Pakistan's Alternative Futures – Beyond the Pendulum of the Military General and the Politician

by Sohail Inayatullah
Professor, Tamkang University, Taiwan
and Adjunct Professor, the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia
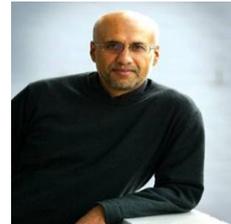
In this essay, I outline five futures for Pakistan: (1) the Pendulum Continues Forever, (2) Collapse, (3) Joining Chindia, (4) the Great Game, and (5) a South Asian Confederation. The most familiar and likely are based on the pendulum of rule by the military and rule by landlord/politicians. These alternative futures are discussed in the context of archetypes and structures that can precondition one's perspectives on the future. It is envisioned that Pakistan can move from the more likely and less desirable futures to a process of anticipatory democracy where the citizens of Pakistan consider, create, and commit to building their preferred future.

DEEP STRUCTURES

With the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's future looked bleak. Among many others, Nathan Gardels argues in his article, "Bhutto's elimination a big boost for al-Qa'ida,"[1] that the West lost track of the prize, focusing on Iraq instead of on Islamabad. It is in Pakistan where the future of the Islamic world lies. Can a secular democratic Pakistan flourish? Or will the politics of Jihadism continue, with Kashmir returning as the battlefront?

While these issues are important in understanding Pakistan's future, the deep archetypes and structures (inner symbols and external patterns) that underlie Pakistani politics are often forgotten. Nonetheless, they delimit what is possible.

Syed Abidi's doctoral dissertation at the University of Hawaii, titled *Social Change and the Politics of Religion in Pakistan*,[2] made the observation that Pakistan's political system can best be understood as a pendulum between civilian rule and military rule. The first stage was from 1947-1958 and was characterized by the parliamentary system with the dominant class being the feudal landowners. The second stage was from 1958-1968. This was martial law with an American presidential system and saw the rise of the capitalist class. The third stage – from 1968-1977 – saw the end of martial law (with a presidential and parliamentary system), the beginning of the Bhutto era, and the return of feudalism.

With the coup by General Zia in 1977, military rule returned and the capitalist class was back in power. The fourth stage had begun. This ended with his assassination in 1988.

The fifth stage was characterized by civilian rule (Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif) until Pervez Musharraf conducted his own coup in 1999 and began the sixth stage. With the events of 9/11, globalization and the rise of the Internet, this phase has seen the return of the capitalist class.

In 2008 the seventh stage of Pakistan's politics appears to have begun. The military era has ended and the civilians are back in power with Asif Ali Zardari as President. While the death of Benazir Bhutto is destabilizing, it does not challenge the deeper structure of Pakistan's politics. Pakistan thus swings back and forth between military and civilian rule and between feudal and capitalist economies. The archetypes are the military general and the politician/landlord.

But why has Pakistan been dominated by the poles of military and civilian power – and why the pendulum between these two poles? In his classic *State and Democracy in Pakistan,*[3] noted political scientist and human rights advocate, Dr. C. Inayatullah argues that one creates the conditions for the other: "As the military became more independent and powerful controlling national politics, its top brass developed an ideology and a set of perceptions to justify their political role. Politics was projected as an irrational, disorderly, inefficient and corrupt method of running the affairs of society compared with the rational, efficient, quick and clean way the military runs itself."[4] They believed they were morally bound to overthrow politicians if the politicians threatened the independence of the nation or if they meddled in the internal affairs of the military. As guardians of the nation, they believe they have the right to rule the nation. Once the civilians come into power, feeling threatened by the military, they attempt to control them. As well, with their feudal roots, a pattern of patronage and corruption sets in. This invites protests from other political parties, often leading to violence. Eventually to stop the violence and decay – when there is weakness, and public contempt of the political party – the military rises up and takes over. Weaknesses emerge from various factors – internal politics, feudal politics, corruption, and external threats, with the particular cause changing over time.

Following Pitirim Sorokin's[5] theory of social change, each system overreaches, becomes more corrupt, focuses on its own survival, or makes long term decisions that may prove unpopular in domestic politics (for example, peace in Kashmir, dismantling of extremist Islam), and then the other group comes in. Both have created a pendulum that benefits only their own strategies and worldview.

ARCHETYPES

Moving away from structural analysis and towards archetypes, these two poles represent different selves of Pakistan. The first is orderly, rational and in control – the general. The second is land-based, social, and at times chaotic. While it challenges military rule, it has its own structure of authority, even as it claims the authority of people's power.

