
Pakistan's predicament: The diagnostic and the debates within

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A detailed discussion on conference on Pakistan's challenges is a timely initiative, for these challenges have been dangerously expanding for long, and the country is facing tough times, indeed. However, an international conference on such a topic may add to its sensitivity, for one of the dimensions of the current crisis is the often heard or read accusations that the ills of the country result basically from an overarching foreign hand —whatever it could be: India, the US or the West. The fact that the most common image of Pakistan elaborated abroad is a disturbing one adds to the difficulty. A foreigner's comment on the state of the nation might easily appear prejudiced if not patronizing. For avoiding these pitfalls, I shall rely only Pakistani sources commenting upon the issues addressed by this conference. The topic is so large, and the Pakistani sources so abundant, that my choices will reflect only a very limited number of Pakistanis who have commented upon the subject. Critics might say that this approach is biased as well, as I shall quote mostly comments coming from what is labelled in Pakistan the "liberals" —who might have become a minority. This is not as simple as that, for the definition of "liberals" in Pakistan is encompassing a number of opinions, and feeds a number of debates. In any case, I would suggest here than when discussing

democracy, it seems sound to listen to those who plead for it. Others critics would say that I have under-evaluated the cost paid by Pakistan in the so-called “war on terror” launched after 9/11. I would like to be precise here that this chapter will deal more with the issue of democracy, governance and national unity than on the geopolitics of Af-Pak, despite its relevance on present day Pakistan, and on the national narratives about the state of the nation.

I. The State of Pakistan: Insiders’ Perspectives

There is no dearth of systematic analyses on Pakistan recently conducted abroad such as Selig Harrison’s report *Pakistan: the State of the Union* (2009) or, from the Indian side, the IDSA report *Wither Pakistan?* (2010). There is no dearth as well of publications by noted Pakistani authors who underline the country present predicament, from Roedad Khan’s *Pakistan: a Dream Gone Sour* (1997) to Ahmed Rashid’s *Descent into Chaos* (2008). From the foreign side, the year 2011 has been particularly productive, with Stephen Cohen’s edited volume *The future of Pakistan*, John Schmidt’s *The Unravelling: Pakistan in the Age of Jihad*; Pamela Constable’s *Playing with Fire. Pakistan at War with Itself* and Anatol Lieven’s book *Pakistan: a Hard Country*, to quote only a few.

Beyond these well-thoughts books, a good start for analysing opinions on the current state of Pakistan is to refer to this special moment of national introspection: Independence Day. In its editorial published on 14 August 2011, *The News* had this to say:

“On its sixty-fifth birthday, Pakistan confronts political turmoil in Sindh, anarchy in Balochistan, continued militancy in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and killings in Karachi. This is hardly a state of affairs we can feel proud of. And to make matters worse, there is no semblance of governance while institutional disputes, notably between the judiciary and the executive, persist. (...) Given our situation, we should also use August 14 as a time to reflect. There is a lot to think about. We should seriously consider

why our country, rich with so many resources and so much talent, should stand where it does today. Why should Pakistan be considered the “most dangerous place on earth”? Why should food security in an agrarian land be worse than in sub-Saharan Africa? Why should literacy levels and health indicators be the worst in the region – and why should the government be so indifferent to the plight of millions across the country. Our very future depends on our ability to confront and answer these questions.”¹

Confronting these questions requests to understand the causes of Pakistan's problems. Reading what Pakistani analysts published recently, the diagnostic is clearly established. Beyond the media columns vigorously exposing the diverse parameters of the current predicament, a series of more austere publications address the same issues and offers in addition policy recommendations. Particularly relevant for us is the comprehensive collection of essays edited by Maheela Lodi in 2011 : *Pakistan. Beyond the Crisis State*”, as it offers the views of a mix of intellectuals, practitioners and decision makers of the highest order.

The fault-lines in Pakistan's polity

The former ambassador to the United States identifies in her opening piece of her book five correlated fault-lines in Pakistan's polity. The first one is defined by the “asymmetry in power between political and non-political institution”. Political institutions are seen as weaker than the steel frame of the bureaucracy and the pre-eminence of the military. For two decades, Pakistan has known only limited franchise, and the Parliament remains largely “subservient” to the Executive. Political parties are too often built around “traditional kinships group”. This structure of the polity generates a second fault-line: “A feudal-dominated political order implementing clientelist politics”. A narrow political elite of feudal and tribal stock has accommodated a section of the wealthy urban groups. As a whole, these privileged classes have opposed reforms, which would have been good for the country but adverse to their personal or

corporate interests —be they land reforms or tax reforms needed for implementing social welfare policies and an efficient pro-people governance. As a consequence emerged a third fault-line, resulting from a biased economic policy of “borrowed growth”. Foreign and domestic borrowings were supposed to compensate for a minimal tax net: an unsustainable choice when the interest rates go up. This could only end in a debt trap, when high service debt is added to high military expenditure. A recent study confirms how military spending explodes external debt in Pakistan, even in a context of economic growth, let alone when growth falls down. ²

The fourth fault-line results from “the enduring quest for security”, defined by the military in order to compensate the “lack of geographical depth” in a context of troubled relationship with India. As a result, a “siege mentality” emerged, while other sources of insecurity developed “in a society wrecked by provincial and ethnic tensions”, which define themselves a fifth fault-line, as the national unity is under pressure from regional assertiveness and religious divides.

