

FUTUREtakes

Transcultural Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

Vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2009)

Third Transcultural Thematic Issue

“Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future”

Perspectives from Finland, France, India, Italy, Japan, Sweden, the United States of America, and Venezuela.

Pakistan – Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

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Pakistan is a vital country for the United States and its war on terrorism. As a resource, Pakistan could in fact be the deciding factor for the war on terror and other future endeavors. Pakistan is strategically located in South Asia and borders Afghanistan, Iran, China and India. More importantly, it is close to oil-rich Southwest Asia (also known as the Middle East) and Central Asian States. Pakistan has the fifth largest military in the world, fully armed with nuclear weapons. Ever since its independence in 1947, Pakistan has proven itself in the past to be an important U.S. ally during the Cold War. After the events of September 11th, Pakistan has continued to be a key ally.

This article reviews the challenges that Pakistan has faced since it became independent in 1947 and the major political, economic, social and cultural forces that have shaped the country. It concludes with a brief perspective on Pakistan’s future.

A Brief History

The Indian Subcontinent and Birth of Pakistan

The Mughals, Muslims originally from Central Asia, ruled over India (present day India and Pakistan) for over 2 centuries before they lost to the British in 1857. During this period of Mughal rule, there was tremendous cooperation between Hindus and Muslims in many spheres of political, social, and

cultural life. After WWII, British decided to end their rule over India. At that time, the Indian Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah demanded a separate homeland.

As a result, the British carved out Pakistan from British India with its two wings, West Pakistan, the land west of India that is the Pakistan of today and East Pakistan, the land east of India that is now Bangladesh. These were the lands where the majority of population was Muslim. Pakistan thus became independent on August 14, 1947. Soon afterwards, about 11.5 million people migrated between India and Pakistan and over half a million were killed by mobs during this mass exodus, in stark contrast with the Hindu-Muslim cooperation that characterized Mughal rule.

At the time of partition, the British failed to decide the fate of princely states that were part of British India as their protectorates. Kashmir was one of those princely states whose majority of population was Muslim under a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. Both India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir in 1948 and 1965.

A third war between Pakistan and India in December 1971 resulted in the separation of East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh.

Pakistan, its Neighbors, and the United States

The relationship between Pakistan and the United States has had its ups and downs for nearly half a century. Until 1965, the relationship had been warm and cordial. In 1954, Pakistan was linked to the United States by the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Further bonds were forged in 1955 when Pakistan became a member of the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) and, later, as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). In 1959 Pakistan and the United States signed the Bilateral Agreement of Cooperation which provided for assistance to Pakistan if victimized by aggression.

The U.S. and Pakistan relationship deteriorated after the India-Pakistan war of 1965 when the U.S. imposed sanctions on Pakistan after Pakistan had used American-supplied weapons against India in the war that was over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

The Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan in 1979. The war between them lasted for ten years, during which one million Afghans and 15,000 Soviet soldiers were killed. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Pakistan risked its own stability by accepting 3.5 million Afghan refugees between 1979 and 1987 and by serving as a conduit for arms shipments from the United States to the Mujahideens (freedom fighters). Pakistan has not yet recovered from the aftershock of this deadly war. Much of the drug trafficking, smuggling, and terrorizing can be attributed to this role in the Afghan crisis.

Pakistan, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia provided substantial support to the Afghan freedom fighters (mujahedeen) as they fought against the Soviet military. The Soviets were finally defeated by the Afghan freedom fighters in 1989. There is no doubt that Pakistan played a critical role in the historic defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

After the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan, the United States did not pay attention to Afghanistan's civil war until September 11, 2001. The nineteen suicide attackers who hijacked the American airliner and attacked the World Trade Towers and Pentagon belonged to the al-Qaida organization that was based and supported by the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

The Taliban and Wahabism Era

The Taliban (translated as “religious students”) came to power after Soviet forces left Afghanistan and a civil war erupted between Afghani warlords. The Taliban controlled about 90% of the Afghanistan’s territory from 1996 until 2001 when they were ousted by the U.S. and Afghani opposition forces (Northern Alliance).

Most of the Taliban's leaders were educated in Pakistani refugee camps where they had fled with millions of other Afghans after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan’s religious political parties provided welfare services, education, and military training for Afghani refugees in most of these camps. The religious schools (madrassas) were run by inexperienced and semi-literate mullahs. Saudi Arabia provided substantial financial support to these schools where the curriculum was very close to the ultra conservative Wahabi tradition that calls for a return to strict medieval “Islamic” practices.

