept that neither India nor Pakistan is going to cede control of the regions currently under their administration and it would be better to concentrate on 'making borders irrelevant' rather than on demanding radical political change to which neither country would consent.

There is, however, growing awareness that *de facto* positions will eventually need to be converted into *de jure* ones. The fate of AJK remains linked to the unresolved dispute between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir. The failure of numerous rounds of talks has negatively impacted the lives of all the inhabitants of South Asia. The inability of both countries to address the issue, be it through lack of resolve, leadership or vision, has meant that the inhabitants of AJK – like their counterparts in the valley of Kashmir – are still hostage to the vagaries of the political relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad.

Further reading:

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Gilgit–Baltistan: sovereignty and territory

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Predominantly rural, sparsely populated and home to some of the world's most majestic mountainous terrain, Gilgit–Baltistan, formerly the Northern Areas, has been the site of strategic competition and conflict between empires and states for centuries.

Today, bounded by Xinjiang province in China to the north, Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir to the south, Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir to the east and Afghanistan to the west with Tajikistan on the other side of Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, the Gilgit–Baltistan region is a 72,486 square kilometre area contested by Pakistan, India and China.

Local sectarian dynamics – Shia–Sunni tensions that have surged since the Zia era in the 1980s – are believed to have attracted the attention of Iran and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the US-led international presence in Afghanistan – linked to Gilgit–Baltistan via the remote Wakhan Corridor in the north – has given rise to suspicions that a mini Great Game is underway with Gilgit–Baltistan's strategic location making it one of the smaller pieces in a regional jigsaw.

Dispute with India

That the very sovereignty over Gilgit–Baltistan remains in dispute and its borders have yet to be conclusively established has much to do with the region's convoluted legal and political history from the mid-1800s onwards culminating in the Karachi Agreement of 1949, which established the ceasefire line between India and Pakistan.

Following the 1949 agreement, Pakistan's control was established over the area that today constitutes the five districts of Gilgit division (Ghizer, Diamer, Astore, Hunza-Nagar and Gilgit), the two districts of Baltistan division (Skardu and Ghanche), a portion of Kashmir province, and Poonch and Mirpur in Jammu. Indian control was established over the majority of Kashmir province, Jammu and some parts of Poonch and Ladakh.

However, India contends that all of Gilgit–Baltistan is a part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and, because of Maharaja Hari Singh's accession to India, the entire territory belongs to India.

Meanwhile, Pakistan claims that the territories comprising Gilgit–Baltistan overthrew the Dogra rule of the then Maharaja in 1947 and voluntarily acceded to Pakistan. However, Pakistan has not formally incorporated Gilgit–Baltistan into its territory – there is no mention of Gilgit–Baltistan in the Pakistani constitution for example. It maintains that Gilgit–Baltistan is not a part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir either, instead claiming that Gilgit–Baltistan is part of the Kashmir dispute.

Pakistan's tiered approach to Gilgit–Baltistan is originally linked to Pakistan's official stance that the UN resolutions on Kashmir between 1948 and 1951 still hold the field, meaning that a plebiscite to determine Kashmir's accession to either India or Pakistan should be held. Given the leanings of the people of Gilgit–Baltistan towards Pakistan, including the area in plebiscite and a plebiscite would have boosted Pakistan's chances of gaining Kashmir.

However, as hopes for a plebiscite faded, Pakistan has still clung to its position that Gilgit–Baltistan is part of the Kashmir dispute because it feared that changing the region's status quo could affect overall Kashmir's status as a disputed territory.

Dispute and cooperation with China

While the issue of sovereignty over Gilgit–Baltistan remains in limbo, so too do some parts of its territorial boundaries. Pre-Partition boundaries between the British Empire and China in the northernmost reaches of India were not demarcated. After Partition, this meant resolving China's claim that its Xinjiang region extended into parts of Gilgit–Baltistan, Aksai Chin and even Tajikistan.

In 1963 Pakistan and China signed the Sino–Pakistan Border Agreement, but both sides recognised the accord as provisional, contingent on the final settlement of the Kashmir dispute. India has rejected the 1963 Agreement in line with its policy of claiming all of Gilgit–Baltistan as part of Kashmir.

With both sovereignty and boundaries thus disputed, Gilgit–Baltistan has seen at least two new dimensions added to the Pakistan–China–India nexus over the past thirty years.