At the level of archetypes, the back and forth dynamic works because in this sense one is the British adult and the second is the "Indian" adolescent challenging British rule. However, and this is the key, once the political challenger takes over the mantle of power, he or she has been unable to escape the shadow of the general – thus, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became authoritarian himself, as have others. They move quickly from the teenager challenging power and authority to the feudal lord. The lord is also very male and foundationally hierarchical.

But there are two other roles in this field of power. What has stayed stable in Pakistan history is a third archetype – the bureaucrat in his suit and tie. The bureaucracy has remained strong throughout Pakistan's history, as it is the trusted and stable servant of the powerful adult. Thus the executive has prospered while other political institutions – courts, for example – and the rest of civil society have remained weak. When politicians have ruled, the system has remained tied to its feudal past, i.e. strong

lines of hierarchy, strong patronage to supporters. Thus, the citizen as archetype has remained out of power – or expressed himself via chaotic power – while other structures have taken their places in power. The bureaucrat has been tied to "red tape," using rules to privilege himself, instead of "green tape," using rules to create a better and innovative society.

There are thus four positions –military rule, chaotic people's power that overthrows the ruler, the politician qua feudal lord, and the bureaucrat who ensures smooth transitions between all these types. Of course, it is arguable that political leaders have been far more democratic and the military creates the conditions for chaos (and thus justifies its dictatorial rule), since political rulers maintain their power through their feudal ties. Thus we see the dynastic nature of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

When the general stays too long, he invites the shadow self, equally violent. This is the *mujahidin* fighter, the *jihadist*, for example. They use military force but as power is asymmetrical, chaos works best for them. The jihadists do not need the bureaucrat; rather it is mullah who inspires them. Of course, if the extremists did come into power, then they, to implement their policies, would rely on the bureaucrats. The mullah, afraid that his story has become totally undervalued in the modernized and globalized world, has returned to past caliphate glories instead of moving toward wisdom and creating a novel future. He links with the jihadist to take over the entire system.

Each one of these archetypes has two sides – the general can be protective and moral (the enlightened despot) or can be amoral, staying too long, clinging to power, assaulting human rights, and using religion or strategy to stay in power. The feudal lord can equally be protective or can stay too long and use his or her power for personal gain. The citizen can be chaotic or can bring social capital to the nation.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

What then are Pakistan's alternative futures?[6]

1. **The pendulum continues forever**. This would mean that after this particular civilian cycle, there would be another military coup in 7-10 years. Politicians will have some luck in ridding Pakistan of extremist fundamentalists, but old scores between the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League or between the PPP and the military will still need to be settled. Issues of justice and revenge will continue and just as Pakistan's economy is about to take off, another crisis will set in. Citizens will rally but then when they see no real change will become despondent. "Nothing is possible here," or a similar catch phrase will be the inner story. Globalization will not go away but the politics would swing between growth and equity.

2. **Collapse** – this is the most feared scenario for all, particularly in the West. Civil war in Pakistan (the provinces going their own way), the inability to stop jihadism, Al Qa'ida or their friends finding some nukes, not to mention the global challenges of climate change, all lead to a slow decline destined for collapse. And if the challenge from the Pakistani and Afghani Taliban is resolved, the frontline will switch to half-century old war in Kashmir. Capital flies away, economic development slows down and Pakistan becomes a nation of competing tribes. Women in this future are particularly vulnerable as the battle between religious and secularists throughout the Islamic (Arab influenced world) is fought over the "body" of the female. Is she a person unto herself or does the strong male (feudal lord, ruler, mullah) need to protect and control? In the collapse, chaos would reign. Over time, and perhaps even quite quickly, a strong military leader is likely to rise (the Napoleon scenario), but can the great leader unite all the tribes (the challenge facing Afghanistan today)?