According to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, the devastation and hardship of the war against the Soviet Union and the civil war that followed have influenced the ideology of the Taliban. The young rank and file Taliban were students in Afghan refugee camps with little or no knowledge of mainstream Islam. The refugee students, brought up in a totally male society, not only had no education in mathematics, science, history or geography, but also had no traditional skills of farming, herding, or handicraft-making.

In such an environment, war meant employment and peace unemployment. Domination of women was an affirmation of manhood. For their leadership, rigid fundamentalism was a matter not merely of principle, but of political survival. Taliban leaders repeatedly said, “if we gave women greater freedom or a chance to go to school, we would lose the support of our rank and file.”

The Taliban leaders have been criticized repeatedly by Islamic scholars as being poorly educated in Islamic law and history. Their implementation of medieval Islamic law in Afghanistan and tribal-belt between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a combination of Wahabi orthodoxy and tribal customs rather than the mainstream Islam.

After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, most of the Taliban forces moved into the semi-autonomous tribal belt (Federally Administered Tribal Area) in Pakistan and have threatened to destabilize Pakistan and the other countries in the region. The Taliban's relationship with the Pashtuns in Pakistan has been a problem. A high percentage of the Taliban are ethnic Pashtuns. Most of the Pakistani Pushtuns live in the area bordering Afghanistan (North West Frontier Province & Baluchistan) and sympathize with the Taliban.

In September 2006, Pakistan signed a controversial peace agreement with the Taliban in the Swat Valley in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Pakistan's army agreed to withdraw from the area and allow the Taliban to govern the Swat Valley as long as they promised that there will be no incursions into Afghanistan and no attacks against Pakistani troops. Critics said the deal handed the Taliban a secure base of operations.

In May 2009, the Pakistani military launched a major attack against the Taliban in the Swat Valley after they violated the peace treaty by occupying Buner district that just 60 miles from the Pakistani capital. After securing the Swat Valley, the Pakistani military has moved into semi-autonomous tribal area of South Waziristan where the leadership of Taliban and al-Qaida is currently hiding. To date, the Pakistani military has taken back multiple Taliban strongholds. Air strikes, artillery bombardment and rocket attacks by helicopter gunships are being undertaken extensively.

This Pakistani war against the Taliban and al-Qaida has been ongoing (as of July 1, 2009) and has led to a humanitarian crisis. More than 2 million civilians (internally displaced persons) have fled the war zone and are living in refugee camps.

Pakistan Today

Economic Development and Challenges

The economy of Pakistan is the 26th largest in the world in terms of purchasing power and 47th largest in absolute dollar terms. Pakistan's major exports are textiles, chemicals, food processing, agriculture, surgical and sports goods and other industries. In 2005, it was the third fastest growing economy in Asia.

Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) growth increased to 6-8% range in 2004-06 due to gains in the industrial and service sectors. In 2005, the World Bank named Pakistan the top reformer in its region and in the top 10 reformers globally. Pakistan was also the second fastest growing economy in the world, after China, in the same year.

Pakistan has steadily raised development spending in recent years, including a 52% increase in the budget for development in FY07 that was necessary to reverse the broad underdevelopment of its social sector.

Today, inflation remains the biggest threat to Pakistan's economy. In 2008, following the surge in global petroleum prices, inflation in Pakistan had reached as high as 25.0%. The central bank of Pakistan is pursuing tighter monetary policy while trying to preserve growth. Since the beginning of 2008, Pakistan's economic outlook has become stagnant.

Security concerns stemming from the nation's role in the war on terrorism have created great instability, which led to a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI) from approximately \$8 billion to \$3.5 billion for the current fiscal year. Concurrently, the insurgency has forced massive capital flight from Pakistan to the Gulf countries.

Combined with high global commodity prices, the dual impact has shocked Pakistan's economy with gaping trade deficits, high inflation and a crash in the value of the Pakistani rupee, which has fallen from 60-1 USD to over 80-1 USD in just few months. For the first time in years, Pakistan may have to seek external funding as Balance of Payments support.

The People

About 97% of the 170 million people in Pakistan are Muslim. Pakistani laws, culture, and traditions all reflect this. The population is made up of different ethnic groups. One of these ethnic groups are known as Mohajirs (meaning 'emigrants') who came from areas which are in today's India when Pakistan was first created in 1947. The official language is English but most Pakistanis can understand and speak Urdu as well.