On the Pakistan–India front, the Indian occupation of Siachen in 1984 injected a direct military element into the area. To the west of the Actual Ground Position Line where Pakistani and Indian troops face off, lies Skardu – a district of Baltistan

where the Northern Light Infantry that defends the Actual Ground Position Line has its headquarters. The 1999 Kargil conflict only served to underline the military possibilities in the mountainous region and thus, unhappily, cemented its military significance.

On the Pakistan–China front, the opening of the Karakoram Highway to the public in 1986 has transformed the region’s economic potential and upped the strategic significance of Gilgit–Baltistan.

With China seeking to develop its western regions and deepen trade relations with neighbouring areas, the Karakoram Highway is a vital piece of the long-term Chinese trading plan. If the port in Gwadar, Balochistan, which the Chinese helped build, does eventually take off – something that is far from certain – then China would have a direct trading route from Gwadar, a sea port in the south, through the Karakoram Highway to its landlocked western region bordering northern Pakistan.

However, the real significance of the Karakoram Highway, from the Pakistani perspective, has so far been closer integration with a country that Pakistan has long considered a key strategic partner and the transformation of the economic potential of Gilgit–Baltistan.

However, new opportunities have brought new threats. The flourishing of Sunni Islamist extremism in Pakistan has caused concern among Chinese authorities that radicalism could be exported up the Karakoram Highway into the restive Xinjiang region, where parts of China’s Sunni Muslim population have shown some sympathy for groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

From a Chinese security perspective, the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, extremism and separatism need to be kept out at all costs. So the Chinese authorities have imposed strict controls on Pakistanis seeking to enter Xinjiang other than the residents of Gilgit–Baltistan, the majority of whom are non-Sunni and who are eligible to receive one-month passes to travel to Xinjiang for trading purposes.

Sectarian clashes in Gilgit–Baltistan

Against this backdrop of decades-old disputes over sovereignty and territory and conflict and alliances between states, internal security in Gilgit–Baltistan has deteriorated over the past thirty years.

With its Shia majority and Sunni minority, the region has seen a rise in sectarian violence, particularly in Gilgit city where the populations are more balanced. Starting with the execution of Shias en route from Rawalpindi to Gilgit on Feb 28 and then the reprisal killings in early April, which led to the imposition of a 25-day curfew in Gilgit city, 2012 has already seen a particularly bloody stretch.

There have been other significant periods of sectarian violence and agitation, particularly May 1988 and the period between 2000 and 2005 when the 'textbook controversy' kept Shias agitating against state-sanctioned textbooks that allegedly favoured Sunni Islamic practices.

The more sinister explanation for the rise of sectarianism in Gilgit–Baltistan is that, ever since the 1980s, the state has had an explicitly Sunni orientation and Gilgit–Baltistan's Shia majority were inimical to a state project to impose a uniform version of Islam as a binding national force.

According to this theory, the centre's direct rule of Gilgit–Baltistan helped inject the necessary elements to foment sectarian violence there and keep the region from becoming a Shia stronghold with nationalist aspirations or an external orientation towards Shia Iran.

A more benign explanation is that the demographics of the region began to change with the opening of the Karakoram Highway. Traders from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab moved to the region and brought with them their Sunni ecosystems: preachers, mosques, madrassas and conservative and/or radical Sunni thought.

In addition, according to the more congenial theory of the rise of sectarianism in Gilgit–Baltistan, the rise of sectarianism in Pakistan at large, (often blamed on the proxy struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia since the Iranian Revolution) combined with a declining state unable to effectively enforce its writ and maintain law and order, led to a situation in which extremist elements were able to operate in the Gilgit–Baltistan region without much official interference.

The ambivalence of Gilgit–Baltistan

As is the case in so many other parts of Pakistan, the most truthful explanation of the status quo of Gilgit–Baltistan appears to lie somewhere in between. While explicit support for a particular variant of Sunni Islam – loosely, 'Saudi' Islam – was evident during the Zia regime

and extremist groups have still not been clamped down on in a concerted manner, the present Pakistani government's enthusiasm for establishing a Sunni state is not evident.

For example, while the army and the bureaucrats in Islamabad in particular are accused of having a preference for a Sunni state, neither worked to scuttle the Gilgit–Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009. This is significant, as the order increased the autonomy of Shia-majority Gilgit–Baltistan and gave the region its own Governor and Chief Minister for the first time.

Similarly, since the elevation of the Northern Light Infantry, which relies on recruits from Gilgit–Baltistan, to a regular army unit and the Pakistan Army's reliance on it to hold the front in Siachen, covert army support to establish Sunni dominance would impact soldiers' morale in a strategically and militarily significant zone dominated by Shias.

