



Pakistan's Stability The Global Stakes

PR Chari

Research Professor, IPCS

In his interaction with students in the St. Xavier's College in Mumbai last month President Obama had stressed that "we want nothing more than a stable, prosperous, peaceful Pakistan." Later, in New Delhi, he emphasized the need to deny terrorists safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and defeat terrorist networks like the Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistan should also bring the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice.

President Obama was greatly concerned with Pakistan's stability as a nation state. In Mumbai he said that India is "the country with the biggest stake in Pakistan's success. I think that if Pakistan is unstable, that's bad for India. If Pakistan is stable and prosperous, that's good." His solution to alleviate the 'security instability' in the region was evolving trust through dialogue between India and Pakistan, addressing less controversial issues first and more contentious issues later.

Currently, the Indo-Pak dialogue is in recess after the Mumbai 26/11 attacks, and incontrovertible proof becoming available of the ISI's involvement in this episode. An early resumption of this dialogue is unlikely.

I PAKISTAN & INSTABILITY

Three questions arise against this backdrop to adjudge the state of stability and instability in Pakistan. Why and how has Pakistan compromised its stability? What are the implications of Pakistan's instability for regional and international security? And, what can external actors like India and the United States do to stabilize Pakistan?

First, evaluating Pakistan's stability or instability requires some recent history to be rehearsed. Pakistan's birth was premised on negativism. It seceded from British India while India saw itself as the successor to British India. Pakistan has felt impelled consequently to emphasize its distinctiveness from India. It chose to be a Muslim, not a secular state, and retain its feudal moorings, while shunning a democratic structure. Further, it promoted the private sector rather than choose a 'mixed economy' like India. It failed to define civil-military relations unlike India. The loss of its tall leaders soon after Independence ensured that its military gained ascendancy over the polity in Pakistan.

Pakistan was also hamstrung by its inherent structural problems. Pakistan was born a geopolitical absurdity, having two wings with roughly equal population on opposite sides of South Asia. Its capital—Karachi—was located in the Western wing, leading to political power being concentrated here, with a consequent neglect of the Eastern wing. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was a tale foretold in 1947. A combination of political and demographic reasons has led to Punjab, with some 60 % of Pakistan's population, dominating its governance breeding unreconciled resentments in the other provinces—Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Finally, mismanagement of Pakistan's economy by a kleptocratic leadership has led to its dependence on external finances, with a consequent erosion of political autonomy.

Hence, it is unsurprising that democracy has proven to be a weak reed for Pakistan to lean upon, and its domestic climate has been propitious for establishing either civilian autocracy or military rule.

Great euphoria attended its last elections following an agitation by its lawyers and civil society, which led to General Musharraf's ouster and civilian rule being restored in Pakistan.

In truth, the return of the Pakistan Army to their barracks meant little, since the real power in the country continues to vest in the Army, with the ISI firmly under its control. Time and again, the civilian leadership has proven incompetent and venal, and been removed by the Pakistan Army. Time and again, the people of Pakistan have welcomed the Army takeover. These persisting internal factors cast serious doubts on Pakistan's future stability.

What about external factors? Pakistan's military links the security of their country with a strategic presence in Afghanistan, using militancy as the instrument of a revanchist defense policy. Counter-insurgency theory informs that open borders and coastlines permit the supply of arms and military supplies by inimical neighbors, apart from their provided training centers and sanctuaries. This allowed the Americans to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan using Pakistan as the conduit for supporting militancy.

Now the United States is facing identical problems and is at the receiving end of Taliban militancy, which is being skillfully graduated by the Pakistan Army. Ironically, it is the most favored ally of the United States. The limited point being urged here is that Pakistan will be unable to stabilize Afghanistan, despite American military and financial support. But, this failure will enhance the militancy inside Pakistan and add to its existing instabilities that are of concern to its neighbors and the world.

Instability in Pakistan is endemic. No doubt, the structure of the state exists, but its functionality is in doubt. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rule of law disappearing from large tracts of the country in Karachi, Swat, FATA region and elsewhere.