The regional tensions are well known, but beyond the case of Balochistan and the dissatisfaction in Gilgit Baltistan, and beyond the remnants of Pashtun and Sindhi nationalisms and the awkward status of disturbed FATA, the debates on Seraiki in South Punjab or on the Hazara in Khyber Pashtunkhwa as well as the ethnic dimensions of violence in Karachi testify to the increasing complexity of the politics of identity in Pakistan.

Islam itself, supposed to be the cement of the nation, its *raison d'être*, is more and more divided. This is a long story: Ahrar defined Jinnah as “Kafir e Azam”, and in his book published in 1979, former Chief Justice Muhammad Munir recalled that when he asked “who is a Muslim?” with reference to the case against the Ahmadis opened in the Fifties, “No two ulama have agreed before us as to the definition of a Muslim” (p.47). Today, the situation is

worse as sectarian conflicts, which for long opposed Sunnis extremists to Shias, have now transcended this divide as Sunnis come under attacks from other Sunnis, not to mention the precarious situation of the weak minority communities.

Pessimists would say that promoting jihad has brought fitna: the war within Islam. The unending sectarian killings, the talibanisation of Swat and FATA, the nexus between the Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan, the jihadi forces such as the Lashkar-e Taiba and its front group the Jamaat-ud Dawa and the radical Punjabi sectarian groups, be they the Sipah-e Sahiba, the Lashkar-e Jhangvi or their new denominations, not to forget al Qaeda elements, has exacerbated violence. From insurgency in FATA to terrorist attacks in major cities, from sectarian killings to the bombings of sufi shrines in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—including the Data Darbar in Lahore—religious violence has brought havoc to the country, and thousands have perished under its strikes. The killing of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer has unravelled an additional challenge in January 2011: Bareilvis can also support violence when the blasphemy law is at stake.

Islam, the State and society: competing views

The pervasive spreading of religious violence raises very different comments in Pakistan. The relativists consider that the challenge is serious indeed, but that the battle is not lost. Says Maheela Lodi: "While it was apparent that defeating the forces of militancy will be a long haul, the people, many of the ulema and most religious parties rejected the militant notion that the sharia could be imposed a gun point." And she adds: "While militant Islam did not pose an existential threat to the country, its ability to exploit local grievance and play off governance failures underlined the tough task that lay ahead to neutralise its influence" (Lodi, 2011, p. 66).

Yes, radical Islam loves to presents itself as the only solution to redress the drift of a country submitted to bad governance,

weak justice and despise of the poor. In this context, it might be relevant to quote "the last will of Abdul Rashid Ghazi", the cleric of the Lal Masjid who was killed when the army commandos attacked its premises in July 2007: « we want the just system of Islam in our country. We are looking forward to seeing the implementation of Sharia laws in the courts of justice. We want the poor to have justice and bread. We want to end bribery, illegal methods, favoritism, injustice, and vulgarity. The solution to all these problems is the implementation of Islam and that is the only solution. This is the order of Allah and also a demand of the Constitution of Pakistan. »³ This is a classic position, found in many Muslim countries. Interesting here is the reference to the Constitution of Pakistan, which contrasts with the statement of Sufi Mohammad, the leader of the Tehril-e-Nifaz-e-shariat-e-Mohammad, who made clear before and after the signing of a peace agreement in Malakand that the Sharia he expects to implement cannot match with a democratic Constitution, as "Islam does not allow democracy or elections"⁴. "Democracy is not permissible in sharia law", he confirmed soon after in a published interview, branding the leaders of the Jamaat e Islami and of the Jammat e Ulema e Islam as "taking part in infidelity" for participating to the democratic process of elections.⁵

The point, therefore, is not so much that the radicals "play off the government failure". It is rather to assess if their actions pose "an existential threat to the country". On that matter, a number of Pakistani analysts are considering that the *nature* of Pakistan, if not its *existence* as a State, is indeed under threat. The fact that the Army decided to act resolutely against Maulana Fazlullah's movement in Swat in 2009 after the collapse of the political agreement signed after a first set of military operations started two years before may condone the idea of a threat, firstly underestimated, and belatedly recognised. The same could be said about tentative agreements with tribal insurgents, which finally collapsed in the agitated agencies of FATA, in 2004 and in 2005.

