

Pakistan's Crisis of Legitimacy¹

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Although Pakistan produces a substantial flow of applicants for refugee status in the UK, only a small proportion complain of direct persecution by the State. Instead the vast majority seek protection from non-state agents, from whose activities the state offers them an insufficiency of protection. Most such claims are consequently lodged either by members of religious minorities, or by women.

On the face of it the Pakistani state – closely supported by the military – has no shortage of power with which to back up its authority. However since the very inception of the state in 1947, the nominal strength of successive regimes has been undermined by the weakness of their claims to legitimacy, making them vulnerable to populist pressures whipped up by the religious right. The resultant contradictions have become particularly severe in the aftermath of the post-9/11 invasion in Afghanistan, such that General/President Musharraf has found himself crushed between the competing demands of his sponsors in Washington who keep his regime afloat and the ever more intense anti-American feelings of both the population and of the Army which he still heads. With the institutions of civil society in increasing chaos, the principle source of external pressure on this house of cards now comes from the ever more influential religious right.

Arguing that they have an inalienable right to supervise an inherently untrustworthy state, the fundamentalists currently preferred targets include

- i. 'Unbelievers' – or in other words all those whose interpretations of the tenets of Islam differ from their own
- ii. 'Moral backsliders' – such as women who have the temerity to disobey their fathers and husbands

Both sets of targets are generating a steady flow of refugees to the UK. All over Pakistan local fundamentalists have begun to actively to target such 'deviants' on the grounds that their activities undermine the integrity of the Islamic order. In doing so, they have begun ever more seriously to usurp the administrative powers of the properly-constituted authorities.

If the authorities had a greater degree of legitimacy they would be in a better position to sweep such usurpers to one side. But given the shakiness of the current regime, which above all derives from the contradictions around which it has been constructed, any efforts which Musharraf makes to do so plays straight into the hands of the religious right – who promptly argue that this is evidence of how far his illegitimate regime has succumbed to the efforts of the American crusaders to undermine the integrity of Islam and its ummah – just as they are alleged to be doing via the Karzai regime in Afghanistan. The resultant process of 'Talibanisation' is currently at least as vigorous on the Pakistani side of the colonially-constructed Durand line as its counterpart in Afghanistan. At present there is no immediately obvious basis on which these developments seem likely to be contained.

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The roots of the crisis of legitimacy – and indeed of system-failure – currently faced by the Pakistani state can be traced right back to its inception when Britain's Indian Raj reached the point of collapse in 1947. At all sorts of levels Pakistan was ill-prepared for its birth. In a paradox which still has profound implications to this day, the initial dynamic for its creation was much more exogenous than endogenous, for the vast majority of its most enthusiastic supporters did not even live in that part of the subcontinent in which Pakistan came into being. Instead the loudest demands for its creation came from elsewhere: the Muslims whose ancestral roots lay elsewhere in the Indian sub-continent, where their minority status led to them becoming acutely fearful of the prospect of unrequited Hindu domination.

India's independence and the contradictions precipitated by religious plurality

The Muslims were not the only Indian minority group with such concerns. The subcontinent's tribal, untouchable and Sikh minorities harboured similar fears, which cut across and reinforced other regional and sectarian contradictions in all manner of complicated ways. As it became increasingly clear that Britain's Raj was coming to an end, a crisis erupted within the Indian independence movement: what steps should be taken to cope with the contradictions arising from India's many dimensions of regional, linguistic, ethnic and religious plurality?

Under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru, the Indian National Congress adopted a very straightforward position: the future Republic of India would not only be homogeneous, but strictly secular in character. Religious affiliation – along with all other manifestations of diversity – would be a personal and private matter, of no public, institutional or political significance.

