

## Anti-India agenda costs Pakistan dearly

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### Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan by Ahmed Rashid

Reviewed by Brian M Downing

With the United States ensnarled in the Afghan insurgency and Pakistan headed toward implosion, AfPak and the countries around it are in crisis.

Renowned journalist Ahmed Rashid offers a series of essays drawn from his connections to figures in the state, army, and insurgent groups which succinctly and engagingly analyze the regional troubles. His insights are remarkable, his candor and courage all the more so. As he notes more than once, the Pakistani army has been known to treat roughly, or even kill, turbulent journalists - including in all likelihood Asia Times Online Pakistan bureau chief Syed Saleem Shahzad last May.

Pakistani political and military elites, he argues, have failed their country in four interrelated regards. First, they have failed to build a national identity embracing the Pashtun, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Baloch ethnic groups. The military has instead only built an identity based on opposition to India, while militants have recently begun building an Islamist one.

Second, elites have fixated on national security and allocated exorbitant funds upon the military at the expense of education, healthcare, and infrastructure - a predilection that civilian leaders dare not challenge. Third, elites have encouraged or at least tolerated jihadi groups that strike targets in the region and occasionally turn on Pakistan as well. Fourth, elites have allowed the country to fragment along ethnic lines. Punjabis are over-represented in the army and state to the resentment of other peoples. The Balochs have begun their fifth insurgency and many Pashtun tribes are at war with the government.

With its politicians drawn from corrupt family dynasties and its generals obsessed with their immense budgets, the country has failed to develop politically or economically. While India and other countries in the region have won places in the global market, Pakistan's belligerent policies in Afghanistan and Kashmir have cut the country off from commerce with Central Asia and India. Much of its industry remains state-owned and uncompetitive. The two foes could have benefited from trade. Instead, India has developed exports in manufactured goods and technology; Pakistan is still selling rice and cotton.

Rashid has long argued that the army supports the Afghan Taliban and he makes his strongest case here. Though nominally supportive of US/International Security Assistance Forces efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan's then ruler General Pervez Musharraf was dismayed by the Pashtun Taliban's ouster in late 2001 and the attendant rise of northern peoples tied to India. Musharraf was certain that India and its northern allies would seek to destabilize Pakistan's Pashtun and Baloch borderlands, endangering Pakistan's territorial integrity.

Musharraf reasoned that the US would soon tire of Afghanistan, all the more so once it had invaded Iraq (2003) and a bitter insurgency soon developed. Better to back the Taliban and guide them back to power. Pakistani intelligence (Inter-Services Intelligence - ISI) helped secure funding for the Taliban from wealthy Gulf donors and built camps for their fighters in northern Balochistan, not far from Quetta where Taliban leaders were safely ensconced.

Rashid is also sharply critical of the US, especially of President Barack Obama whom he sees as even less interested in AfPak than his predecessor. George W Bush, Rashid rather puzzlingly insists, showed considerable interest in Afghanistan; Obama handed off AfPak to others, especially the military, where artfulness in political development and diplomacy is limited and where reliance on force is not. Whether Afghanistan's lack of priority is true of the new administration as a whole or just the president, who after all faces pressing

economic problems, is unclear - probably deliberately so.

The new administration began with high hopes of negotiating a broad regional settlement, including the decades-long conflict over Kashmir. But when India objected to linking Kashmir to the war in Afghanistan, the Obama administration backed down. This fueled a new wave of conspiratorial speculation inside Pakistan: Indians had become the Israelis of the region, lavished upon by gullible Americans, and Pakistanis were becoming the Palestinians of South Asia, innocent victims of foreign lobbies and nefarious intrigues.

Rashid argues that it was a bad idea for the US to insist on elections in Afghanistan back in 2009. As much as this goes against the faith in democratic processes, he makes strong points. The Afghan parliament was essentially functionless, the parties were weak and not well known, and the public was more attached to well established patronage networks than to newly-minted political processes.

United States pressure for candidates to run against President Hamid Karzai convinced him that Washington was determined to unseat him. He responded by rigging the election with the help of warlords, drug racketeers, and a legion of corrupt officials who wished to retain their jobs. Owing to the strength of the insurgency in the south, the Pashtun vote was low and the non-Pashtun northerners enjoyed disproportionate success, which had the adverse consequence of strengthening ethnic mistrust. Rashid looks at attempts at counterinsurgency in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although a Pakistani army study in 2000 saw serious internal dangers, the generals refused to reorient from conventional warfare with India to counterinsurgency efforts toward internal groups.

A few years later, the US pressed Pakistan to retrain two divisions (about 45,000 troops) of its 29 divisions to conduct counter-insurgency campaigns in Pashtun tribal regions against the Taliban. The army, however, refused, citing the need to defend against an Indian invasion, which of course is highly unlikely now that Pakistan has nuclear weapons.

The US was only able to retrain Frontier Corps units - Pashtun tribal units that stretch along the Durand Line. This proved short-lived as the special forces advisers were ordered out of the country after the US raid on Osama bin Laden's home near an army compound in Pakistan in May of 2011.

The US was able to persuade the army to go after militant groups in the tribal areas of South Waziristan, but the operations did not use counterinsurgency techniques. They relied instead on heavy firepower, which caused large numbers of civilian casualties and turned more locals against them.

To the north in Afghanistan, American counter-insurgency efforts have not brought appreciable success. There is little economic activity unrelated to the war or foreign doles. The enclaves carved out of former Taliban areas aren't secure and locals are reluctant to cooperate with the US or Kabul officials. Indigenous military units are not effective. The army and police have high desertion rates and exhibit no fighting spirit. General David Petraeus pressed hard for building up local militias and won, despite Karzai's opposition to what he thought would become more warlord bands. Thus far, these militias have accomplished nothing as they are viewed with suspicion by locals.

Karzai's state remains both corrupt and inept. Ten years after the Taliban's ouster, many districts do not have a government court. Taliban courts have established themselves there.

Rashid sees the Taliban leadership as war-weary, perhaps even more so than their opponents. It was the Taliban, after all, who approached the US for peace talks. ISI, however, opposes peace until its regional agenda on India and Kashmir is guaranteed to be a central part of negotiations. Last year, ISI arrested the Taliban's second in command, Mullah Baradar, as he was embarking on peace talks that the generals had not approved.

As a result of at least somewhat diverging interests with the Taliban, the generals may be placing more emphasis on the Haqqani network, an insurgent group which is only partially integrated into the Taliban and which has been close to ISI since the old days of the Soviet war. The Haqqanis are thought responsible for most of the assassinations, suicide bombings, and terrorist strikes into major cities - including the coordinated attacks in Kabul and other cities last week. (As an insurgent offensive has recently begun, it will be interesting to see if the Taliban send signals through relative inaction in the south, contrasting with Haqqani boldness in the east.)

The Taliban's war-weariness and their disagreements with ISI offer some prospects for negotiations in the near term. Rashid suggests that the Taliban and the US negotiate a confidence-building arrangement whereby the US foregoes the night raids on Taliban commanders and the Taliban forego the assassinations of government officials. In this respect, Rashid offers some hope in his bleak yet compelling account of the region.

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