More broadly, however, the range and the diversity of violence engulfing the country raise a challenge, which runs much more deeply into the prevailing polity. Hence, interrogations formulated by Cyril Almeida in an op-ed written in 2010, under the title: "Questions, questions, questions", about "the currency of debasement and shallowness » that affects Pakistan today. I quote:

« As the carnage and destruction, both manmade and nature's wrath, around us continue, it's hard to figure out what to do. (...) There are so many strands, where do you begin? Militants, the economy, politics? If militants, then which kind, the sectarian or the pan-Islamic? Is the state collapsing? Or are still-born state-building processes finally catching up with us, inevitably proving that only shrinking pockets can be kept governable? (...) It's pretty clear the barbarians are gathering at the gate, but can we be so sure on which side of the gate they are? Inside — among us, one of us, ostensibly protecting us — or outside? (...) Questions, questions, questions — the answers only seem to come in the form of more blood, more misery, more dashed hopes. (...) The self-appointed guardians of the national interest have been so keen on saving this place from external enemies, real and imagined, that they seem to have forgotten you can wither away from within, too. »⁶

Interestingly, in the volume edited by Maheela Lodi other contributors are less optimistic than her. Ziad Hyder, for instance, sees Pakistan as "ideologically adrift", as the "existential militant Islamist threat " results from the failure of Musharraf's "enlightened moderation" project, and from the fact that "the state's flawed narrative of nation building and strategic security" has been hijacked by extremist non state actor groups "that regard the Pakistani state as the enemy of Islam".⁷

ii. The Dual Face of Change: The Ambiguity of the Middle Classes

In a context raising so many challenges, what trends may redefine the future? What is changing, for good or bad? Here again, two sets of opinion can be observed. The first, exemplified by Maheela Lodi, takes note of the strengthening of civil society and hopes that, beyond uncertainties about its capacity of bringing significant changes, this new dynamics will bear fruit. The second type of analyses is clearly less optimistic, as it looks at the middle classes as dangerously tempted by authoritarianism and radicalism.

The rise of the middle class and its positive potential

On a rather hopeful perspective, Maheela Lodi defines the years 2007-2009 as a watershed, and argues that "prospects for a departure from politics as usual are better now than ever in the past" (p. 66), for the society has changed under General Musharraf's rule. Economic growth has been fair and even good during a number of years: from a low 1.96% in 2000, the annual growth rate has reached successively 4.7%, 7.4%, 8.9%, 5.8% and 6.8% between 2002 and 2006. The liberalisation of information has resulted in the rise of independent broadcasters backed by a telecom boom. A more connected and urban society has developed, increasing the size of the middle class. For Lodi these "transformational trends" only accentuated the gap between a stronger civil society and the traditional forms of politics, be they a military ruler or an elected government. The lawyers' movement launched after the dismissal of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in 2007 was thus "spearheaded by middle-class professionals, with politicians following them rather than leading this extraordinary urban upsurge" (p.71). More than that, "a stronger society was emerging just when state capacity in many areas was eroding" (p. 68), and society organisations were "able to offer different paths to political engagement and activism outside the framework of traditional parties and electoral politics" (p.72). Hence the "central paradox of Pakistani politics today: while traditional politics continue to hold sway in the electoral area, the

political ground is shifting in ways parties have not yet come to grips" (p.73).

This new fault-line raises unavoidably a major question: whether these movements "can go beyond informal, sporadic checks on executive conduct or single-issue political campaign? Can they morphed in a critical mass?" (p.75) This is definitely uncertain for, contrarily to some expectations, the Lawyers movement of 2007 has not generated a new political party. Lodi sees an hypothetical positive answer to her question as "the most exciting scenario" of the five options she considers for Pakistan's future: "a middle-class led-coalition spearheading an agenda of reform that aims to make governance more effective and more accountable and responsive to the aspiration of the people". Other scenarios run from "muddling through" to another military take-over. A social breakdown paving the way to the Islamists is seen rather as an outsider's hypothesis. Besides the best scenario, a second rate substitute would be defined by one or more of the established political parties beginning "to adapt and adjust to economic changes by making a paradigm shift from patronage to issue based politics" (pp. 76-77).

While Maheela Lodi herself is hesitant about her "best case" scenario, other contributors to her volume offer analyses and questions, which ponder optimism or at least which identify preconditions for a positive change. One of these preconditions is clearly linked to the potency of the military in the state apparatus, and to strategic paradigm the Army has defined for long. Recalling the size of the "milbus", the "military business" analysed by Ayesha Siddiq, Shuja Nawaz —the author of *Cross Words: Pakistan, its Army and the Wars within*— underlines, in Lodi's book, that "as assessments by the Army itself have shown, there are different ways of achieving security without making the Army so large and burdensome that it dwarfs and stifles economic development". A step further, Nawaz argues that "an even better defence lies in creating a powerful, pluralistic policy residing in a strong

economy", and concludes that "the longer the country remains under military domination, the greater of chance failure".⁸ Ayesha Jalal would concur. Asking if a turnabout is possible, she answers: "Pakistan cannot change course without neutralising or satisfying the security concerns of its all-powerful Army. (...) This entails assisting Pakistan's civilian government to sort out its political and economic difficulties and weaning the Army away from its deadly gamble with religious extremism".⁹