Few of India's minorities were convinced that this would offer them much protection in the face of hegemonic mobilisation more powerful than themselves. However those who sounded the loudest alarm were members of India's largest and best organised minority, the Muslims, who made up close to a quarter of the sub-continent's population. Even then Muslim voices were far from united. The loudest voices of protest did not arise in the peripheral provinces where Muslims formed the majority – precisely the areas in which Pakistan eventually crystallised. Instead concern for their future was most intense in the heartland of the subcontinent, which had largely been subject to Muslim rule in pre-British times, even though the Muslims living in these areas were heavily outnumbered by Hindus.

Fearing that the Hindus would want to get their own back, the Muslims of Hindustan were extremely sceptical of Nehru and Gandhi's bland assurances that all would be well when the day of Independence dawned. In their view the Hindu majority – who dominated the Congress party – were bound to gang up against them the moment the British left. In an effort to construct an institutional bulwark to hold that prospect at bay, the Muslim League – led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, an astute lawyer with an even more secular outlook than his Hindu counterparts – insisted that independent India should constituted in such a way as to guarantee minorities in general, and the Muslim minority in particular, an *institutionally guaranteed* share of power.

Unfortunately Gandhi, Nehru and their supporters refused to have any truck with such pluralistic notions. On the grounds that unity was strength, they insisted that independent India should be a centralised, secular, and above all an institutionally *homogeneous* state, whose very integrity such Muslim intransigence threatened to undermine.

In desperation, Jinnah threatened to wreck the entire party. He argued that if the Hindus were not prepared to do a deal, he would insist on dividing India itself through the creation of a separate state of Pakistan. Given that Jinnah and the vast majority of Muslim Leaguers were resident in Hindustan, this was not what the Qaid-i-Azam and his supporters really wanted at all; however he also calculated that it was an outcome which Nehru and Gandhi wanted even less. But to his alarm they refused to budge. Brinkmanship got worse and worse, and for reasons I have not got time to discuss here, Jinnah ended up with the unwanted fall-back position with which he had tried to blackmail his opponents.

Pakistan: a solution or yet another can of worms?

But there were many further ironies still to come. When Jinnah gave his inaugural address as the newly independent state of Pakistan's Governor General on 14th August 1947, the vision of the future he set forward was one which would have been equally applicable if partition had never occurred, and he had been inaugurated as head of state of a united India. His position was quite clear: in the new nation which had just been created of its inhabitants' would enjoy equal rights, an equality of esteem, and an equal degree of formal recognition by the state.

Jinnah was no Islamist. His concerns were much more political than religious in character. Hence whilst his objectives were to challenge – and as it turned out to put himself and his followers beyond the reach of – the threat of Hindu domination. Hence whilst the second-best solution of Pakistan with which he found himself lumbered might indeed provide a welcome place of safety for Muslims seeking refuge from the pogroms which were taking place in India, its future – at least as far as Jinnah was concerned – was most emphatically *not* that of an Islamic state.

Nor were the Islamists of the period rooting for such a prospect either. Instead both the Deobandis and the followers of Maulana Maudoodi's *Jamaat-i-Islami* took the view that the concept of a *nation*-state was antithetical to the principles of Islam. They did so on the grounds that a truly Islamic state should not have narrow nationalist foundations, but should instead seek to unite all members of the global *umma* under the authority of a single *Khalifa*. Pakistan, they noted, could only provide shelter for a fraction of India's – let alone of the world's – Muslims. Nor were they impressed by Jinnah's credentials as a Muslim leader: his liking for Scotch whisky well known, as was the fact that his wife was a Parsee.

If Pakistan's foundations were shaky in the first place, its immediate development moved from bad to worse. Jinnah was seriously ill with TB when the new state came into existence, and had passed away within a year. To create the institutional structure for an entire new state from scratch would have been a tough enough challenge at the best of times. But in seeking to do so Pakistan found itself plagued by precisely the same contradictions of plurality – albeit articulated within a rather smaller arena – as those which had precipitated its crystallisation in the first place. Moreover given that the Muslim League was an import from Hindustan, it had to do so in the absence of any kind of organised civil foundations.