3. **Joining Chindia**. With India likely to move into the ranks of the G-8 by 2020, gaining a permanent UN Security Council Position, Pakistan's only hope in this scenario is to link in every possible way with India and China – or Chindia. Certainly Pakistan will favor the China part of the amazing rise, but in any case, in this future, economic growth is far more important than ideological struggles. To move in this direction, the Singapore or Malaysian model may be adopted. This model is characterized by a clear vision of the future, transparency; breakup of the feudal system, limited democracy (one party rule), and creatively finding a niche role in the global economy, and then using that as a springboard to becoming a global player. However, the India example shows that economic rise is possible outside the East Asian model. In any case, this future is hopeful but requires investment in infrastructure and a favoring of globalized capitalism. Instead of lamenting the colonial past in this Chindia future, Pakistan creates its own transnational corporations. Politics moves from focusing on old wrongs (Kashmir, for example) to desired futures. Instead of Chindia, Chindistan is created.[7]

4. The fourth scenario is **the Great Game.**[8] Pakistan remains a pawn, moved around for the strategic and ideological purposes of the great powers. Whether in proxy wars against the Russians or against 9/11 jihadis or whoever may be next, Pakistan's capacity to influence its future is low or non-existent. At best, it can only rent out its military, or territory, for others' battles. In this future (as in the current present), the rental receipts do not lead to even development –they merely enrich those getting the rent, generally the military. The national game becomes not how to transform the great game but how to get a piece of the action, legitimately or illegitimately. Those not part of the money game sing songs of grand conspiracies. These songs take away agency. While Pakistan has a dependency relationship with the rest of the world, citizens have a dependency – that is, child/adult – relationship with the government, expecting it to solve each and every problem, without taking responsibility for their own actions and blaming the government when it fails. At the collective level, Pakistan remains rudderless, evoking the words of the founder, but unable to follow through with action**.**

5. **A Wiser South-Asian Confederation**.[9] The challenges Pakistan faces are similar to what other countries in the region face – religious extremism, climate change, poverty, corruption, deep inequity, stale futures, and less than helpful archetypes. In this future, the only way forward is towards an EU model of slow but inevitable integration. While this may seem too positive and far away, it is not impossible. Each country needs the help of others to solve their problems. None can go it alone, and each can learn from the other. This requires learning, peace and mediation skills in all schools; moving toward the sustainability development agenda; developing agreements in security, water, and energy to begin with; and a focus on the desired future and not on past injustices. Gender equity and systemic and deep cultural levels is foundational for this future. This future also requires an archetype that is neither the male general nor feudal lord nor the rebellious teenager, but the wise person, perhaps the *Globo sapiens*.[10] Fortunately, the south Asian tradition is steeped with wisdom. Can this imagination be drawn on to create a different future? Already in Pakistan, there are hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals working on this vision. What is needed is systemic support for this future, and a move away from focusing on past injustices.

Moreover, can the mullah who is focused on religion for tribal power become the wise sage, the Sufi or *pir* focused on transformative power? Can other roles as well be transformed? For example, can the consumer become the producer, the client the citizen, the child the adult? And perhaps, as in East Asia, can new myths be created through grounded realities such as the economic miracle, which has now created new stories of social capacity and new identities? Pakistan was on the verge of this future in the early 1960s, and it is possible to rediscover this pathway.

THE PLANETARY CHALLENGE

If an alternative future for Pakistan is not created, the pendulum will continue with collapse always being in the background. Moreover, in the world we now live in, a weakness or pathology in any part of the planetary system threatens everyone. Pakistan's futures are part of the planet's futures – we all need to transform.

This transformation in Pakistan needs to be part of a multi-leveled futures visioning process – true citizen anticipatory democracy. Given the illiteracy in the nation, using television, radio, DVDs offer a way to present scenarios of Pakistan's possible futures. Citizens can critique them and offer their own preferred futures (in some detail, not the grand ideas approach) as to how they wish their lives to be in 2020 and what needs to be done today to move in that direction. In parallel with a citizen participatory process, a rigorous academic process can collect data to provide evidence of preferred, feared and alternative Pakistani futures. Finally, leaders can be consulted, since they can help provide inspiration. The process can thus move toward an anticipatory democracy that includes electoral and participatory democracy. Without these steps, foresight becomes merely another activity of the planning commission or a part of a military and political strategy that marginalizes opposing perspectives. Foresight itself then becomes part of the pendulum. However, too much is at stake to allow this to happen or to otherwise permit the current trajectory to continue. An alternative is needed and is possible.

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[1] Nathan Gardels, "Bhutto's elimination a big boost for al-Qa'ida," *The Australian*, 4 January 2008, 4.

[2] Syed Masoom Abidi, *Social change and the politics of religion in Pakistan*. PhD Thesis. Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii. Honolulu, Hawaii. May 1999.

[3] C. Iyanatullah, *State and Democracy in Pakistan*. Lahore, Vanguard Books, 1997. Dr. C. Inayatullah is with the Council of Social Sciences, Islamabad Pakistan. Dr Inayatullah <uinayat@dsl.net.pk>

[4] *Ibid*., p. 137.