The Army challenge and the India parameter

Going beyond the long established "India-centric" perspective acknowledged by the Army Chief himself is also needed. Acknowledging the rise of India and her "expanding influence in the global arena", Syed Rifaat Hussain identifies three modes of reactions that Pakistan may decide to choose from. First, "Faced with the spectre of a rising India, Pakistan may turn inward to put its own house in order", a process which would request "a long peace with India". Second, "Islamabad may revive its atrophying links with the jihadi groups to use against its arch rival". This would have "devastating blowback consequences for Pakistan". Third, "Islamabad may try to bandwagon with New Delhi to take advantage of India's high economic growth, especially tap into a huge Indian market for its goods". Hussain adds: "None of these options are a foregone conclusion".¹⁰ Interestingly, even Munir Akram, the former Pakistan Permanent Representative to the U.N. standing on a more hawkish line while calling for "reversing the strategic shrinkage" of Pakistan vis a vis India, ends by recommending "a genuine dialogue on Kashmir and other outstanding issues", the creation of a South "Asia free trade zone" and transit agreements between the two countries. While strategic and diplomatic preconditions identified by Akram might not be acceptable to New Delhi, it is worth noting that Pakistan's India policy needs obviously to be revised.¹¹

Another view of the middle class

Maheela Lodi's book, although published in April 2011, says nothing about the killing, on January 4th, of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer by Mumtaz Quadri, one of his bodyguards opposed to Taseer's call for revising the blasphemy law voted under Zia ul Haq regime. The episode, followed three months later by the killing of Pakistan's only Christian minister Shahbaz Bhatti, has strongly confirmed how the space open to the liberals is shrinking. The most shocking event for the secular minded Pakistanis has been perhaps less the killing of Taseer than what followed: an open approval of his killer by a significant section of the middle classes, including hordes of lawyers from Lahore Court volunteering for defending the killer and spreading rose petals on him, and dozens of clerics refusing to conduct prayers for the deceased. The Army kept silent, and the Government choose to be as discreet as possible, suggesting by its attitude that another red line has been crossed with impunity. One year after the incident, Raza Rumi, took hold of its significance, in strong words:

« It is simplistic to ascribe the act of Mumtaz Qadri to an individual act of moral righteousness. In precise terms, Taseer became a victim of a dysfunctional state, which has allowed itself to wither away over the decades ». Taseer's silencing « has to be viewed in the larger context of the state that is reaping what is sown over the years. There are hundreds of Qadris belonging to various schools of thought who roam at large on the streets or hide within the security agencies meant to provide protection and enforce the law. The inability of federal and provincial governments to even take basic measures of institutional accountability against Qadri's peers and seniors remind us of the way our elites have almost surrendered to Zia's Pakistan. The police and paramilitary forces comprise personnel from a society where hatred in the name of religion is not uncommon now. The mosque-sermons continue to promote violence against non-Muslims and even fellow Muslims who may not belong to the

'right' sect. The unregulated growth of the faith-industry has found its way into mainstream television programming and once again there seems to be few checks on that."¹²

In a few lines, Rumi deconstructs the promising image of ascending middle classes eager to rejuvenate and normalise a democratic Pakistan. As a public intellectual, Rumi knows very well that all is not lost, and that Taseer's « moral clarity » helped his popularity to grow « within the moderate and progressive sections of Pakistani society ». But what he underlines after the killing of the Governor is « the rising tide of sectarianism and the use of violence to promote a particular religious worldview. Henceforth, « Taseer's murder has drawn lines between the two Pakistans. One that wants to survive as a tolerant and inclusive polity; and the other which legitimizes use of violence to establish a xenophobic state".¹³ "The battle continues", he concludes, largely within the middle classes, including some TV anchors of private channels which are fanning the flames when they and offer the extremists a media platform.

iii. Civil Society and State Policies: Pakistan on the Move?

To those, particularly foreigners, who believe that Pakistan is a failing (or even a failed) state, one has to remind that, fortunately, the country is still home to a number of courageous individuals who holds on —sometimes at great personal risk— and to many NGO or private initiatives who maintain, against the current, a willingness to act for the common good.

Civil society initiatives

I have seen by myself what the Lahore based South Asia Free Media Association has done for years for a sane dialogue between Pakistan and its neighbours, particularly India — a field where the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy has been active in its own way since 1993. I have observed the *Aman ki Asha* initiative launched jointly by the Jang Group of publications and