The more likely drivers of the Sunni–Shia conflict are the same ones that are found elsewhere in Pakistan: first, a state distracted by what it regards as more serious threats in other parts of the country; second, a state unwilling to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to militancy and radicalism; third, a state unable to enforce its will against a resolute foe; fourth, a society which has seen swathes of its population radicalised and is unable to suppress the tide of hatred; and finally, regional actors who either have a favourite to back in this fight or see it as a way of settling scores with Pakistan.

Thus, caught between the fear of the agendas of regional powers, particularly India, and its own declining ability to impose order inside areas under its control, Pakistan has presided over a Gilgit–Baltistan region that has progressively been infected with problems similar to those suffered in other parts of the country. This has left the state with yet more apprehensions about regional interests in Gilgit–Baltistan, but even fewer ideas about how to recover the situation.

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Punjab and Sindh: expanding frontiers of Jihadism

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Since 9/11 the world's attention has remained firmly focused on Pakistan's tribal areas along its border with Afghanistan and on its Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Even the Pakistani government's own narrative has concentrated on these areas. Such a tilt in discourse has hidden the subtle and consistent expansion of jihadism and radicalism in mainland Pakistan – particularly in Punjab and Sindh. In fact, as I argue in this paper, radicalism and jihadism are a greater threat in the 'settled parts' of the country, which have always been under state control. These areas have not experienced the absence of state that has been the case in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) historically. This paper also argues that the pattern of radicalism and jihadism in Punjab and Sindh is qualitatively different from that of the tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and also comparatively more lethal. Furthermore, such trends will not dissipate without a conscious effort by the state authorities to check these developments.

Jihadism – the expanse

The discussion on jihadist movements in Pakistan is usually limited to the Tehreek-e-Taliban, which is mainly concentrated in the tribal areas. According to the scant available literature, one of the offshoots of the Tehreek-e-Taliban is the Punjabi Taliban, which is held responsible for a lot of violence and mayhem in the urban centres of Pakistan, especially in those areas of Punjab with no direct link to the war in Afghanistan or its tribal areas. Incidentally, there is a dearth of literature explaining the Tehreek-e-Taliban, or the Taliban phenomenon in Punjab and other areas of Pakistan.

However, before embarking on such an explanation, I would like to clarify the difference between talibanisation and jihadism as these two terms have different contexts. While talibanisation is linked with the Taliban movement, which was an indigenous Afghan village mullah uprising; jihadism is a more urban and state-supported phenomenon, taking place in the heartland of Pakistan. There is also a difference in the quality of the leadership of the two movements. Unlike the Afghan Taliban, the heads of Pakistani jihadi movements are better-versed in sharia and have been exposed to rigorous religious training. Moreover, the inspiration of Pakistani jihadis is not territorial but extraterritorial, which is not

the case with the Afghan Taliban or even, to some extent, the Pashtun Taliban. Furthermore, the jihadi leadership in Pakistan represents the middle class or the middle-income group, which makes them both more effective and more lethal at the same time.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Pakistani state, the Tehreek-e-Taliban is defined as unfriendly militants from Punjab who have connived with the unfriendly Pashtun Taliban, mostly from the Mehsud tribe, to attack the state, security installations and religious minorities. Thus, in popular memory, the Punjabi Taliban refers to 'unfriendly militancy'. The explanation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban forwarded by the military does not emphasise the critical linkage between the unfriendly militants and state approval. Although the army and its representatives often talk about the 'bad' Taliban being a breakaway faction from the less troublesome groups, such an explanation tends to hide the real picture or fails to present the entire microcosm. The fact of the matter is that, though these are interlinked, there *is* a difference between the Punjabi Taliban and the jihadi phenomenon. The latter is, in fact, a larger concept and pertains to all militant organisations including those which state authorities consider to be relatively safe or friendly or have engaged with in the past.

There are essentially three categories: (a) non-cooperative or unfriendly jihadis referred to as the Punjabi Taliban; (b) friendly jihadis comprising Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jamaat-ud-Dawa and Jaish-e-Mohammad; and (c) marginalised groups that historically partnered with the state and continue to do so, but selectively. This category includes outfits such as the Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Harkat-ul-Ansar and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. All of these groups have links with the Afghan and Pakistan Pashtun Taliban, and Al-Qaeda. The linkage serves a critical logistic requirement to relocate to the tribal areas when the need arises.

The genealogy of militant outfits

It is paramount to understand the jihadi network in Pakistan through the prism of its linkages with multiple political forces in the country. It is an intense network, which connects militant outfits with educational networks, religious parties and even political parties. Understanding the genealogy of the various outfits will assist in comprehending their interlinkage even further and in assessing the threat each group represents. Broadly speaking, in Pakistan two schools of thought out of the existing four are involved in militancy.

