

The Tanner Lectures, Brasenose College - 2010

Pakistan- Lecture TWO

Saturday, 13/02/2010

By Ahmed Rashid

In my first lecture I focussed on Afghanistan. Afghanistan is, I argued, a fairly black-and-white issue; it is a complicated situation, but we know in broad terms what is going on there. Pakistan, however, is a much more complex state; and is currently extremely fragile. There are three factors that, I think, that have prevented Pakistan from stabilising since its formation sixty years ago. The first factor has been the failure to establish a coherent national identity. This is a subject of constant debate: is Pakistan an Islamic state, or alternatively a state for Muslims along with other religions and ethnic minorities? Are we Muslims first, Pakistanis second, and Sindhis or Punjabis third? Or are we Pakistanis first and foremost? The issue of national identity has plagued Pakistan and continues to be a significant source of confusion and conflict. It is exacerbated by Islamic extremists in the country who call for the establishment of a Sharia state and a Caliphate which joins Pakistan with other Muslim states thus dissolving Pakistan into a supra-national identity beyond its current geographical boundaries.

The second factor which has divided the country, particularly the army and civilian politicians, is the question of national security. What is Pakistan's national security paradigm? There are two conflicting views on this issue, and the tension between them contributes to the military's habit of taking over government, which has prevented the consolidation of civilian power in Pakistan. The conception of national security which currently maintains influence over Pakistani politics is founded on the military's views of security. This view is that Pakistan is primarily a national security state, it is a country constantly threatened by outside enemies, in particular by India but at times also by Afghanistan, Iran, or America. In order to defend Pakistan against these foreign threats, according to this paradigm, the country must maintain an army of one million men and also channel approximately 30 to 40 % of government expenditure to the military. Of course, this interpretation of Pakistan's security situation serves the military's interests of preserving power and domination of the allocation of resources within the state.

One result of this conception of Pakistan as a national security state is that it has allowed the army to define itself as the guarantor of Pakistan's borders. This has in turn led to an expansionist military policy. An expansionist policy, it is reasoned, allows Pakistan to keep India off-balance and on the defensive. This is seen as strategically important given Pakistan's considerable disadvantage in manpower, outnumbered as it is by India seven to one. A direct consequence of this strategy is that the state has pursued a policy of sponsoring extremism and terrorism for the last 30 years. It is possible to trace this strategy back further in the history of Pakistan - some would suggest this has been the policy of the military since the 1950s - but the clearest emergence of the strategy came with the arming of the mujahidin in Afghanistan in 1981. The Pakistani military, working with American operatives, used this process to gain influence in Afghanistan. This strategy and viewpoint was then applied to the development of the insurgency in Kashmir. Then again, in the 1990s, the Pakistan military backed the Taliban, which led to the creation of extremist groups within Pakistan to facilitate the development of this policy.

The third factor in Pakistan's fragility is the question of ethnicity. Punjab is the second largest province in the country in terms of geography, but contains 60 % of the country's population. 70 % of the army is drawn from Punjab, along with a substantial proportion of the government bureaucracy. As a result of this dominance there is enormous resentment from the smaller provinces, particularly Sindh and Balochistan, against Punjab. This shows itself in various forms of political resistance, unrest, and terrorism, such as the current insurgency in Balochistan against Punjab and the central government. The idea of a shared national ethnicity and language remains a long-running unresolved issue in Pakistan. There have been attempts in the past by some of the previous military regimes to institute a national ethnicity and language by fiat, but there has been no progress on developing a consensus on how to resolve this issue.

Having identified these three factors which have contributed to Pakistan's history of instability, I now turn to the present situation in the country. There are four ongoing crises in Pakistan. The first is the continuing

political crisis between the military and the central government. Secondly, there is the problem of terrorism and the development of Pakistani Taliban. This is a new phenomenon linked to the issue of control of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These regions are not legally part of Pakistan; they are semi-autonomous, with distinct identities and operating their own legal systems. The debate about the future of the FATA is a critical issue for the future of Afghanistan and also for the future of Pakistan. Thirdly, there is the insurgency in Balochistan. And, finally, there is the economic crisis. The current economic recession is the worst economic crisis in the country's history.