Even though Pakistan became a more or less homogeneously Muslim state after its entire Sikh, and the overwhelming majority of its Hindu, population fled to India in the immediate aftermath of partition, its population was anything but homogeneous. Muslims may have formed the overwhelming majority, but they were divided by sect as between Sunnis, Shi'as and Ahmadis, and yet deeply by as between the Bengalis (who formed a clear majority),

Punjabis, Sindhis, and Baluch. Moreover the greater part of the elite which crystallised in the immediate post-Partition period were not even natives of the new state, but *muhajirs* – refugees – from India.

As a result the start the newly founded state suffered from a crisis of identity – and of its legitimacy – right from the outset? Just what was its purpose? And what kinds of bonds of loyalty could best hold it together? Notions of nationalism were largely fictitious, since its population lacked any kind of ethnic homogeneity. On the contrary it was made up of a bunch of distinct and mutually competitive ethnic groups, all deeply suspicious of one another's motives. What about religion? Given that the circumstances of the new state's origins, Islam was an obvious rallying point for national unity – but for the fact that the Prophet's message has always been interpreted in a variety of differing ways. And far from the differing sectarian traditions closing ranks in the aftermath of Independence, they exploded into an orgy of competition as each sought to claim the theological high ground versus all available rivals.

In these circumstances the only other institution capable of holding the nation together when all else failed proved to be the Army, which was in any event as regarded as a vital means of keeping India – then as now regarded as Pakistan's ever-present nemesis – firmly at bay.

Against this background the roots of Pakistan's current crisis of legitimacy is easy to spell out: over the course of the past sixty years neither the Army, nor religion, nor ethnicity nor the institutions civil society has succeeded in providing the Pakistani nation, let alone the Pakistani state, with a sense of coherence, let alone of legitimacy. To be sure all have had a shot at doing so, but in the process of seeking to achieve – or more precisely to *impose* – such a sense of coherence on Pakistan's ever more fractured social order, each successive regime has done little more than to widen the contradictions it set out to resolve.

A state in search of legitimate foundations

This is no place to offer you an overview of Pakistan's 60 years of ever more tumultuous development: instead I'm going to focus briefly on the role of the Army as a bastion of the state, together with the activities of a series of movements whose role is best described as that of non-state scourges of each of Pakistan's successive regimes, be they military or civilian. These are the Islamists of religious right whose influence – and/or threat – to the established order has grown steadily greater over the years.

But first some history. For the reasons I have already sketched out, democratic rule in Pakistan got off to an extremely shaky start. The extent to which the capacity of the authorities was crumbling was highlighted by the assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, followed by riots on the streets of Lahore when inflation shot up in the aftermath of a brief period of prosperity during the course of the Korean War. Growing popular doubts about the legitimacy of the regime was promptly opportunistically harnessed by the religious right, who argued that Pakistan's troubles stemmed from the presence of an enemy within: the numerous members of the Ahmadi sect, led by Sir Zafarullah Khan, Pakistan's internationally respected foreign minister, at the core of the administration. The Army eventually had to be called out to suppress demands that the Ahmadi movement should formally be declared to stand outside the fold of Islam, and all its followers dismissed from public office.

The Army was beginning to stir in its barracks as the authority of the civilian regime crumbled yet further. In 1958 martial law was declared, Field Marshal Ayub Khan assumed the reins of power, to be replaced by General Yahya Khan took over in 1969. By then an even larger contradiction was opening up, that between the east and west wings of Pakistan. However the consequences of the manifest necessity of replacing military with civilian rule had disastrous consequences as far as Pakistan's Punjabi, Pathan and *muhajir* ruling elite was concerned: Mujib-ur-Rahman's Awami League united the Bengali vote, such that he could expect to enjoy a working majority in the National Assembly if it ever met. It never did. Instead the Army set out to 'pacify' Bengal, setting off a civil war in which it dissolved in a quagmire of failure. A further partition of the country's two spatially separated wings ensued, in the aftermath of which Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as the civilian President of the western rump.