Numerically, the Deobandi School is dominant and is represented by outfits such as Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammad. The Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan, in fact, is the mother organisation since this was founded in the early 1980s during the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, to counter the threat from revolutionary and Shiite Iran. Tehran had financed and supported the creation of Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jaffriya during the early 1980s that proliferated into a militant outfit, Sipha-e-Mohammadi during the late 1980s. The Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan was also deployed during the early 1980s in Afghanistan, and the recruitment for the Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan was conducted in Punjab, and later in the southern province of Sindh. Driven by the need to fulfil American goals in Afghanistan, the Zia regime started converting people to the more orthodox form of Islam by invoking an interest in jihad. While the tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are widely described as the mainstay of the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, there has been less systematic study of the involvement of jihadis from Punjab and Sindh.

Comparatively more literate than the Pashtun areas of the north, Punjab was even more susceptible to religious orthodoxy with areas such as south Punjab becoming hubs of Deobandism. One of the two primary Deobandi ulama, Allama Darkhwasti, had settled in south Punjab after migrating from India in 1947. The general population was more familiar with and conscious of religion than in Pashtun areas, which underwent a transformation during the 1980s through a different process. Consequently, the religious fervour was consciously exploited and manipulated in Punjab to draw people towards jihad in Afghanistan. Thus, there were a lot of south Punjabi fighters and even commanders in the local armies of various Afghan warlords. General Musharraf's information minister, Mohammed Ali Durrani, for instance, claims to have fought with and been associated with Burhanuddin Rabbani until the early 1990s. Similarly, the urban centres of Sindh such as Karachi, which was the main airport and seaport during the 1980s, turned into a hub for training jihadist activists. Madrassa Binoria in Karachi, for example, played a key role in training and supporting Al-Qaeda fighters and other popular militant leaders, such as Masood Azhar of Jaish-e-Mohammad from south Punjab.

The Deobandi groups grew at a faster pace than the Wahhabi/Salafi groups due to the relative popularity of Deobandism, which is closer to the more popular Barelvi Islam in Pakistan. Since funding was distributed to the militant groups on the basis of performance, measured by their capacity to recruit, Deobandi organisations such as Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan got a relatively larger share of funding, even from the

Saudis who would have typically backed Wahhabi/Salafi organisations such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba. The Saudis could not support only the Lashkar-e-Taiba because there is less support for Wahhabism in Pakistan.

The ideological driver for these militant groups was not just the war in Afghanistan but also other factors, such as an immense dislike for the Shiite and other religious minorities thereby fostering intolerance for diversity. The leaderships of most of these groups and religious parties were also linked with the anti-Ahmediya movement of the 1920s and 1950s. For instance, the grandfather of Jaish-e-Mohammad, Masood Azhar, was a part of the anti-Ahmediya struggle in the princely state of Bahawalpur during the 1920s. Due to the friction with Shiite Islam, the internal ideological dimension began to be felt in south Punjab. Authors like Mariam Abou Zahab believe there was a class dimension to the conflict in Jhang in south Punjab as well. More importantly, the sectarian dimension played a critical role in Siph-e-Sahaba Pakistan's ability to draw funds from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

With the end of the war in Afghanistan in 1979, the Siph-e-Sahaba Pakistan formalised its role in politics, but created another militant outfit, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, for purely militant activities. The two groups were heavily involved in sectarian killings during the 1990s, especially in the urban centres of Pakistan. But they also expanded into other areas such as Kashmir, which became the primary focus of both groups during the 1990s, a decade that is also interesting from the perspective of proliferation of militancy. There were about 72 outfits during this period, some of which kept changing their structure. For instance, Harkat-ul-Ansar, another Deobandi outfit, transformed into another organisation Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and later split into two groups: Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

A parallel track has been that of the Wahhabi outfits, which were limited to the two key organisations: Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen and Lashkare Taiba. Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen has limited operations, and the key Wahhabi outfit is Lashkare Taiba. However, even the Lashkare Taiba could not attract funds from the Saudis during the 1990s due to its relative lack of popularity. The Lashkare Taiba was created in 1991 when the state found a task for it in what it calls 'Indian Occupied Kashmir'. This particular political cause was attractive to youth enrolled into the Lashkare Taiba and also drew funds from both inside and outside the country. On the whole, Lashkare Taiba is considered to be more organised than the Deobandi outfits and, hence, under better state control. This is despite the Deobandi outfits having a larger base and having existed for a longer period of time. This explains the overall

chaos in Deobandi outfits and the presence of a number of breakaway groups. The Wahhabi groups, which are smaller in size, are comparatively more organised with less internal friction.