Let's start by considering the first of these crises, the conflict over the governance of the country between the civilian politicians and the military. Over the past decades we have had a cyclical pattern of military rule followed by its collapse and replacement by civilian government. However, as a residue of military rule during which many civilian leaders would have been exiled or executed, the incoming civilian government has invariably faced considerable difficulties. The civilian leadership has usually lacked the political experience or knowledge to manage the country toward a full-fledged democracy. Their governments have then faced a crisis of support and pressure from the military for a return to military rule. This process happened in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. And it is happening again now in the wake of the death of Benazir Bhutto. We have seen, after the departure of the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf, that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Asif Ali Zardari, have stitched together an alliance which, for the first time, has actually brought together many of the competing ethnic groups and political parties in Pakistan.

The PPP suffers from a number of problems, most notably corruption and general incompetence. However, it remains the only national party in Pakistan which has support in all four provinces. All the other parties, including the main opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League, have become regional parties representing ethnic groups or regional territory rather than national parties. Zardari's alliance included the main moderate party in the northwest frontier, the Pashtun party, the Awami National Party, the MQM, which is predominantly the party of the Urdu speaking population, and also groups in Balochistan. This was the first time when you had a national government which had support from the Pashtuns, the Muhajirs, the Sindhis, and elements in Balochistan. For the first time, this raised the prospect of a stable government under whose leadership ethnicity would not be major point of conflict

Following their election, this PPP-led alliance sought to reform the military and foreign policies of the Musharraf era. The reforms included attempts to improve relations with the Afghan government, which had been poor under Musharraf, and an outreach to India. However, India strongly rebuffed the approach and shortly after Pakistan's change in approach the Mumbai attack occurred and any prospect of an improvement in the relationship with India passed. These overtures by Zardari to Pakistan's neighbours, which were made independently of the military, were viewed by the military as a threat. The military had effectively dictated foreign policy for the previous 30 years and did not respond well to Zardari's initiatives.

The political situation has also been complicated by a domestic crisis involving the judiciary. This crisis was initiated by the removal of several senior members of the judiciary by Musharraf at the end of his tenure. This prompted a very strong reaction from the Pakistani legal community and civil society, which sought the reinstatement of the ousted jurists. However, Zardari was very hesitant to do this as he feared that the reinstated judiciary would then revisit claims of corruption against the PPP dating from the 1990s, and perhaps even challenge the legitimacy of his election as president. The judiciary members were subsequently restored after considerable pressure from the army. This created the perception within the PPP (accurate or not) that the army and the judiciary were working in alliance to remove Zardari from office. Zardari feels threatened by these developments as he has a history of corruption allegations stemming from his activities during his wife's term as Prime Minister in the 1990s. These problems have raised doubts about the viability of Zardari's survival as President.

This political instability is precisely what Pakistan does not need. The country requires a sustained period of democracy under civilian governance. This is so even if it is a bad, poorly functioning democracy. If Zardari is unpopular or ineffective then he should be removed from office through elections. The country does not benefit from the army removing a civilian government, even if it is a poorly functioning one, as this only exacerbates Pakistan's problems. The army does not offer political solutions for the country and, in particular, the army provides no solution to the country's economic problems. Indeed, the history of military regimes in Pakistan shows that they deepen economic problems because under military rule the flow of international investment aid stops.

The second crisis in Pakistan is terrorism. This issue is linked to yesterday's lecture which focused on

Afghanistan. To understand the prevalence of terrorism in Pakistan we must first consider the question 'who are the Pakistani Taliban and where do they come from?' Firstly, as I noted above, the army has supported extremist groups both in Afghanistan and in India for the last 30 years. This support has, in turn, led to a process of radicalisation within Pakistani society. During the 1990s many of the militant Punjabi and Kashmiri groups preparing to fight in India and Kashmir received training from the Pakistani military and intelligence services. These same groups are now conducting terrorist attacks in Pakistani cities.

