

**Pakistan, our paradoxical partner in the war on terror by Raspal Khosa****19**

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Pakistan is experiencing a failure in governance brought about by eight years of unpopular military rule, decaying institutions and a deeply-rooted insurgency in its tribal badlands. The last year was a shocking one for Pakistan. It was marked by constitutional and judicial crises, and widespread political and religious violence that culminated in the assassination of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and a dozen other major terrorist incidents leading up to the federal parliamentary elections of 18 February 2008. Once it has formed, the newly elected civilian government in Islamabad must find the will to defeat the radical Islamists responsible for these attacks: Pakistan's internal stability and the security of neighbouring Afghanistan are at stake.

Afghanistan and the adjacent Pushtun tribal belt along its long porous border<sup>1</sup> with Pakistan are a key theatre of the Global War on Terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Jihadist militias operating from Pakistani-controlled territory are conducting an insurgency in the south and east of Afghanistan against the government of President Hamid Karzai and the Western military forces supporting him. Since September 2006, there has been a major increase in insurgent violence employing terrorist tactics against security forces and civilian targets. As a partner of the West in the war on terror, Pakistan must confront the radical Islamist elements operating freely from its national territory. Pakistan's paradoxical position, however, is that it is at once a source of extremism and a key player in fighting it.

Ironically, the radical Islamist movement was activated by the West with the support of Pakistan in the 1980s in response to the Soviet Union's decade-long intervention in Afghanistan from 1979. The radicalism spawned by the Afghan Jihad led to the diffusion of war in the region, and by the mid-1990s had reverberated around the world in a phenomenon known as the 'Islamic blowback'. For its part, Pakistan has adroitly exploited its position as a frontline state, both in the Cold War against communism and the war on terrorism, to secure massive injections of Western aid and gain legitimacy for its various military regimes.

Pakistan gave rise to radical Islamist movements as instruments of its strategic policy in the 1990s. Extremist Islamism is now viewed by the international community as one of Pakistan's major exports. Principal plotters in a succession of terrorist attacks against Western targets in recent years received training and inspiration from Pakistan-based radical Islamist groups. Pakistan has been at the centre of the war on terrorism

following the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The United States and its allies, including Australia, launched combat operations in Afghanistan to destroy the al-Qaeda Jihadist network and to drive from power the Pakistan-supported Taliban militia which hosted it.

### Battlefield Afghanistan

Today Afghanistan remains a centre of gravity of transnational terrorism. The United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is battling a range of Jihadist insurgents in the south and east of the country. The 43,250 ISAF personnel<sup>3</sup> are under the overall command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which assumed responsibility for the security of the whole of Afghanistan in October 2006. A further 16,000 US troops are in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom; the ongoing military campaign against transnational jihadist extremism.<sup>4</sup>

The challenge of Afghanistan is regarded by US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, as a 'litmus test' for NATO and is driving the Alliance's transformation from its Cold War focus on Europe. However, Afghanistan is also the rock upon which the alliance may founder without a fundamental reappraisal of the commitment of key continental European NATO allies to fighting the present insurgency.



The main purpose of ISAF is to assist the government of Afghanistan in establishing and maintaining a secure environment to facilitate the rebuilding of Afghanistan, the establishment of democratic structures, and to deepen the influence of the central government. ISAF currently comprises personnel

from all twenty-six NATO members and fourteen partner states, including Australia—represented by over 1,000 Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, mostly engaged in reconstruction activity and counter-insurgency operations in the restive Oruzgan province in the south of the country.

The July 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate, *The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland*,<sup>5</sup> reported that al-Qaeda had established a safe haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).<sup>6</sup> This consensus report by sixteen American intelligence agencies found that al-Qaeda has been able to reorganise to its pre-September 11 strength because of a failure by Pakistan to counter extremism in its tribal areas. In September 2006, Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf, struck a deal with tribal leaders in North Waziristan to force al-Qaeda and foreign Taliban militants to quit the area. This strategy was also applied in several other tribal agencies. Always sceptical of this flawed policy, Washington is no longer content with Musharraf's laissez-faire approach to dealing with radical jihadists in the tribal belt.

The sanctuary afforded by Pakistan's tribal belt has contributed more to the survival of Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters, among other radical groups, than any other factor. President Musharraf acknowledged the nature of the problem at the August 2007 Afghan–Pakistan peace *jirga* (assembly) held in Kabul. Insurgents operating in the southern and eastern Afghan provinces enjoy strong support from ethnic Pushtuns in Baluchistan and the FATA. The failure by Pakistani authorities to dismantle the insurgent bases in these areas has resulted in rising levels of violence in Afghanistan, and threatens the painstaking state-building and reconstruction efforts by the international community.