But despite his initial popularity, Bhutto's regime steadily more autocratic regime also ran into legitimacy problems. In an effort to placate his ever-present critics on the religious right, and hence to give his regime a greater degree of credibility, Bhutto decided to concede one of their most salient demands. He issued the notorious ordinance XX, which declared that the followers of Ghulam Ahmed Khan – otherwise known as Ahmadiyyas or Qadianis – did indeed stand outside the fold of Islam. Not that the initiative did him much good. The legitimacy of his regime continued to slip, and before long he was deposed by the very apparently inoffensive general whom he had carefully selected to head the Army. Under Zia-ul-Haq Pakistan was subjected to another lengthy period of military rule.

From our perspective, however, it is worth noting that Bhutto established two key precedents in issuing ordinance XX. In the first place the ordinance was a public acknowledgement of the legitimacy of a long-standing demand of those '*ulema*' (religious scholars). Identifying themselves as the guardian Islamic of orthodoxy, they claimed the right to monitor the policies of the state against the yardstick of Islamic Law, and should they find any of these to be 'repugnant to the principles of the *shari'a*', to demand that they be abandoned forthwith.

Moreover the specific character of Ordinance XX allowed the '*ulema*' of the religious right to advance their arguments one step further: it not only confirmed their right to issue edicts of *takfir*, apostasy (a contentious issue in Islamic Law at the best of times), but also to argue that that the Pakistani state had accepted that it had a *duty* to enforce such edicts.

To put all this in context, three further points are worth noting:

- i. The scholars of Islam (the '*ulema*') – who are much better understood as canon lawyers than as priests – have long engaged in mutual invective. In doing so they have regularly accused their opponents in obscure technical debate not just as mistaken but *kaffirs* – unbelievers.
- ii. There is no religious hierarchy in Islam. Hence whilst it is the duty if the '*ulema*' to provide *fatwa* on contentious matters, they have no means of enforcing them. Hence just as in the case of counsel's opinion, its force is only as good as its audience believes it to be.
- iii. In an Islamic context the ultimate enforcer of the opinion is not a judge but the Sultan. Hence the ruler is the ultimate arbiter of such matters, since he has every right to pick and choose as which of the *fatwa* on offer he is going to accept and enforce.

This state of affairs generated a considerable amount of tension amongst the '*ulema*'. Every Sultan who sat confidently on his throne invariably took care to appoint some tame *darbari* '*ulema*', court lawyers, who could be guaranteed to come up with the right decision. Hence whilst the most respected '*ulema*' were those who kept well clear of the Sultan and his *darbar*, those who did so were by definition powerless and ill-funded; but by the same token those who stayed clear of the *darbar* came into their own whenever the power, and consequently the authority of the Sultan began to slip.

The '*ulema*' of the religious right to whom Bhutto turned in an effort to sustain his legitimacy were in no sense *darbari*: nor did they reflect, or even attempt to reflect, a consensus of opinion amongst the '*ulema*' as a whole. Moreover there is no sign that he turned to them because of their righteousness: rather he did so in an effort to placate their capacity to whip up popular opinion against convenient scapegoats. Hence by acceding to their demands he sought both to curry popular favour, and to undermine the capacity of the religious to discredit his regime.

Pakistan's religious right appear to have learned many lessons from this experience. Well aware that they lacked the popular support to have any chance of taking over the institutions, and equally conscious that they stood in danger of discrediting themselves by exposing their inadequacies as governors if they were to do so, they have taken great care to maintain their distance from the state. By carefully sustaining their position as non-state actors, they have maintained – and indeed further developed – their capacity to take pot-shots at the state and its institutions as and when that seemed appropriate.