This support for militant groups in Pakistan has led to a contradictory situation. In 2001, after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, the leadership of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban escaped into Pakistan (settling in Balochistan and the FATA) where they have continued to reside, largely untroubled, ever since. This situation has persisted while the Pakistan military has continued to provide support to the US military operations in Afghanistan. In exchange for sanctuary, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda have brought money and more military resources, and have also enhanced the process of radicalisation in the Pashtun-dominated border regions of the country. Pakistani Pashtuns have been fighting in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban since the 1990s, so the integration of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda into Pakistan has built on an existing relationship. However, this relationship has now increased the strength and depth of the radicalisation process of the population of these provinces.

The Pakistani Taliban differs in important respects from the Afghan Taliban. As I noted in my last lecture, the Afghan Taliban is predominantly an army made up of illiterate or semi-literate rural farmers and labourers. They are largely non-ideological and non-radical. They fight for a range of reasons which have little, if anything, to do with global jihad. In contrast, the Pakistani Taliban is much more radicalised. They have developed a strong youth element, drawn from young Pashtuns who have been radicalised in madrassas or religious schools established in the FATA and frontier regions of Pakistan. The madrassas teach a particular strain of Sunni Islam which presents a very narrow interpretation of Islam.

The FATA and frontier regions have been particularly receptive to this radicalization process because of a history of poverty and underdevelopment. The FATA region's population is just 3.5 million people, with very rugged terrain with little in the way of a modern economy or prospects for its youth. Forty-six % of the population, even before 9/11, worked outside the FATA. Literacy rates in the FATA for women are amongst the lowest in the world at approximately 3 %. The rate is little better for men at around 12 to 15 %, which is far lower than the national average of approximately 50 %. The influx of Al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban into this region has consequentially acted like a kind of economic engine which has sustained and enhanced the process of radicalisation in Pakistan.

This development of the Pakistani Taliban has gone along with the development of a terrorism campaign which has seen the introduction of suicide bombing. Suicide bombing in South Asia started in Kashmir in the 1990s when some of the Pakistani groups introduced the tactic in an attempt to inflict higher casualties on Indian civilians and soldiers. The entry of Al-Qaeda into Pakistan in 2001 saw the tactic developed and employed more widely in Pakistan itself. Al-Qaeda have promoted suicide-bombing despite the fact that suicide is strictly forbidden by Islam. And they have been very successful at developing suicide bombing into a form of 'industry' in the border regions of Pakistan. Hundreds of suicide bombers are now turned out annually. Last year we had in Pakistan 87 suicide attacks, which killed approximately 3,000 people, including civilians, police, and members of the military. This 'industry' has also spread the tactic to Afghanistan which did not have suicide bombing until two or three years ago.

With the influx of money, contact with radicalised Islamists, and the training and deployment of the suicide bombing campaign, the Pakistani Taliban has developed rapidly since 2001. Having initially acted merely as hosts for Al Qaeda, and then as guards and soldiers for the leaders of these groups, the Pakistani Taliban have now entered a third phase of development where they are pursuing a political agenda aimed at liberating the FATA and creating an independent emirate. The recent alliance of all Pakistani Taliban groups in the FATA has developed the independence movement's goal toward seeking to create an Emirate throughout Pakistan, very similar to what the Taliban in Afghanistan have pledged to do.

What has been the reaction of the state to these developments? From 2004 until 2007-2008 the army showed very little interest in the Pakistani Taliban. The belief of the army high command was that as long as the Pakistani Taliban were going across the border into Afghanistan and helping the Afghan Taliban attack Americans there was no requirement for the army to act. There was no apparent concern from the army about the Taliban insurgency against NATO forces in Afghanistan. The realisation that Pakistani Taliban was active within Pakistan and was mounting an increasingly violent campaign against that state seems to have taken a

long time to register. This was despite numerous indicators of the change in the motivation and tactics of the radicalised groups in the FATA, most notably the Red Mosque Siege in 2007, during which approximately 1,000 militants took over the Red Mosque in Islamabad and held it for six months. The army were eventually forced to storm the mosque to end the occupation.