[5] Pitirim Sorokin, *Dynamics of Social Change*. Boston, Porter Sargent, 1957.

[6] See Sohail Inayatullah, "Images of Pakistan's Future," *Futures* (Vol. 24, No. 9, 1992), 867-878. Also available at www.metafuture.org.

[7] I am indebted to Clem Bezold for this term. Institute of Alternative Futures - <cbezold@altfutures.com>

[8] I am indebted to Zeenia Satti at zeenia_satti@yahoo.com for this scenario.

[9] For earlier versions of this image, see, Sohail Inayatullah, Guest Editor, *Futures*, Special Issue titled, "The Futures of South Asia," November 1992.

[10] I am indebted to Patricia Kelly for this term. I also wish to thank Dr. Kelly for editing earlier drafts of this article.

Professor Sohail Inayatullah is a political scientist/futurist associated with Tamkang University, Taiwan (Graduate Institute for Futures Studies), University of the Sunshine Coast (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences), and Prout College (proutcollege.org). He has authored/edited twenty books and CD ROMs, including Youth Futures*;* Macrohistory and Macrohistorians*;* Questioning the Future*;* The Causal Layered Analysis Reader*; and* The University in Transformation*. Inayatullah has authored over 300 refereed journal articles, book chapters and magazine editorials. In addition, he is theme editor (Globalization and World Systems) of the UNESCO Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems and has contributed articles to the* Macmillan Encyclopedia of Futures Studie*s and the* Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy.

Internationally, among other groups, Professor Inayatullah has presented to the European Commission, UNESCO, the Organization of Islamic Conference, APEC, the Thai Capital Markets Academy, the Ministry of Trade and Investment of the Singapore government, the Ministry of Education of the

Malaysian government, the European Academic Cooperation Association, University Sains Malaysia, and Ministries of numerous governments. In Australia, along with presentations to local, state and federal departments of government he has conducted futures workshops for dozens of educational organizations and corporations. He can be contacted at s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au and his Web site is www.metafuture.org.

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM *(send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):*

- *Iyanatullah mentions focusing on old wrongs and a nostalgia for past caliphate glories. Similar nostalgia can be found within other nations. To what extent will such elements of the past continue to influence the future and perspectives on the future?*

- *Iyanatullah refers to four archetypes that have influenced Pakistani government and society. Which archetypes are influencing your part of the world today, how relevant will they remain, and what new archetypes will emerge within the next fifteen years?*

- *In the "Great Game" future scenario for Pakistan that Iyanatullah presents, people expect government "to solve each and every problem, without taking responsibility for their own actions and blaming the government when it fails." In various other countries, a change in government is often accompanied by high expectations. In 2020, will high expectations of government (or similar entity) characterize your part of the world?*

- *In what ways will education, educational methodology, and the type of education – for example, skills cultivated (e.g., "left brain," "right brain") – influence the evolutionary course of societies within the next 25 years?*

- *Feudalism is discussed at length in this article. Is feudalism a common stage in a nation's (people's) development? (Also see Halal article on global maturity, this issue.) Related question: what is the next wealth? First it was land, then capital, now information. What is next?*

- *Iyanatullah states that Pakistan was "on the verge of this future in the early 1960s." Identify the drivers, "wild cards," and other developments that may have changed the course of events.*

- *Iyanatullah characterizes the recent history of Pakistan as a pendulum of the military general and the politician, and he mentions Pitirim Sorokin's theory of social change in which overreach is followed by correction. In another article (this issue), Professor Halal refers to a political pendulum, and others have used this metaphor to characterize nations that have two dominant political parties or competing constituencies (e.g., "management" and "labor"). In 2015, to what extent will the pendulum characterize governance in your part of the world, or will another mechanism of social change prevail?*

- *Two of the scenarios presented herein, "Joining Chindia" and "A Wiser South-Asian Confederation," involve different degrees of integration into a larger regional entity. Within the next ten years, will trans-national regional entities replace the nation-state as a source of governance, identity, and perhaps trade? Conversely, will the coming years see more tribalism, semi-autonomous communities, or other smaller-scale entities? In*

other words, "fission" or "fusion" – and with what implications for cultural plurality? In answering this question, consider emerging technologies as well as social forces.

- *In addition to the alternative futures for Pakistan presented in this article, what other ones to you envision for Pakistan and its neighbors? Also, what are possible "scenarios after next" for your part of the world?*