Talibanisation: the catastrophic consequences of global developments

Time is short, so I will jump over how all this played out during the reign of General Zia ul Haq, who actively courted the far-right '*ulema*' to prop up his policies of Islamisation, as well the role which they continued to play during the box-and-cox switches between the 'democratic' regimes headed by Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto during the 1990s. Instead I will fast-forward to developments which have taken place during the course of the current regime of General/President Pervaiz Musharraf – whose has likewise found himself courting the religious right in search of legitimacy. But before doing so another crucial ingredient has to be inserted into the pot: Afghanistan.

After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to prop up the tottering Najibullah regime, Pakistan found itself at the fore-front of a Saudi-supported *jihad* waged by the Afghan *mujahadin* against the Godless Russians, which simultaneously took the form of a CIA-supported effort to stop the Communists toppling another domino. Huge quantities of funds and armaments to support the freedom-fighters/*mujahadin* began to flow through Pakistan and into Afghanistan. Much of this traffic was facilitated by the ISI, a semi-autonomous unit of the Pakistan army, whose officers had their own agenda: firstly to bring Afghanistan under *de facto* Pakistani control, and secondly to reinforce the right-wing fundamentalist forms of Islam to which many of them were personally committed. Hence the ISI went out of its way to encourage and support the Taliban, and the Deobandi seminaries which produced and inspired its ill-educated recruits.

In a further twist in the kaleidoscope precipitated by American efforts revenge the 9/11 atrocities, General Musharraf found himself facing an irresolvable dilemma. As a result of Pakistan's efforts to maintain military – and nuclear – equality with India, Pakistan had become severely indebted. Hence when the Americans indicated that they required Pakistan's

support as they set about driving the Taliban out of Kabul, Musharraf was not in a position to demur. But whilst his regime was richly rewarded for its cooperation, he severely undermined the legitimacy of his regime in so doing. Hence his carefully stage-managed general election designed to give his regime a veneer of legitimacy went severely awry. The MMA – a coalition of parties from the religious right – received an unprecedented level of support, such that they turned out to hold the balance of power in the National Assembly. That suited them very well indeed. Not only were they able to continue to castigate all their opponents for their lack of commitment to Islam, but also to ensure that the regime would be unable to govern without their support – even if they themselves have carefully avoided taking office in the central government.

Contradictions within Islam itself

All this has brought some deep-rooted contradictions to a head. Whilst there can be no doubt that the neo-fundamentalist ideology of the religious right is becoming steadily more influential in contemporary Pakistan, its current success owes much more to failure of the institutional structures of the Pakistani state than it does to the intrinsic characteristics of Pakistan's indigenous religious and socio-cultural order. Hence in yet another paradox, the ever-increasing influence of neo-fundamentalist forces whose activities have precipitated what many commentators describe as the 'Talibanisation' of Pakistan are in no sense an outcome of the Islamic traditions indigenous to Pakistan.

Prior to partition, popular Islamic practice was strongly influenced by the Sufi tradition. Although the *'ulema* were respected in principle, mystically oriented Pirs were far more influential than Mullahs and Maulvis, and the shrines of deceased saints attracted far more devotees than mere mosques. However to the neo-fundamentalist reformers of the north Indian Deobandi school, together with their close allies, the Wahabis of Saudi Arabia, such popular practices are anathema, and deserve to be extirpated from the face of Islam. Hence Pakistan is also the site of a much deeper battle: between those whose Islam is a source of spiritual inspiration, and on that basis a source of guidance and solace as one wends one's way through the trials and tribulations of everyday life – and those who see it as God-given set of rules which will enable those who follow them to physically overcome all those whose ignorance and unbelief stands in the way of their own confident understandings of God's purposes. How, then, have the proponents of the latter position managed to become so influential when the most immediate targets of their religious critique are the ideas and practices which lie at the heart of popular culture?