the Times of India, for “an Indo-Pak peace project” is “an idea whose time has come”.¹⁴ In Karachi, I have visited some of the schools the Citizens Foundation is building all over the country, for offering “quality education for the less privileged”, girls and boys alike. In Lahore, I have seen what issues address the Centre for Public Policy and Governance, recently established at Forman Christian University. I have noted what stand took the Aman Tehrik (the Peace Movement) when in 2010 it gathered participants from Khyber Pakhtunkwa and the FATA for a conference which ended by the release of the Peshawar Declaration on “Eliminating Terrorism and Establishing Sustainable Peace in the Region”. I have noted as well the multiplication of think tanks, large or small, which favour independent research and thinking on better governance, peace and security affairs such as the Jinnah Institute, its “Open Democracy Initiative” and its “Extremism Watch Report”, the Islamabad based Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies releasing, amongst many publications, an annual “Pakistan Security Report” or the Centre for Research and Security Studies working for documenting the sources of violence in the country, publishing a “Balochistan Weekly Monitor” and proposing “alternative views on peace and conflicts in Pakistan”.¹⁵ I have attended the Karachi Literature Festival where hectic arguments all along the day end in lively mushairas, which transform debaters in poetry lovers. This list could be endless. It testifies — as would do qawwali singers or folk artists brought to Paris by music lovers (Zarsanga the Pashtun, Akbar Khamisu Khan the Sindhi, Abdulharman Surizehi the Baloch)— of the vitality of popular tradition and creation, far from the chilling image of talibanisation. In a different and tragic mode, the way civil society initiatives have faced the devastating floods of 2010 is also testimony to the spirit of life stronger than the culture of death.

Reforming the polity: the federal issue

This, however, cannot always be a substitute to uncertain governance, and cannot exonerate governments, politicians and

decision makers from their responsibility. Looking at a few significant decisions taken recently will help to assess the performance of those elected to power in 2008. Certainly, attempts have been made, although their promises have rarely fully materialised. The unanimous vote of the 18th Amendment by the Parliament in April 2010 did make a mark, by striking a better balance between the President, the Prime Minister and Parliament. It is supposed as well to depoliticize nominations in the Judiciary, and to provide more powers to the Provinces, but its implementation is still a matter of debate. In the same vein, the National Finance Commission Award of 2010 has been seen as permitting a better distribution of financial resources among the provinces, but here again the debate was open, and the memory of devolution attempted at under General Musharraf regime was revived, after trouble in Sindh.¹⁶

In such a context, the question of dividing established provinces for the sake of better administration was bound to exacerbate the debate about the unity of the nation. I. A. Rehman, the Director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan—an independent NGO—and a Magsaysay Award winner, puts the ideological background of the debate into light in his comment:

« The traditional custodians of the Islamic ideology or the Pakistan ideology, or both, will surely oppose the idea of dividing any province on a linguistic or an ethnic basis. They are so obsessed with their notions of the millat that the existence of Muslim nations within the great millat is anathema to them. It is with difficulty that they tolerate the existence of units in the federation of Pakistan, and off and on their yearning for turning this country into a highly centralised unitary state comes out into the open ». ¹⁷

Interestingly, the whole episode unravels, if need be, how there is no consensus on what "Pakistan ideology" is, just as there is no consensus on what was really the position of the Mohammad

Ali Jinnah on the role of Islam in Pakistan. On the issue of delineating new provinces, we may refer to two extremes views, which illustrate the point. On the one hand, Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, Chairman of the Sindh National Front, defines Pakistan has a multi-nation state in need of strong provinces, to say the least: "The Sindhi, Baloch, Pukhtun, Punjabi and Bengali people were all independent nations which the British subjugated and combined to form the mosaic of India ». They, says Bhutto, joined for forming Pakistan on « the firm promise » made by the Pakistan Resolution of 1940 that these nations would be 'autonomous and sovereign' ». The solution would therefore be, in this extreme view, to have Pakistan as a confederation, "a commonwealth of Muslim states, as it is not possible to have sovereign states in a federal system".¹⁸ On the opposite, but invoking Jinnah's Pakistan as well, stand believers in grand conspiracy theories, such as Farooq Hameed Khan : « Pakistanis should foil any designs to disfigure and fragment Jinnah's Pakistan in the garb of breaking up Punjab and other provinces on linguistic lines for short term political gains and probably at the behest of foreign powers. This appears to be the next phase of the grand conspiracy to further weaken Pakistan, create hatred and divide the nation on linguistic/ethnic lines that may prove dangerous for the unity and integrity of Pakistan. »¹⁹

One may easily discard extreme views and underline rather the broad level of consensus which holds the country together, allows multi-party elections and a specific balance between constitutional civilian elected governments and unconstitutional but well entrenched power enjoyed by the military. However, interrogations on the weaknesses of the federal system of Pakistan and the wide prevalence of conspiracy theories go well beyond individual statements. Putting the blame on others, pointing all the time to "the foreign hand" and its agents inside the country is too often blown out of proportion, and sustain a culture of denial which is only deceptively a convenient rampart against recurrent crises. Drifts of the federal polity, recurrent disorder and

insurgencies are not figments of imagination. The case of Balochistan is too well documented for needing a long development: between repression, targeted killings and disappearances, the sense of economic frustration of a number of Balochs, and the resilience of separatist movements suggest that various “packages” recommended by official Commissions or announced by successive Governments have not solved the problem. To see the Baloch issue discussed in a US Congressional hearing on Capitol Hill, in February 2012, can certainly draw attention to the problem, but can hardly help to build a much needed consensus for a fair deal with the Baloch in Pakistan.²⁰