Organisational contraction and expansion – post 9/11

In the past couple of decades, both the Deobandi and Wahhabi groups seem to have expanded within Pakistan. While the Deobandi groups have a larger following in south Punjab (due to the association of some of its leadership with the sub-region), Wahhabi organisations such as Lashkare Taiba have grown in north and central Punjab and in the areas of south Punjab with Punjabi and *mohajir* (originally migrants from India pre-Partition) settlers. For instance, new villages in Bahawalpur division, referred to as *chaks*, are new settlements of, primarily, Punjabis from central Punjab. The main Wahhabi following is amongst the urban middle class in larger cities and small towns whereas the Deobandis mainly have a lower-middle class base. The leadership in both cases, however, represents the middle class who are not inspired by poverty or lack of social justice, but rather driven by an expansionist ideology.

Another difference between the two is that while Wahhabi outfits have proliferated in major urban centres of North and central Punjab, the Deobandi outfits have expanded in areas which were once considered hubs of Sufi and Bareilvi Islam. There is a greater possibility of Barelvis being attracted to Deobandism due to a common thread, which provides a natural affinity. In any event, many of the Deobandis in rural areas and small towns (bordering rural and urban areas) are Bareilvi converts, for whom Bareilvism and Sufism is no longer sufficient. The emerging middle classes in Sindh and south and even central Punjab have lately been attracted to the modernity of the Deobandi and Wahhabi religious discourse. The existing Sufi discourse does not provide a credible alternative and fails to meet its followers' need for modernity. This does not necessarily mean that there will be a massive shift towards orthodoxy but the risk has increased due to the absence of an alternative narrative.

Some observers argue that jihadi elements will not be able to melt the impact of Sufi culture on society. However, the fact of the matter is that just as south Punjab is known for being a hub of Sufism, Sindh has also begun to transform. Roughly, Sindh is divided between Lashkare Taiba, which has influence in areas bordering India and those with a greater Hindu population, and Deobandi groups led by Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan. The Deobandi groups such as Sipha-e-Sahaba Pakistan and Jaish-e-Mohammad seem to be spreading in areas bordering Punjab province or

where the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazlur Rehman faction) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Sami ul Haq faction) have influence. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazlur Rehman faction) politicians have played a critical role in expanding this influence and are also helping establish Afghan villages and towns in upper Sindh. Therefore, the rise in atrocities against the Hindus and other minorities, and the cases of forced conversion of Hindu women in Sindh shouldn't come as a surprise. The increased radicalism in Sindh has no ideological boundaries, as a number of Bareilvi groups seem to be involved in the activity as well. This was evident when Bareilvi groups condoned the killing of the former governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, in 2011. Notwithstanding the perceived sanctity of the blasphemy law, the virulent support for the said law by the Bareilvi School also indicates a reaction to the tremendous pressure felt by its leadership from the opposing ideological schools of Deobandis and Wahhabis. The Deobandis in particular have made inroads into Bareilvi strongholds, which seems to have provoked the Bareilvi *ulama* to come up with an ideologically strong position of their own on certain marketable issues like blasphemy. In Sindh, there are instances in which prominent people with links to Sufi shrines have used their positions to develop partnerships with Deobandi forces and help in the forced conversion of Hindus to Islam.

Such transformation is obvious in an environment where the jihadi network is strategically supported by the state or some of its elements. It is due to this connection that jihadi outfits have started to pose as the neo-feudals of south Punjab and Sindh. They hold *jirgas* and dispense justice like the traditional elite. Their impunity from law gives them the power to create clients. In fact, members and leaders of political parties and other power centres have begun to develop linkages with these outfits because there is a general understanding that it is difficult to remove these new forces that have the backing of the state.

Over the years the state–militant collaboration has created a larger socio-political space for these various outfits. The partnership was obvious during the 2005 earthquake and the floods of 2009 and 2010, in which these outfits were allowed to provide welfare activities alongside the armed forces. Any attempt to justify the presence of these groups on the basis of their welfare work is an argument which ought to be seriously challenged. The welfare work has been manipulated to the advantage of the militants; it is not their core activity, but is used for showcasing. Such exhibition, in turn, is essential for creating greater political space. The impact of welfare work in creating sympathy in Pakistani-administered Kashmir after the 2005 earthquake is a case in point.