A substantial part of their current influence stems from their success in taking advantage of the contextual developments set out above. As a result of the failure of Pakistani state to deliver significant benefits to a large part of population, together with the equally manifest failure of secular political processes to offer any kind of remedy to those inadequacies has – as we have seen – left the field wide open to those offering millenarian solutions. However the real key to the neo-fundamentalists' success is to be found in their educational initiatives. As in much of the rest of the Islamic world, the parlous state of disastrously under-funded public educational institutions has provided the religious right with a wonderful opportunity to roll out be its most effective recruiting sergeant of all: a huge network of *madrasses* – mostly funded by charitable donations from Saudi and the Gulf – across the length and breadth of Pakistan. Given the narrowly 'Islamic' content of the curriculum of these religious schools, most *madrasses* graduates of these complete their education with few marketable skills. What most do possess in abundance, however, is a fierce loyalty to the teachings of the Deobandi/Wahabi tradition, and an equally strong commitment to the destruction of its

enemies. In other words they are ideal – and easily malleable – recruits to the *jihadi* objectives of the canny leadership of the religious right.

Picking off the enemy

Pakistan's growing army of *jihadis* divide their enemies into two broad classes. Firstly Islam's enemies without, whom they have come to regard as 'Crusaders' whose self-proclaimed war on terror aims to crush their civilization and all its works. Given that the Americans fall into that category, as do the Hindus, Deobandi *madrasses* produce an endless stream of recruits ready and willing to sacrifice their lives as *shahid* in Afghanistan and Kashmir. However their *jihad* is not just directed at Islam's internal enemies. From a Deobandi/Wahabi perspective the principal reason why the *ummah* is in such a parlous state is that since the demise of the four rightly-guided Caliphs thirteen centuries ago, so-called Muslims have become their own worst enemies. By deviating from the straight path of righteousness, Muslims have fatally weakened themselves, and hence enabled the enemies to prevail. If so it follows that if Islam is return to its divinely destined path, internal reform aimed at ridding Islam of its mistaken patterns of unbelief is a necessary prerequisite to success in the external *jihad* against the Americans and the Hindus in which it is currently engaged.

Who, then, are Islam's worst enemies in the eyes of the graduates of Deobandi *madrasses*? They include, in increasing order of seriousness:

- members of Pakistan's Christian minority, former sweepers to their Muslim superiors, and now stupid blaspheming dupes of Euro-American crusaders who go out of their way to support their potential fifth column
- followers of the false 'prophet' Ghulam Ahmed Mirza, who dare to call themselves Muslims whilst denying Mohammed's role as the seal of the Prophets
- miscreants who follow the Shi'a interpretation of Islam who turned against the Prophet's injunction thirteen centuries ago and are still trying, but failing, to undermine those dedicated to following the straight path
- members of Pakistan's educated and privileged elite, led by the biggest Dajjal (impostor) of all, Pervaiz Musharraf. Although claiming to be Muslims, they are in fact nothing more than backsliders who are not so very secretly committed to advancing the interests of the crusaders, as is evidenced by their commitment to godless notions of immorality such as the 'liberation' of women.

The notion that the established order is rotten to the core, and hence in desperate need of moral and theological renewal, is not a novel phenomenon in Islam – or in Christianity. Likewise history shows that such millenarian movements gain their greatest degree of popular support during periods of turmoil and rank socio-economic injustice.

Non-state actors in contemporary Pakistan

The Islamic millenarian movement with which the Pakistani authorities now find themselves confronted has taken several decades to develop its current level of momentum, and there is no sign that the current regime has come any nearer to devising a set of responses which would diminish, rather than exacerbate, its further expansion. Moreover given current developments the blame for all this cannot be laid solely at the door of the Pakistani authorities. The series of proxy wars that have been waged in Afghanistan during the past three decades have not only played straight into the hands of the fundamentalists, but have also served to reinforce yet further the gross inequalities in Pakistani socio-economic order,

turning the country into just the kind of arena in which millenarian movements can be expected to flourish. Precisely because all of Pakistan's many regimes, whether military or civilian, have been plagued by problems of legitimacy, none has yet felt capable of facing up to the threatening presence of the religious right: instead all manner of efforts have been made to appease them. Perhaps the most disastrous consequences of all this is that control of large parts of the curriculum in the state-supported educational system has also been ceded to the religious right, such that Islamiyyat – now a compulsory subject at all levels in the system – is overwhelming grounded in a Deobandi theological vision.