Similarly, the long overdue reform of the FATA is supposed to normalise at last a buffer zone along the Durand Line, which has been kept so for more than sixty years after Independence. Khalid Aziz, a former member of the FATA Reform Committee in 2004, is optimistic in this regard: “The Fata reforms that have achieved two glowing successes, the introduction of the Political Parties Act that will permit the mainstream national parties to mobilise the people of FATA and thus weaken the base of militancy, and humanising the draconian tribal regulatory law by reforming the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) »²¹. Certainly, bringing FATA into the national mainstream is necessary, but it might be a story of « too late, too little » at worst, or a question of time at best. Despite specific development plans which have been set up with international aid, be it from the USAID’ Office of Transition Initiative or from the World Bank, the dividends of much needed reforms will be visible only after —perhaps even long after—the insurgency affecting the Agencies would have come to an end. From pillar to post, from Pakistani talibans of Waziristan to secular Baloch separatist movements, two issues are therefore prominent: the problem of de-radicalisation, and the effective federal policies to implement for addressing structural challenges.

Fighting the militants

During the previous decade, under General Musharraf's rule, the score on fighting the militants has been, to say the least, unequal. If some al Qaeda leaders have been arrested and sent to Guantanamo, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (in US known as KSM), the Afghan Taliban have been offered asylum (and more than that, apparently) while the jihadis groups and the sectarian ones have been banned, but authorised to reappear under new names. The "enlightened moderation" has been a welcome proposal, richer in rhetoric's than in substance however. The reform of the madrassas or the passage of the Women Protection Bill in 2006 have not gone very far: "real change or band-aid?" asked Abira Ashfaq, who had worked with Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, a Pakistani NGO.²² The multi-faceted rationale behind Musharraf half-baked policies is well known. First, to support discreetly Afghan Taliban in order to sustain, in difficult times post 9/11, the quest for "strategic depth" in Afghanistan; second, not to confront seriously the forces of political Islam at home, in order to keep at bay the Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan People Party whose leaders were in exile (hence the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal episode after 2002); third —and it was perhaps the most difficult— to lower whatsoever the infiltration of Pakistani jihadists in Kashmir and to offer to India propositions open to negotiation, without disbanding really the jihadi groups.

This strategy has clearly backfired, when running with the hare and hunting with the hounds ended with losing the control of a section of the radical groups so far instrumentalised by the State and its Intelligence apparatus. The process started in 2003, with failed attacks on Musharraf himself. This legacy is not over, for the de-radicalisation process is still hesitant. If militant groups which turned against the power of the State are now facing the brunt of the Army, in operations which have pushed on the roads, in Swat or in FATA, very large numbers of displaced persons and killed hundreds of soldiers and Frontier Corps men, the protection of

the State apparatus is still on place for groups, such as the Haqqani network, which serve the geopolitical goal of Rawalpindi, and the Government is not terribly active against the radicals from Punjab. That Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the head of Jamaat ud Dawa, could publicly appear in Karachi in February 2012 along with the Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (the present name of the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan), the Jamaat e Islami, and former ISI Chief Lt General Hamid Gul at a meeting of the newly established Difa-e Pakistan Council (Defence of Pakistan Council), chaired by former Senator Maulana Sami ul Haq, chancellor of the Taliban training Jamia Darul Uloom Haqqania speak volumes about the limitations of the Government de-radicalisation policy. To have on the dais of this rally the vice-president of Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf, supposed to offer an alternative to the mainstream parties after the huge meetings of his leader Imran Khan, is unravelling as well the ambiguity of those who aspire to come to power through the ballot box during the next general elections.²³

The radicalisation is thus going both ways, while a powerless government is supposed to be in command. On the one hand, the pro-jihadists raise their head for "saving Pakistan" at a time when the US and NATO forces prepare their withdrawal from Afghanistan. They call as well, as they did in the Karachi rally, to make "mincemeat" of India: the Difa-e-Pakistan Council is both anti-US and anti-India. On the other hand, as noted above, the radicalisation deepens amongst the rank of the middle class, far beyond widely shared anti-Americanism views. In such a context, the "de-radicalisation plan" announced by the Defence Committee of the Cabinet in August 2008 appears to have failed. De-radicalisation goes far beyond fighting militancy, as rightly noted by Gul Bhukari, and implies to recognise first the extent of radicalisation and the existential challenge it raises.²⁴

v. Meeting the Challenge

The ways to go "beyond the crisis" are discussed at large in Pakistan, and many suggestions are offered from various quarters.

Without entering the details, and betting upon a democratic perspective, it appears that two types of challenges are to be addressed. The first one encompasses policy options. The second one is probably even more important, for it address structural parameters —should we say pre-conditions?— which, if not met, could probably impair the implementation of policy options.