Acceptance of this welfare work by Pakistani society is bound to increase the possibilities for the religious right to manipulate social values. It has begun to happen in Punjab and Sindh, which have experienced greater violence against religious minorities. This is not to suggest that militant outfits have completely dominated these regions, but that the influence is growing and will expand as the militants gradually establish themselves as stakeholders in power, especially at the local level. The pattern for socio-political expansion by militants in Punjab and Sindh is very different from that of the tribal areas and KP. These jihadists know how to engage in multiple partnerships due to the fact that these areas are far more exposed to a variety of ideas. There is an inbuilt multipolarity in the society that has not allowed militancy to expand faster than its current pace.

The culture of the 'soil' is, however, weakening and must be strengthened through a systematic analysis of how to polish and utilise the narrative. At this juncture there is no possibility of a western style secularism being able to even breathe in the political environment. What will perhaps work is a narrative that aims at political liberalism matched with liberalisation of the religious narrative, using sources from the available discourses. Most importantly, the security establishment needs to de-link itself from the militants.

Further reading:

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Urban Sindh: region, state and locality

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This paper seeks to locate the patterns of interaction between Karachi, a relatively volatile city by way of ethnic violence and sectarian clashes, and the unstable regional setting of South and Southwest Asia. The discussion starts with an analysis of the cross-currents of opinion and policy that underscore the strategies of players on the domestic and regional stages. The idea is to explain the constitutive factors behind the perceived political instability of Pakistan, with reference to both covert and overt input of countries ranging from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India and Iran to the US. Ethnic and Islamic militancy in and around Karachi shape the broad contours of our discussion, in terms of an unravelling of the national project and regional security. This paper will also look at the prospective endgame in Afghanistan and the emergent scenario of a new round of power play in the region.

Karachi – the centre of tension

Karachi represents what is known in comparative politics as ‘indivisible territory’, with rival claims to its intellectual, energy, water, land-based and service-based resources. As the commercial hub of Pakistan, Karachi is linked via its international airport and seaport to the rest of the world and to Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan. As a prototype migrant city, it has various communities: big and small, local and non-local, national and foreign, working class and middle class, old and new, all living either inside the legal framework of the state or outside the purview of law. Karachi has experienced an influx of new migrants for decades. These migrants have primarily come from the Pakhtun areas of the war-torn provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and south Punjab. They often carry Islamic militant ideologies. It is instructive to look at the city as symptomatic of both the cultural and linguistic dynamics of urban Sindh and as a crossroads of domestic and regional currents of ideology, migration and militancy. Karachi is the most violent city in Pakistan. Targeted killings left 1,715 people dead in 2011 alone, including 329 political activists. Cases of kidnapping for ransom stood at 125 in 2011, five times more than in 2002. Journalists fear reporting crime because that brings them to the malevolent attention of the perpetrators of violence. All this casts a shadow over the possibility of holding a fair election in 2013, when political parties are also expected to mobilise supporters among militant groups that some of the parties allegedly

patronise. In the absence of a new, long overdue, census, and the presence of hugely bogus electoral lists, polls are bound to see threats to life and property.

Patterns of ethnic conflict

At Partition, urban Sindh represented a relatively unbounded space. It was occupied by migrants from India. In 2012, a majority of them formed the third generation of the Urdu-speaking community, which reinvented and reinvigorated the migrant mindset, characterised by a feeling of insecurity, nostalgia and quest for identity. These migrants (*mohajirs*) live in sizeable numbers in Hyderabad, Sukkur and other cities of Sindh. Their representative party Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) is identified predominantly with Karachi. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is typically identified more with rural Sindh excluding Karachi. The two exclusive ethno-nationalist movements representing urban and rural Sindh draw on the fact that no provincial reorganisation on a linguistic basis was ever taken up. In India, language is 'in' and religion is 'out' as a legitimate political entity. In Pakistan, religion is 'in', but language is 'out'. As a result, provincial territory becomes a symbol of nationalism of the majority community, such as Sindhis in Sindh, which leaves the minority community of mohajirs de-territorialised. Not surprisingly, the MQM pursues a strategy of ethnic overbidding, while the Pakistan People's Party remains committed to ethnic underbidding for the fear of losing its constituencies outside Sindh. Recently, the Pakhtuns from upcountry have registered their presence through political activism. The process of nativisation of the two migrant communities has pushed both mohajirs and Pakhtuns – at 8–9 million and 4–5 million respectively out of an estimated 18.5 million people in Karachi – towards a headlong collision.