Further, the Wikileaks confirm the widely held suspicions about Pakistan's collusion with the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), which spearheaded the Mumbai attacks. For instance, the American Ambassador to Islamabad, Anne Patterson, made clear in one of her dispatches that the Pakistan Army sponsors four major militant groups, which includes the LeT. In December 2009 Hillary Clinton wrote that ISI officials "continue to maintain ties with a wide array of extremist organizations, particularly the Taliban, LeT, and other..." The Wikileaks disclosures are still unraveling; they will not permit the Indian government to resume the stalled India-Pakistan dialogue, despite the Prime Minister's personal inclinations to the contrary.

Second, the foregoing underlines that instability in Pakistan is endemic. No doubt, the structure of the state exists, but its functionality is in doubt. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rule of law disappearing from large tracts of the country in Karachi, Swat, FATA region and elsewhere. The minorities are not safe in Pakistan; nor are the common citizens. Suicide terrorists are operating with impunity throughout Pakistan, and the death toll from their attacks has reached horrendous proportions.

Anne Patterson, former American Ambassador in Islamabad, is cited in the Wikileaks as opining, "Although not a failed state, Pakistan needs international help to stabilize civilian rule," despite the evidence that the Pakistan Army has no interest in assisting this process. Paterson also informed that militant recruitment is growing in southern Punjab, and "the phenomenon is spreading into northern Sindh as well." Militancy is already excoriating the FATA region, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and Balochistan, which really implies the whole country. The Pakistan military is over-stretched, with its forces deployed in strength in North Waziristan and on Pakistan's eastern borders with India.

Gary Samore, the White House Coordinator for WMD Counterterrorism and Arms Control, believes that Pakistan is "facing very serious internal and external security threats, [has] a dysfunctional political system and is seeking to expand its nuclear weapons program." He added that it was in great danger of plunging into "political chaos" and "government collapse." This compounds the risk of the "insider threat" from professionals within the establishment deciding to steal, sell or use

nuclear or radiological substances, endangering the region and the international nuclear regime, no less than the stability of Pakistan.

Incidentally, Pakistan, along with Afghanistan, is listed among the ten most vulnerable countries and being closest to state failure identified by the Failed States Index drawn up by the Fund for Peace. Apropos, the factors predisposing state failure include demographic pressure, massive movement of refugees and internally displaced persons, legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievances, sharp and/or severe economic decline, security apparatus becoming a 'state within a state,' criminalization and delegitimization of the state, rise of factional elites, and intervention by other states or external actors. Clearly, all these factors are present in Pakistan in abundant measure. Hence, the failure of Pakistan is a very real possibility.

II AN UNSTABLE PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL & GLOBAL SECURITY

How will all this impinge on the stability of the region and the world? At least four threats to national and international security can be identified.

First, adverse developments in Pakistan can spill over porous borders and spread into neighboring regions. South Asia is replete with such examples. For instance, Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka adversely affected the security of Tamilnadu due to the ethnic linkages between the LTTE and the local population. The cancerous growth of the Taliban, largely Pashtuns, in the FATA has spilled over into Afghanistan and Pakistan, and could spread into the adjoining Indian territories of Punjab and the Valley of Kashmir. The availability of dissident groups in these territories provides a fertile support base for the foreign militants.

Second, the possibility of forced migration due to instability in Pakistan could add to insecurity in India, since little can be done to keep out desperate population without using force, which would invite adverse criticism on humanitarian and human rights considerations. Acceptance of these refugees, on the other hand, would raise socio-economic costs wherever they choose to settle, leading to the local law and order situation

The nightmare scenario for the international community is an unstable Pakistan losing control over its nuclear arsenals. The al Qaeda is known to have interest in acquiring nuclear weapons, and Pakistani scientists are known to be in contact with them.

deteriorating and the local employment situation deteriorating. Besides, difficult questions would arise regarding their repatriation to Pakistan, except with their express and willing consent.

Third, all states in South Asia have their weak spots, where state control is tenuous. For instance, several districts in Central and Eastern India and the Northeastern states are weak spots; so is the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but particularly the Valley of Kashmir. The influx of a large number of refugees, who could be infiltrated by militants, would worsen the law and order situation, which already bedevils these weak spots. A FATA-type scenario unfolding elsewhere in the region is embedded in the instability of Pakistan.