More disturbing still, are allegations that elements of the Pakistani military continue to provide assistance to the Afghan Taliban. There is virtual unanimity among UN officials and ISAF commanders that Pakistani military assistance to the Taliban in Afghanistan is significant and ongoing. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate is accused of directing, assisting, training and supplying intelligence and matériel to the Afghan Taliban who are fighting Pakistan's Western allies in the war on terrorism.

### **The Pakistan factor**

Pakistan has had a longstanding policy of using extremist militias as proxy forces to attain geo-strategic outcomes. For decades it has sought influence over Afghanistan and attempted to pursue a revisionist agenda in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989, the Pakistani military embarked on an adventurous course of strategic action that has led to a radicalisation of civil society in Pakistan and a destabilisation of the region. During the 1990s this activity was not moderated by weak civilian governments, and included: the growth of extremist mosques and madrasahs, the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network, ongoing support to the Kashmir insurgency, creation of the Taliban movement, and the 1999 Kargil War with India.

Pakistan was faltering by the time General Musharraf assumed power in October 1999 through a military coup d'état against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. By that time, the country was being undermined by poor governance and widespread sectarian conflict. With Pakistan in such a parlous state, it was increasingly difficult to pursue adventurous policies abroad. Moreover, Pakistan had a poor international reputation and was being labelled a state sponsor of terrorism, whilst enduring a range of punitive sanctions by the international community following its May 1998 nuclear tests.

The September 11 terrorist attacks forced an abrupt policy shift in Islamabad. Pakistan's continued support for the Taliban, and by extension al-Qaeda, became untenable. Musharraf was compelled through existential threats to provide assistance to the US by opening Pakistan airspace, making available military and logistics facilities, sharing intelligence, and capturing and handing over al-Qaeda terrorists.<sup>7</sup>

Employing something of a 'carrot and stick' approach, the US has also offered Pakistan substantial inducements to participate in the war on terror. Since September 11, the United States has supported Pakistan with A\$12 billion in direct financial assistance and by writing off debts. It has annually waived a raft of sanctions that targeted Pakistan's nuclear program, and reinstated full military cooperation with the Pakistan armed forces. Furthermore, the United States has allowed long-deferred sales of military hardware to Pakistan, including frontline F-16 fighter aircraft.

Pakistan, for its part, has taken some limited action against extremists in the FATA and elsewhere. It has lost over 1,000 of its own soldiers and paramilitary forces in counter-insurgency operations. The Pakistan Government has also enacted a range of counter-terrorism laws and banned some of the more egregious militant organisations. However, a number of these groups continue to operate under new aliases. Radical Islamist animus is directed against the Pakistan state following the July 2007 storming of the extremist Red Mosque in Islamabad by security forces with much loss of life. This action provoked a violent anti-state response by extremist groups, with suicide blasts now commonplace in Pakistan's major cities.

In spite of this, President Musharraf is perceived by the West as under-performing in the war on terror. He has yet to conduct a sustained campaign against insurgents that are using Pakistani territory as a staging area for operations in Afghanistan, or to move against the Afghan Taliban leadership whom are thought to be based in Quetta, Baluchistan. Pakistan retains some of these extremist groups for leverage against Afghanistan and India, however, their utility is limited in the current strategic environment. The US is applying intense pressure on Pakistan to re-evaluate its cost-benefit calculus of employing these proxy forces. Pakistan's Janus-faced policy is increasingly difficult to sustain as the US and its allies grow impatient for victory in Afghanistan. As it stands, it is unlikely that Pakistan will be able to continue its limited cooperation with its Western allies while supporting radical Islamists in Afghanistan.