These indicators showed that the radicalised groups were galvanising their resistance against both the Pakistani state and the army. The militants were starting to attack the very entities that had helped create them. In the last year these attacks have continued with direct attacks on the general headquarters of the Pakistan army, on the headquarters of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and on many senior generals. However, what appears to have finally changed the army's position on these groups was the situation in Swat. Since 2003, the Pakistani Taliban has extended its operations beyond the FATA, with the intent of securing the Swat valley just north of Islamabad. The Taliban's success in Swat drew the West's attention to the fact that the militants controlled land on the edge of Islamabad, a situation that was deemed unacceptable. The army was therefore pressured by Western governments to militarily engage the militants. At the same time public opinion in Pakistan began to turn against the Pakistani Taliban as the domestic threat to Pakistan became clear. As a result of this combined pressure, the government and military finally began to confront the militias both in Swat and the FATA.

Despite this growing awareness of the threat posed by the Taliban there are several factors vital to achieving a real solution to the presence of these radical groups that remain unresolved. The first is the failure to recognise the association between the Pakistani Taliban and the militant groups in Punjab that have been fighting India in Kashmir and the threat that these groups pose. Many of these Punjabi groups have joined the Pakistani Taliban, and have of course brought with them all of their training provided by the Pakistani army. These groups are well armed and experienced in conducting urban terrorist campaigns. The addition of these groups has brought a degree of sophistication to the operations of the Pakistani Taliban which has allowed it to expand outside the FATA. The army's focus on the military threat from India prevents the army from acknowledging the domestic threat posed by these Punjabi groups. The army still views these militant groups as strategic assets that would operate behind the lines to disrupt India's military in the event of a conflict with Pakistan. India has countered Pakistan's preparations for such a conflict by developing a 'cold start' strategy, which means that India could launch an attack in seventy-two hours, without needing extensive time to mobilise. India could, therefore, strike almost immediately if there was sufficient provocation. The terror attack on Mumbai very nearly promoted such a response. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh exerted considerable influence to restrain the hawkish elements of the Indian government and military in the wake of the attacks in 2008. India views the Punjabi militant groups as a significant threat and, consequently, has demanded that they be dismantled as a condition of improving relations with Pakistan. Pakistan's position in response is that it will not dismantle these groups until India begins serious talks on the future of Kashmir. Pakistan's relationship with India remains a significant factor in prolonging the difficulties that Pakistan and the region face.

Pakistan's continued support for radical militant groups in Punjab acts as an impediment to investment, which in turn retards economic development and impedes relations with its neighbours. As the army now seems to have come to recognise through the activities of the Pakistani Taliban in the Pashtun regions, militant groups present a significant threat to the internal stability of the country. But there remains a reluctance to see the Punjabi groups as a similar threat.

There is also the complicating issue of Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban. For nine years Musharraf and the government denied that the Afghan Taliban was in Pakistan. This was widely known to be false; Mullah Omar was (and remains) in the country, along with numerous other senior leaders of the Afghan Taliban. In the last year or so there has, however, been a change in this stance. The military, but not the government, has apparently acknowledged to the Americans that the Taliban leadership is living in Pakistan. The stipulation which has accompanied this recognition is that if the Americans wish to hold talks with the Afghan Taliban, it is the Pakistani military that will broker them. Pakistan, therefore, now appears to be trying to position itself as the main mediator between the Karzai government, the Americans, the British, and the Afghan Taliban, on the subject of reconciliation and the formation of a transitional coalition or government in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's attempts to influence the outcome of talks with the Afghan Taliban significantly complicate the process of negotiation for a range of reasons. The Pakistan army and the ISI have been heavily involved in the conflict in Afghanistan since the 1980s and, consequently, have alienated many of the non-Pashtun Afghan groups, particularly in northern Afghanistan. But, perhaps more importantly, Pakistan is seeking to exclude