More Pakhtuns live in Karachi than in Peshawar, the capital of their heartland KP. For two generations, they struggled to obtain good jobs and generally worked as labourers in the construction and transport sectors. Some operated in smuggling, drug trafficking and land grabbing. The third generation is now seeking a political identity. The classical Pakhtun entity currently known as the Awami National Party (ANP) has established itself in Karachi by winning two seats in the Sindh Assembly. The last two years have seen bloody clashes between mohajirs and Pakhtuns. There have been spates of targeted killings at the hands of militant wings, allegedly related to the MQM, ANP and PPP. The question of whose land it is anyway has made real estate an apple of discord between communities. Accounting for 45% of the inhabitants of Karachi, the squatter

settlements operate outside the law and disputes are settled outside the courts, often through the barrel of a gun.

Politics of Islam

Islam has been at the heart of the national project in Pakistan, whereby the ruling elite constantly drew upon the Two-Nation Theory as a source of legitimacy. Islam became an instrument of state policy to counter ethnic forces in pursuit of national integration on the one hand, and the perceived Indian challenge to national security on the other. The military sponsored divine sources of legitimacy as an alternative to the constitutional source of legitimacy. From the 1970s onwards, the much discussed *mullah*-garrison alliance operated in the background of the military operation in East Pakistan and the Afghanistan resistance movement as well as General Zia's Islamisation programme in the 1980s. The rising tide of anti-Westernism focused on the perception of Muslims as underdogs in the regional conflicts of Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo in the 1990s, and Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s. The clash of civilizations became the new *mantra* with anti-Americanism at its core, and *jihad* as its ideological weapon. Beyond nationalism, an alternative meta-identity of the world of Islam took root, deeply immersed in a dichotomous worldview. The Taliban and various proto-Taliban groups projected Islam as war. In six decades, Pakistan moved from separation of religion from politics as professed by its founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, to conflation of the two; from the state defining religion to religion defining the state; and from a low-church society to a high-church society. The denominational discourse raised sacred barriers to national integration, and created paranoia about security. All this has led to insularity in thinking, and isolation from the region and the world.

The social universe of Karachi has become atomised due to immigration of individuals and families – not tribes, groups and communities – from south, east, west and north India and from KP, Punjab and Balochistan in Pakistan. The unplanned urbanisation discounted civil authority and delivered power into the hands of the illegal developers of the underworld criminal networks. The concomitant process of loss of community has led to the disembodiment of religion from culture. New currents of religious thinking filled the vacuum: Jihadism from Afghanistan; Salafism from Saudi Arabia; the Shia model of Islamisation from Iran; and the Sunni model of Islamisation in Pakistan. A latent anti-Indianism and a strident anti-Americanism link the local territorial state's idiom with the supra-territorial global discourse of Islam. In this context, the War against Terror has lost the moral

high ground. Karachi has emerged as a haven for fugitives from Afghanistan and FATA under the impact of war along the Pak–Afghan border and drone attacks. Osama Bin Laden is understood to have spent a few years in Karachi after he fled Afghanistan. There are around 5000 militants living in the city, belonging to Al-Qaeda, Tehrik Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Tayba, Jamaat Dawa, Lashkar Jhangvi, Sipah Sahaba Pakistan, Jundullah and dozens of other jihadi organisations. Not far behind are extremist parties such as the Sunni Tehrik, along with its coalition partners in the Sunni Ittehad Council. There are also Internally Displaced Persons from Swat, South Waziristan and other war-torn areas.

There is an impression that the Taliban have largely spared Karachi from militant activities, because the city provides a nodal point for communication networks of jihadi organisations, shelter for fugitives from northern Pakistan and Afghanistan, and a strategic place for raising money by robbing banks, kidnapping for ransom, money laundering and collecting donations from local and foreign sources. The MQM claims that 21 networks of Islamic militants have been unearthed by the Rangers, some of whom operate in conjunction with the ANP. The latter accuses the former of the same crime. Islamic and ethnic forces communicate, combat, coalesce and compete with each other in different contexts at different times in Karachi.