### **Implications for Australia**

Pakistan has been a military dictatorship for the past eight years, over the course of which radical jihadists have flourished. The only way to discourage Islamic extremism in Pakistan over the longer term is through democracy. As a strong supporter of democracy building around the world, Australia should encourage President Musharraf, to observe the constitutional rule of law and work toward the ultimate restoration of full civilian government—including reinstating an independent judiciary—in his country, which is variously described as a 'command democracy' or 'concealed military rule'. Significantly, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd stated in Parliament that Australia has a 'deep strategic interest' in the outcome of the elections in Pakistan. He urged a return to democratic processes that will bring stability to Pakistan and assist in the conflict in Afghanistan where Australian troops are stationed.<sup>8</sup>



Since August 2006, an ADF Reconstruction Task Force and Special Forces Task Group have been deployed as part of a larger Netherlands contingent in Oruzgan Province, where they are engaged in counter-insurgency operations against the Taliban. Earlier this month an ADF Chinook helicopter detachment of two aircraft and 110 personnel were deployed to Kandahar in Southern Afghanistan. However, combating Jihadists that operate from the tribal belt will not be effective unless Pakistani authorities make concerted efforts to disrupt the activities of domestic sectarian groups that provide logistics networks, terror funding and recruits. The international community, including Australia, must press Pakistan to adopt a holistic counter-terrorism strategy that makes no distinction between foreign Jihadists in the tribal belt and indigenous radical Islamist groups located elsewhere in Pakistan.

Australia resumed its Defence Cooperation program with Pakistan soon after September 11, 2001, following a three year hiatus due to the 1998 nuclear tests. Australia's Defence cooperation activities with Pakistan include staff college exchanges and certain training activities in Australia. Australia should examine the feasibility of training elements of Pakistan military to enhance their capability for counter-terrorism. This could involve the instruction of Pakistan's Special Service Group commandos in close quarter battle techniques and other tactical activity by Australian Special Forces operators. However, this initiative may raise strong protests from India, which may fear such specialised training will be used against it in the event of future hostilities with Pakistan. Nevertheless, Australian Special Forces now instruct the Philippines military in counter-terrorism operations, and in the past have trained Indonesia's elite Kopassus unit.

The linkages between transnational terrorism and radical Islamism in Pakistan are incontrovertibly extensive. There are strong associations between radical organisations in our region, such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf, and Pakistan-based extremist groups. For over two decades, Southeast Asian radical Islamists gravitated to Afghanistan and Pakistani-controlled territory to receive Islamist indoctrination and terrorist training. Significantly, a number of high profile terrorism cases heard here involved Australian nationals who trained in Pakistan with the al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist militia, Lashkar-e-Toiba (aka Jamaat-ud-Dawa)—a terrorist organisation proscribed in Australia.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) seeks to fight terrorism at its source in offshore locations. The AFP has an overseas liaison post in Islamabad which is currently staffed by two sworn officers. A principal focus of AFP activity in Islamabad is liaising with Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency on counter-terrorism issues. In July 2005, Pakistan and Australia signed a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Counter-Terrorism which provides a framework for cooperation in areas such as law enforcement, intelligence, security and border controls.

The wholly inadequate investigation into the shooting and suicide bombing death of Benazir Bhutto in the garrison city of Rawalpindi—General Headquarters of the Pakistan Armed Forces—on 27 December 2007, is indicative of Pakistan's signal failure in key areas of counter-terrorism. It led to accusations of a cover-up and widely held beliefs that the state was complicit in Bhutto's murder. Authorities subsequently blamed the attack on Baitullah Mehsud, a powerful Pakistani Taliban commander based in South Waziristan, and belatedly invited the London Metropolitan Police to conduct an impartial investigation into the incident. There is considerable scope for the AFP to

enhance the capacity of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies to deal with the terrorist threat from radical Islamists. This could involve developing capabilities in intelligence sharing, bomb investigation techniques, forensics and other skills essential to defeating terrorism.

Countering radicalisation in Pakistan should not be predicated on fighting terrorism alone. We need a stable and assured Pakistan that is focused on economic growth and constructively engaged within its region. While recognising that Pakistan must reform on its own, we may assist it to become a modern, liberal Muslim state that is nationally cohesive, at peace with itself and its neighbours, and positively disposed towards the West. To attain this end, the US and the international community must remain committed in Pakistan for at least the medium term. The US in particular must reassure Pakistan that it will not be abandoned once it has attained its regional goals in the War on Terror in favour of enhanced ties with arch-rival India.

Australia can contribute to international efforts by doing more to build the capacity of Pakistan's ailing institutions. Pakistan's national health and education systems are under enormous pressure—the Pakistan Government annually spends less than \$18.00 per person in these areas. Australian assistance to Pakistan is managed by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and focuses on basic healthcare and education, building human capital (through a scholarships program) and supporting reconstruction in areas affected by the 8 October 2005, Pakistan earthquake. However, total Australian overseas development assistance for Pakistan in FY 2007–08 is only \$25 million.