Indian influence from Afghanistan. This sets up a tension in negotiations that make Pakistan's brokerage of a successful settlement between the interested parties unlikely. Perhaps Pakistan's demand to exclude India was feasible during the 1990s when there was little international interest in Afghanistan. However, the events of the past decade have fundamentally altered the picture. Afghanistan as a sovereign nation now has a foreign policy plan which includes regional partners such as India. Pakistan has an important role to play in Afghanistan's future, but until there is recognition of Indian influence, Pakistan's involvement will likely just complicate any peace process.

*

Let me turn briefly to the Pakistani economic crisis, which was catalyzed by events predating the current global recession. Between 2001 and 2007, Pakistan received US\$12 billion in aid from America, and about half that sum again in aid from other countries. Under Musharraf's rule, 80 % of that money went to the military. But while this was known to the US, there was no attempt by the Bush administration, or by any other foreign government, to attempt to link this aid to the development of Pakistan's economy. As a result of the economic neglect under Musharraf, Pakistan has fallen into a very deep recession. The national economy has in the last two years experienced high inflation, joblessness, and an ongoing energy crisis. For example, in Lahore, where I live, there is no electricity for sixteen hours per day. Under these conditions schools have ceased to operate, as have factories and workshops. In rural areas the energy crisis is even more acute, with some regions being without power for up to twenty hours a day.

The energy crisis stems from a failure to invest in infrastructure. There has been no recent development, despite the pressing need, for gas pipelines from Central Asia or Iran to address substantial gas shortages for the country's power stations. The energy crisis is part of a wider crisis of spiralling debt, whereby industries which have insufficient electricity to operate productively fail to pay their debts, which in turn reduces investment in infrastructure, which in turn continues to limit productivity. This is a situation that it is very difficult to escape from, particularly as the country struggles with the ongoing insurgencies in the FATA and Balochistan and the resulting refugee problem which has further strained the country's resources.

A year ago, after the election of the civilian government led by Zardari, the West formed a group of nations called the 'Friends of Pakistan' which sought to address this economic crisis. The group included America, Japan, Canada, Australia and the EU. However, to date little money has been provided by this group, in part because of the impact of the global recession, but also in part because of tension over Pakistan's continued association with radical groups and the lack of transparency in how the funds would be handled. There is doubt about Zardari's government which is viewed in some quarters as wasteful and corrupt.

The failure of the 'Friends of Pakistan' to agree on an aid package is contributing to anti-Western sentiment in the country. Even the existing aid program from the United States, a package of US\$1.5 billion for the next five years directed at civil and economic development, has been delayed in the US Congress. This aid is conditional on the maintenance of a democratically elected government in Pakistan which includes government control of the military. This has, of course, increased tensions between the government and the military which resulted in some of the conditions of the aid package being watered down. These difficulties have meant that much needed money has not arrived in sufficient quantities to arrest the economic decline in Pakistan.

Another important difficulty with the provision of aid for economic development is targeting it to the areas which need it most. The US has recognised that the FATA and northern border regions should be targeted for aid; however the NGOs that would facilitate the distribution of aid have been driven out of these regions. Only the Pakistani military maintains a presence in the FATA. So even if the money were available, it is not clear how to distribute it to the areas where it is most needed.

It seems clear that the Obama administration genuinely wants to help Pakistan, but at the same time the US wants to see improvements in the government's control of extremist groups and in the relationship with India. Pakistan has managed to maintain an excellent relationship with the US despite these reservations, as the recent drone attacks conducted from Pakistani territory indicate. But in general there is a lack of clarity over the direction of US-Pakistan relations, which mirrors the lack of clarity in Pakistan over its dealings with the militant groups within its borders.