Fourth, the nightmare scenario for the international community is an unstable Pakistan losing control over its nuclear arsenals. The al Qaeda is known to have interest in acquiring nuclear weapons, and Pakistani scientists are known to be in contact with them. Various scenarios can be visualized of what al Qaeda can do or threaten to do with nuclear weapons like their actual use or using them for blackmail. A sub-scenario is that al Qaeda acquires weapons grade fissile materials that could be fashioned into nuclear weapons. Or, it gains access to 'spent fuel' to manufacture an 'enhanced radiation device' or 'dirty bomb.' Such devices could find use for attack or blackmail.

The issue whether external actors, prominently the United States or India can prevent instability from overtaking Pakistan can be simply answered. No. This answer can be elaborated by a Socratic modality.

First, instability in Pakistan arises from systemic factors as noted above: like the dominance of Punjab and the resentments of its smaller provinces bespeaking the failure to adopt federal principles. These inherent factors are aggravated by the Pakistani Army being the real power in the country, either through military rule or being the Praetorian Guard, with civilian governments serving at their pleasure. Can the US or India do anything to change this state of affairs?

Second, the belief in the Pakistan Army that it must gain control over Afghanistan to acquire 'strategic depth' has become an *idée fixe*. Nothing can shake this feckless belief, which has led the Pakistan Army to link the national security with a notoriously fractious polity. Ideally, they hope the United States will continue to finance Pakistan as its surrogate to control Afghanistan, and will accept a Taliban takeover in Kabul. Will other regional interests like Iran, India and Russia, maybe China, accept this dispensation? Is this a plausible, workable scenario?

Third, the United States is persisting with its naive belief that New Delhi should negotiate a settlement of the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan to instill confidence in Islamabad, permit it to withdraw segments of the Pakistan Army from its eastern front against India, undertake a more vigorous campaign against the militants on its western borders, and, thereby, stabilize its polity. The complexity of the Kashmir problem is not appreciated, which includes the problems between New Delhi and Srinagar, between Islamabad and Muzaffarabad. Will a resolution of the Kashmir dispute resolve the India-Pakistan imbroglio? Will the Pakistan Army permit a resolution of either the Kashmir dispute or the larger India-Pakistan imbroglio, eroding its primacy in the Pakistani polity? The answer to all these questions is in the negative, but their reiteration conveys the sense that the US is tired, and has run out of ideas.

III CONCLUSIONS

What does the foregoing portend for Pakistan? A big question mark has to be placed over its stability. Not that it will fall off the map. But, it has become dysfunctional, leading to terror being exported, but, more ominously, nuclear technology being transferred. The danger to South Asia but also the international system is palpable. What does all this portend for the United States and/or India being able to stabilize Pakistan? President Obama's hope that India might hold a dialogue with Pakistan to relieve its 'security instability' is a non-starter. Could India negotiate directly with the Pakistan Army? But, this would militate India's governance processes that are premised on parliamentary democracy and civilian control over the military. An impasse is obtaining on basic issues, which cannot be resolved by assiduous Track I or Track II efforts.

All manner of wise judgments have been made regarding Pakistan. In a famous one-liner Atal Behari Vajpayee had said: "Pakistan is on the wrong side of history." Nicolas Sarkozy recently noted that: "A stable, prosperous and democratic Pakistan is in the interest of India, France and the whole world," before adding: "Nobody is forcing Pakistan to be both the victim and the crucible of terrorism."

Therein lies the problem—the contradictions within Pakistan itself, which can only be resolved by Pakistan. But, so long as its real rulers, the Pakistan Army, believe they can manage Pakistan's contradictions, there is little that is possible to ensure its stability. In truth, Pakistan is on a glide path leading inexorably to instability and state failure, and does not know how to rescue itself.



**INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
CONFLICT STUDIES**

B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave, New
Delhi, India, 110029
Tel: 91-11-4100 1900