Currently fifty million people in Pakistan are illiterate. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>9</sup> is collaborating with the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency on improving the quality of education in Pakistan. Education is one sector where Australia's experience in our immediate region (funding the establishment of 2,000 schools in Indonesia) can assist our allies. We should not, however, be preoccupied with attempting to undercut the role of madrasahs, or Islamic schools, which serve many parts of Pakistan that the government doesn't reach. Madrasahs are a source of literacy and social services for many of the rural poor. The small number of extremist madrasahs that propagate Jihadist doctrine must, nonetheless, be challenged on an individual basis by Pakistani authorities.<sup>10</sup>

Promoting good governance is a priority area of Australia's development assistance program in South Asia.<sup>11</sup> Australia can assist in Pakistan by working with local authorities to develop more robust governance structures and civilian accountability. AusAID has recently established a South Asia Governance Fund, which aims to strengthen institutions and build the capacity of agencies to carry out reforms in a number of South Asian countries including Pakistan. The Asia Public Sector Linkages Program is another mechanism to enhance governance in South Asian partner countries including Pakistan. The aim of the program is to transfer capacity building skills and expertise from Australian Government and state and territory government agencies to counterpart institutions.

The Election Commission of Pakistan, an ostensibly independent and vital democratic institution, is widely believed to have been manipulated by the Musharraf Government. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) can assist in future elections in Pakistan by providing technical assistance and training to help ensure free and fair elections. Furthermore, the AEC has extensive experience in monitoring elections in trouble spots around the world that it can bring to bear in Pakistan.

Apart from issues relating to electoral malfeasance, civilian politics in Pakistan in the last few decades has also been marked by widespread corruption and nepotism. Pakistan's two mainstream political parties—the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)—are personality driven, undemocratic organisations. Benazir Bhutto's assassination created an enormous vacuum and demonstrated the lack of leadership continuity in the PPP. The party leadership was jointly awarded to Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, and her 19 year old son Bilawal. Australian political parties can assist in the reform of Pakistan's major parties by working with the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, which promote democracy and governance. The Liberal and Labor parties already work with these non-governmental organisations in a number of states in our region to develop internal party democracy and to strengthen governance.

## Conclusion

The solution to the conflict in Afghanistan lies in great measure within Pakistan. That state's strategy of using radical jihadist proxies to gain influence in Afghanistan is restricted by the changed international circumstances since September 11, 2001. Pakistan is now facing strong pressure from the US and its allies in the Global War on Terrorism to constrain extremist elements that operate from its national territory. Over the longer term, the international community must help Pakistan to confront its radical Islamists through development work and strengthening democratic structures. Meanwhile, Australia can do more to challenge extremist Islamism at its source by assisting Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts through training and interagency cooperation.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The poorly demarcated 2,640 kilometre border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is known as the Durand Line.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Long War' or 'Long Struggle' have now gained ascendancy over the Global War on Terrorism in Washington policy circles following the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, which states a key driver of the United States defence strategy is defeating transnational terrorist networks. The Long War encompasses the post-September 11 environment, and describes the generational nature of the global counter-insurgency campaign against extremist Islamism.

<sup>3</sup> As at 6 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The US has committed an additional 3,200 marines to the Afghanistan theatre to be deployed in the northern spring of 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Available at [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20070717\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is a 27,220 km<sup>2</sup> ethnic Pushtun region that is nominally controlled by the Pakistan Government. It is strategically located between the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and the settled areas of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. The FATA comprise seven Agencies: Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, Orukzai, and North and South Waziristan, together with six Frontier Regions (FR): FR Bannu, FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Kohat, FR Lakki, FR Peshawar, and FR Tank.

<sup>7</sup> The threat of force for Pakistan to comply was revealed during Musharraf's September 2006 US visit to promote his memoirs. He alleged to reporters that in the aftermath of September 11, US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, had declared that Pakistan should be prepared to be 'bombed into the stone age' if it did not cooperate in the war on terror.

<sup>8</sup> Australia, House of Representatives 2008, *Votes and Proceedings*, Proof 18 February 2008, pp 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> USAID has invested A\$300 million over five years from 2002 to reform and revitalise Pakistan's education system.

<sup>10</sup> See Alexander Evans 'Understanding Madrasahs: How Threatening Are They?' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (2006), pp 9-16.

<sup>11</sup> See AusAID 2003, *Australia's Development Cooperation with South Asia: Framework for 2003–2007*, AusAID, Canberra.

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