The resources issue: tax and education

It has been mentioned in Maheela Lodi's diagnostic: accustomed to "borrowed growth", Pakistan needs a sound economic policy betting less on aid and loans, and more on its own resources and on expanding trade. On that matter, tax reform is a cornerstone of any sound strategy preparing the future. Everywhere, in a time of financial crisis and low economic growth, the topic is politically sensitive, and the debate between economists favouring austerity against deficits and those believing in Keynesian stimulation is running. The case of Pakistan is however specific for, beyond global parameters, the tax net here is particularly small, and a huge part of the wealth escapes taxation. To put it in Moshin Hamid's optimistic words calling for "a tax revolution": "Why is Pakistan not delivering what we hope for? Because of dictatorships, or India, or the Americans? Perhaps, but these days a large part of the reason is this: we citizens aren't paying enough for Pakistan to flourish (...) This is fabulous news, because it can change: taxes are the big hope for Pakistan."²⁵

A sound fiscal policy is also needed for investing in what Nobel Prize Amartya Sen has for long recognised as the engine of sound development: education and health. Two factors are at play in education. The first is the absolute need to give its due to primary education in government schools: this is a global rule, the backbone of any sound policy. Pakistan cannot be an exception on this ground. The second factor is related to the school curriculum: its knowledge content and the pedagogy tools supporting it, but also its ideological content. Twenty years ago, K.K. Aziz has deciphered the "prescribed myths" conveyed by textbooks.²⁶

More recently, Pervez Hoodbhoy has updated the analysis of textbooks, looking at the curriculum of class V students, with great concern about the world they depicts to young minds.²⁷

The identity issue

Beyond textbooks, the historical narrative of the nation is at the crux of the identity issue. Historical narratives, one should rather say: as stated above, they are conflicting interpretations of the past—which is not uncommon amongst nations—as they are conflicting interpretations of what should hold Pakistan together. Diversity of opinions is not a problem, as long as there is at least a minimal sense of cohesiveness. Ayesha Jalal would call this the need of a sound sense of history: “An informed, open-ended and sustained internal debate that can shed light on the root causes of their (the Pakistanis) present predicament is impossible without some semblance of a shared historical consciousness. Yet (...) instead of history, Pakistanis are given emotive lessons in ideology, along with a compendium of selective facts.(...) The self-glorification of an imagined past matched by the habits of national denial have assumed crisis proportion today when Pakistan is under far more serious threat from fellow Muslims than it was in 1947 from rival non-Muslim communities.” Not only “the official scribes of nationalism saw regional identities as threats to the state”, they entertain today, by texts, by speeches or on TV screens “a psychologically national mindset resistant to critical self-reflection”, a sure recipe for sprawling conspiracy theories, and for “burnishing the old narrative of national insecurity with apocalyptic fear.”²⁸

The strategic paradigm

This narrative of national insecurity and the policy of denial were once again apparent after the killing of Osama bin Laden by an American commando in the garrison city of Abbottabad in May 2011. While during a special Parliament session attended by the Army Chief and the ISI Chief the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, leading the opposition, asked for a better control of the defence

budget, by the end the unanimous resolution of the Parliamentarians stuck the world, as not a single word of their resolution asked why and how Bin Laden could have been living there. More important for them was the condemnation of "the US unilateral action in Abbottabad, which constitutes a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty », and the call for national unity in such troubling circumstances. So, unanimously, the Parliament, condemning the US intervention as well as the drone attacks in FATA,

« Expressed its deep distress on the campaign to malign Pakistan, launched by certain quarters in other countries without appreciating Pakistan's determined efforts and immense sacrifices in combating terror and the fact that more than thirty thousand Pakistani innocent men, women and children and more than five thousand security and armed forces personnel had lost their lives, that is more than any other single country, in the fight against terror and the blowback emanating from actions of the NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan » and « Affirmed also full confidence in the defence forces of Pakistan in safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and in overcoming any challenge to security, with the full support of the people and Government of Pakistan. »²⁹

Nothing has underlined as well the power of the Army and its Inter Services Intelligence than this "full confidence" renewed by all legislators. That does not mean that everyone is buying the official story. That does not implies either that the strategic paradigm focussed primarily on India is accepted by all, but it anchors a paramount power and a central dogma which weaken attempts at building normalised relationships with Pakistan's neighbours, whatever could be the initiatives of the Government.

While General Kayani says to NATO chiefs in 2010, at Brussels, that he is "India centric", and that there is no way he could relax on his eastern border, for "India has capability and (her) intentions can change

overnight³⁰, this does not imply that diplomacy is inactive. However, initiatives directed towards India are always subject to uncertainty, be it Kashmir or trade. It is certainly not by chance that the backdoor negotiations on Kashmir conducted with India under General Musharraf by Foreign Minister Kursheed Mehmood Kasuri, said by the Pakistani top diplomat to be "just a signature away" since 2007, were discarded by his successor Shah Mehmood Qureshi, stating that he found no file on that when he took over. We therefore understand that not everyone believes that the difficult geopolitical legacy of the Kashmir dispute should be a matter of compromise on "the second best choice", to quote Kasuri's formula.³¹ As far as trade is concerned, it would be of interest to see if the decision to grant to India the "most favoured nation status" announced by Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar in October 2011 —fifteen years after New Delhi granted it to Pakistan— will materialise, even after the successful visit to India of Pakistan Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim in September. Unsurprisingly, in their Karachi meeting in February 2012, the Difa-e Pakistan radicals urged the Government to withdraw its decision to offer MFN status to India...