The unstable regional setting

Is the playground of regional rivalries shifting from Afghanistan to Pakistan as the endgame in 2014 approaches? In the regional scenario, apart from Afghanistan as the prime cause, Saudi Arabia has played a significant role in Pakistan in economic, political, strategic, diplomatic, religious and cultural domains of public life. My analysis shows that 1) Saudi Arabia has outsourced its security to Pakistan, reflecting a doctrine of strategic depth of its own; 2) it has lost out in the Arab nationalist project and embraced the Islamic project in the wider Muslim world through funding of *madrasahs* and Islamic parties, with an anchor in Pakistan; 3) it has engaged in a proxy war with Iran on the soil of Pakistan in the context of the Shia–Sunni conflict, thereby keeping the embers of sectarianism burning; 4) it sometimes operates at cross purposes with the US, its partner in the War against Terror, in the context of Salafism – a fundamentalist doctrine that allegedly abets radicalisation; and finally, 5) it is feared that the Saudi Arabian input carries a destabilising potential for Pakistan in the longer-term perspective in terms of rendering the institutional–constitutional framework of the state rooted in the Westminster model illegitimate by invigorating alternative ideological forces.

While Afghanistan, the ultimate source of regional instability in recent history, has been the first line of defence against terror for the US, it has now emerged as the first line of defence against India for Pakistan. The increasing Indian presence in Afghanistan in the context of infrastructural development and strategic alliance has sent shock waves through the security establishment of Pakistan. The Af–Pak approach to regional security, combined with the purported decoupling of US relations with India and Pakistan, has become redundant for understanding the conflict in the region. Washington’s approach to the War against Terror missed out on the Indo–Pakistan rivalry. The tremors of cataclysmic developments in Afghanistan are felt deep down in urban Sindh through the new waves of refugees, fresh ideological indoctrination and the role of Karachi in serving the financial, educational and security requirements of the Taliban and its allies. Iran has also displayed a willingness to accommodate the enemies of the US, including the Taliban. Pakistan has kept on pressing for the deal on the gas pipeline amidst uncertainty created by the continued sanctions against Iran.

The US has operated through the civilian government and, more significantly, the army to keep the strategic alliance with Pakistan on track after the Raymond Davis affair, the Abbottabad operation and the NATO attack on the Salala checkpoint in 2011. There are allegations, from the MQM leadership among others, that the US has supported the ANP to sort out the Taliban from the local Pakhtun community in KP and, for that purpose, extended the recognition of its role in Karachi. The MQM leadership claims that US Military Intelligence asked it to spare two seats of the Sindh Assembly for the ANP in Karachi, and also disallowed Jamiat-e-Ulama Islam-Fazlurrehman (JUI-F) from contesting those seats. As compensation, Washington was given a free hand in KP by the ANP, in its pursuit of terrorists. Other allegations point to India as a destabilising factor in the region through its soft landing in Afghanistan, thus pushing the security establishment of Pakistan away from pursuing the Taliban and towards sponsoring a Defence of Pakistan Council that included several banned militant outfits. Urban Sindh traditionally looked at India – the country of origin of the mohajir population – as a hegemonic country, much as the Arab Jews in Israel looked at their areas of origin in adversarial terms. In recent years urban Sindh – like urban Punjab – has embraced a regional perspective on India as the latter is seen to be encroaching upon Pakistan through Afghanistan, Balochistan and Iran, both strategically and diplomatically.

Urban Sindh: some comparative and concluding remarks

How is urban Sindh different from FATA, Balochistan, south Punjab, Gilgit–Baltistan and Azad Kashmir in terms of the fallout of regional instability? It is the ‘centre’ while

all other regions represent the ‘periphery’ of the national economic, political and cultural life. Its problems are somewhat different: more ethnic than sectarian, more civic than military. It calls for a solution that transcends solutions elsewhere. Unlike FATA, Karachi is a mega city with one of the highest population concentrations in the world. Neither selective military action nor drone attacks are possible here. While south Punjab is a peripheral region under a growing influence of extremist Salafi and Deobandi doctrines, Karachi has the profile of a modern, cosmopolitan and plural society. However, its complex ethnic conflict has the potential to create a vacuum in civic life that could be filled by religio-sectarian forces mobilised by changes in the region. Urban Sindh represents a turf war between contending forces, not a separatist movement such as in Balochistan. Gilgit–Baltistan, the only Shia-majority region in Pakistan, has been the scene of sectarian killings, which is not the dominant pattern in Karachi. Azad Kashmir’s politics is essentially local, even at the same time as being part of the core dispute between India and Pakistan.

It is evident that the conflict is no longer bounded by the local space. Patterns of interaction across the borders reinforce the spiral of fear and insecurity, buttressed by a constant process of image making along various schemas incorporating the perceived adversaries. The withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan has the potential to accelerate the ethnic war in Afghanistan and increase the number of refugees in Pakistan. If more refugees seek a new life in Karachi, it would further complicate its ethnic profile. The absence of an ethnic bargain and sectarian harmony in Afghanistan and in Karachi points to cynical scenarios in the short run.

Further reading:

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