Hence no matter how much Washington may feel content with its success in recruiting Islamabad as a collaborator in its 'war on terror', the greater part of the country's population together with significant portions of the army are bitterly hostile to the American (and British) presence in Pakistan. The attitudes of *jihadi*-oriented graduates emanating from Pakistan's innumerable Deobandi *madrasses* are therefore by no means wholly out of kilter with those of the remainder of their fellow countrymen: they simply stand at the extreme end of a broad spectrum of popular opinion.

By no means all the graduates of the Deobandi *madrasses* choose to pursue a course of *jihad*, no matter how vigorously their mentors may urge them to do so. But those that do so can choose between two options. Some choose the dangerous option of the external *jihad*, and in consequence set off in the direction of Afghanistan and Kashmir. Meanwhile those with less courage provide ready recruits for a more localised version of *jihad*, waged within Pakistan's borders rather than beyond them. In doing so those waging the internal *jihad* operate in a carefully-graded way. Although their ultimate objective is to herd the entire population of Pakistan into their narrowly-authoritarian vision of the proper practice of Islam, direct attacks on their Barelvi opponents have as yet been relatively rare. Instead the vast majority of their full-fronted homicidal assaults are much more carefully targeted, and consequently directed at much more obvious deviants: Christians, Ahmadis, Shi'as and 'fallen women' – as well as any free-thinking Western-tainted liberals who have the temerity to go out of their way to assist them. By doing so the members of the religious right can present themselves as defenders of the purity of Islam against the many dajjals who have dedicated themselves to corrupting its integrity.

Conclusion

General Pervez Musharraf is no fundamentalist: on the contrary there can be little doubt that he is broadly liberal-minded in personal terms. But even though he is simultaneously the elected President of Pakistan, as well as Chief of Army Staff, he is in no way in a position to act as he wills. Instead he is best regarded as standing at the peak of a delicately constructed house of cards, in which a significant rebellion by any of its major elements would bring the whole edifice tumbling down in chaos. But whilst the contradictions which he has been required to bridge to maintain his balancing act have by now comprehensively shredded all the claims to legitimacy which his regime may once have had, the absence of any viable replacement inhibits all the contradictory elements of which it is composed to bring it down.

This has provided non-state actors on the religious right with an opportunity to have a field day. Not that they have any immediate plans for a comprehensive takeover. They are far too canny for that. They are well aware that their level of active support amongst the population at large is far too limited for such an exercise to have any prospect of success, and that even if they did by happenstance manage to do so, they are would by doing so expose themselves to

the prospect of being exposed to just the same process of failure and delegitimisation of which all previous Pakistani regimes have rapidly fallen foul.

Instead they are carefully maintaining their stance on the sidelines, and doubtless will continue to do so when the Musharraf regime reaches its inevitable end, and regardless of whether its successor is more military or civilian in character. In strategic terms there is much to be said in favour of sustaining their position as non-state actors, since it gives them access to power without being troubled by matters of responsibility. Above all it enables them to claim the moral high ground by subjecting the state and its institutions to a constant critique by claiming that it is failing to live up to its Islamic duties, whilst picking off vulnerable 'impostors', 'apostates' and other similar deviants from the straight path as and when they will.

So long as this kind of stand-off is sustained, states in Pakistan's position can be expected to produce a steady stream of refugees fleeing from persecution by non-state actors against whose depredations the properly constituted authorities are neither able nor willing to offer adequate protection.

Sources

In addition to the academic literature on the political economy of Pakistan, the principle source of information on current development in Pakistan on which I have relied in preparing this paper are a series of reports prepared by the International Crisis Group:

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