*

Having presented this bleak picture of Pakistan's current situation, I want to conclude by pointing to some extremely hopeful signs for the future. First, over the past eighteen months, I believe greater awareness has developed among Pakistanis that extremism is a real threat to the country. There is also a growing association in the public's mind between this extremism and the economic, social, and political crises. As evidenced by the siege in Islamabad and the attacks in Mumbai, extremist groups pose a sufficient threat that the country is now effectively being held hostage by them. If there were to be another attack like the one in Mumbai in 2008, India has clearly stated that it will attack Pakistan. Another terrorist attack by one of these militant groups then could derail any hope of peace between India and Pakistan. The perception of being held hostage by militant groups has, for the first time in recent memory, unified the population behind both the army and the government.

Secondly, for the first time, we are seeing the emergence of a vocal middle class in the country. The middle class only comprises a small proportion, perhaps as little as 5 %, of the total population of 160 million people. However, despite its comparative smallness, this emergent middle class has contributed to the development of a stronger and more active civil society. The growing influence of this sector of the population (which includes individuals from the media, lawyers, business people, NGOs and women' groups) was exhibited by the ousting of Musharraf, which largely resulted from the resistance to his presidency led by this group. It is the first time in Pakistan's history that people from this class background have come out in the streets and successfully demanded a change in the government. Notwithstanding the success in ousting Musharraf, this group is not yet strong enough to exert real pressure on either the government and the army to change policy, but I still take its emergence as a positive development for Pakistan's future political stability.

Thirdly, the media has become very influential and very powerful in Pakistan. The media is divided in its approach to the political landscape of the country; some elements are anti-government and anti-Zardari, whereas other sectors are supportive of the government. There are still other elements that are pro-army, and apparently working closely with the intelligence services or with religious extremist groups. However, the fact that there is an active media acting as a 'fourth estate' has had an influential impact on political debate and awareness in Pakistan.

These three developments have helped to begin to counter the previous absence in Pakistan of an effective political system, with functioning political parties acting in a modern, cosmopolitan, and democratic environment. There has not been the evolution of a political system as there has been in India, where there is a history of relative stability enabling consistent and peaceful transitions between successive civilian governments. Pakistan has a history of civilian governments being overthrown by the army which has degraded the political process to such a degree that Pakistan has largely lacked the capable civilian leadership to govern when it was required.

So, what is required given the current situation in Pakistan? First, there must be recognition that the country will not become a Western-style democracy, at least not in the short-term. The country requires a period of stability, which in turn requires a long-term partnership between the army and civilian leadership. But that partnership needs to operate under certain restrictions and guidelines, key among which is that the army must allow the development of a new national security paradigm. Pakistan can no longer live in a permanent state of hostility with India or any other neighbouring country. The new paradigm must instead be built on an expressly civilian understanding of national security which privileges non-military aims such as economic development, trade, public education, and healthcare. The development of a new national security paradigm will require a significant shift in policy by the army. Unfortunately, this shift is not currently occurring.

India must recognise that they need to shift their policy relating to Kashmir. For most of India's population Kashmir is an insignificant issue. However, in Pakistan it remains a major issue that dominates the country's foreign and domestic policies. If India wants to help Pakistan deal with the extremist threat, it has to open up negotiations on Kashmir and be more flexible in dealing with the other major disputes, such as that over water, which have been a source of conflict between the countries. Only if there is substantial movement on these deadlocked conflicts will there be motivation for the Pakistani military to change its approach to national security.

Lastly, what we need is a comprehensive program of state-building in Pakistan. The education system is in a pitiful state with illiteracy rates of approximately 50 %, the lowest literacy rate in the region. In sixty years,

the country has never conducted a nationwide literacy campaign. Even Afghanistan has managed to conduct a literacy campaign. In 2002, despite thirty years of almost constant war, Afghanistan (with support from UNICEF) was able to put 3 million children back into school in one day. Pakistan has never tried anything like this. An educated population is of critical importance for the building of a stable state. This is of particular importance as the civil administration structure that Pakistan inherited from the British is now largely in a state of collapse. Without an educated population, efforts to achieve effective administration and good governance are unlikely to be successful.

The end.