The governance issue

Here again, on the decisive governance issue, two parameters are at play and here again the structural problems add to the difficulties of the day-to-day exercise of power. Critiques of the Gilani Government and of President Zardari, both elected in 2008, abound. What is important here is less what could have been done and what was not done than why is it so. The arguments are well known and do not call for repetition: they go beyond the easy but too simplistic dichotomy between the Civilian and the Military, although harsh critics of the power of the sword would put the blame on the Army, as does Roedad Khan in a vitriolic piece on "the illusion of power" :

« In practice, it is the *pouvoir occulte* which is the ultimate authority in the decision-making process in Pakistan. They decide when to abrogate the Constitution, when it shall be suspended, when elected governments shall be sacked, when an elected prime

minister shall be handcuffed, led to Attock Fort and detained or hanged, and when democracy should be given a chance. The political sovereignty of the people is a myth. To apply the adjective "sovereign" to the people in today's Pakistan is a tragic farce. »³²

More intricate but no less revealing was the still unfinished imbroglgio of the "memogate" which, from Fall 2011, exposed the intricacies of the multifaceted game of power, around a set of interrogations which are all questioning the pattern of governance at its core: the distribution of powers and counter-powers as defined by the Constitution, and as exercised beyond its ambit. Reality is of course important, but speculations are important as well, as both determine the power game. Whatever the end of the story could be, the "memogate affair" is instructive as it mobilises the four powers defining governance in Pakistan: the constitutional ones —the Executive, the Legislative (called to support the Government), the Judiciary— as well as the Army. Some would add another extra-constitutional power: the medias. That the Prime Minister could accuse the Army chiefs of not following the rules when answering the Judiciary while he is himself called by the Supreme Court on another affair implying the President testifies to the tense relationship which governs the State apparatus in Pakistan. There is nothing new in that. The old "doctrine of necessity" by which the Supreme Court used to validate military coups, or the moving geometry of powers between the President, the Judiciary and the Prime Minister during the failed decade of elected governments in 1988-1999 tell the same story: behind the responsibility of this or that Government in its dereliction of duty, stands the unresolved challenge of a balanced democratic political order bringing to the forefront, with a relative stability, the common good rather than groups interests.

Conclusion: The Sources of Hope

All this considered, what are the terms of the debate related to Pakistan's predicament, amongst those who believe that Pakistan democracy is the goal to achieve? From a leftist perspective, Pervez Hoodbhoy is a prominent voice, and a fiery contradictor of the religious right. In 2009, in a five-year forecast on Pakistan, he made first a clear bottom line : "Pakistan will not break up; there will not be another military coup; the Taliban will not seize the presidency; Pakistan's nuclear weapons will not go astray; and the Islamic sharia will not become the law of the land. » Then he listed the risks raised by the growing talibanisation of the minds: « a sterile Saudi-style Wahabism is beginning to impact upon Pakistan's once-vibrant culture and society. It could be far worse. One could imagine that Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani is overthrown in a coup by radical Islamist officers ». In other words, the bottom line is secure « as long as the army stays together. »³³ After the killing of Salman Taseer, however, Hoodbhoy was more pessimistic, identifying the "miracles" needed to save Pakistan: a change of the Army's paradigm regarding what is the real threat to Pakistan; a better governance; and peace in Afghanistan, the crux of the matter being the need to recognise the sprawling religious extremism "as a mortal threat" which could put Pakistan at war with itself.³⁴

From a more mainstream position, let us hear novelist Moshin Hamid: his bottom line is not really different from Hoodbhoy's 2009 analysis: "False nationalism will not work: we are too diverse to believe it. That is why our dictatorships inevitably end. Theocracy will not work: we are too diverse to agree on an interpretation of religious law. That is why the Taliban will not win." For Hamid, despite "desperate sufferings" the miracle of Pakistan has already happened: "We'll still here (...). We are not a dream, we are reality. (...) We are a country. We are normal. At last". And "it's worth pointing this out, because incessant pessimism robs us of an important resource: hope".³⁵

However, beyond different interpretations of the present predicament, Hoodbhoy and Hamid both believe that it is up to their co-citizens to decide what Pakistan they wish. A Pakistan recovering thanks to a revived economy and a policy of development made possible by the "tax revolution": "A brighter future awaits us if we, as Pakistani citizens, are willing to pay for it", concludes Hamid in his chapter "Why Pakistan will survive".³⁶ Hoodbhoy's scope is much broader, and more demanding, but the conclusion is similar: "For better or for worse, it will be for Pakistanis alone to figure out how to handle this. »³⁷ So be it !

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