Jewelry making in Pakistan reflects an ancient art, which reached perfection during the Mughul period, in ornately engraved gold chokers, bracelets, and earrings. Many tribal and mountain women pierce the outer ridges of their ears, so they can wear several hoops and studs. Basketry, woodwork, and carpet-making are still widely practiced crafts. Pakistani hand-knotted carpets are famous throughout the world.

The ancient civilizations of Moen-Jo-Daro and Harappa were making clay pots and bricks in the region of modern Pakistan in 5,000 BC. Amazingly, the foot-driven potter's wheel of that period is still in popular use today. Potters and metal workers tend to draw on ancient artifacts for their inspiration.

More than half the working population is involved in agriculture. Manufacturing, mining, and service industries are the other large employers. Many people go abroad in search for work. Interestingly, there are currently over 15,000 physicians in the U.S. who emigrated from Pakistan.

The most famous sporting achievement for Pakistan was winning the Cricket World Cup in 1992 and most recently ICC World T20 in England 2009. In 1995, Pakistan were the reigning world-champions in four separate sports; cricket, field hockey, squash, and snooker. The national sport of Pakistan is field hockey, but 'the people's sport' is cricket.

Pakistani people are famous for their hospitality. If you entered a shop or a business, you will be offered soft drinks or tea. You will not be rushed as though you were a burden to someone else's time. If you entered someone's home, you would not be allowed to leave until you ate a meal with the host.

Most Pakistani people dress modestly and are not obsessed with the youth-oriented culture as are many people in the West. Welcoming others seems to come naturally in Pakistani culture as has been explained by Greg Mortenson in his book "Three cups of tea."

A common misconception about Pakistani culture is that it is backwards in terms of treatment towards women. Pakistan, being a very liberal country, is quite progressive in terms of Muslim countries: Pakistan was the first Muslim country to elect a female prime minister. There are more Pakistani women who graduate from medical school than Pakistani men. Besides the Taliban-controlled areas and villages, most women do not feel the need to wear the burka, or long headdress, nor are they looked upon as subservient to men. In fact in recent years, it is looked down upon when a Pakistani woman is less educated than her husband.

Democracy

Democracy has never thrived in Pakistan since landowning has traditionally been the social base from which most politicians emerge, especially in rural areas of Pakistan. However, this trend is now changing since a higher percentage of the population has moved into the urban areas from rural areas.

It was this new empowered urban middle class that showed its political muscle for the first time with the organization of a lawyers' movement, whose protests against the dismissal of the chief justice soon swelled into a full-scale pro-democracy campaign, despite President Parvez Musharraf's harassment and arrest of many lawyers. The movement represented a huge shift in Pakistani civil society's participation in politics.

Pakistan's Future

Several trends – in politics, economics, culture, entertainment, and education – point to greater prosperity (in Western terms), increased integration into the world economy and the community of nations, and a rejection of religious extremism. According to a most recent poll released on July 2, 2009, over 80% Pakistanis reject Taliban ideology and view both the Taliban and al-Qaida as a critical threat to the country, marking a turn in public opinion that stands to bolster U.S. and Pakistan's offensive against the Taliban and al-Qaida. This recent poll is not a big surprise since the people of Pakistan have historically supported moderate secular democratic parties rather than political parties that promote religious ideology.

The urban middle class that was previously excluded from Pakistan's political process is slowly gaining political control. This was seen in 2008 Pakistani elections in which candidates who were largely from middle-class won most of the seats. This was a clear victory over the forces of feudal landlords and military supporters that had heretofore dominated Pakistani politics. Overall, the Pakistanis voted heavily in favor of liberal centrist parties opposed to both mullahs and the military. The religious parties won only a dismal 5 out of 272 national assembly seats.

On the economic side, Pakistan's revenues have greatly improved in recent years, as a result of economic growth, tax reforms and more efficient tax collection and privatization of public utilities and telecommunications. Pakistan is aggressively cutting tariffs and assisting exports by improving ports, roads, electricity supplies and irrigation projects. It also has doubled development spending from about 2% of GDP in the 1990s to 4%, a necessary step towards reversing the underdevelopment of its social sector.

If you travel to Pakistan today you will see the effects of the boom in every major city: in vast shopping malls and smart roadside gas stations, in the cranes of the building sites and the smokestacks of factories, in the expensive new cars and numerous cell-phone stores. In 2003 the country had fewer than 3 million cell phones; today there are over 50 million, while car ownership has been increasing approximately 40 percent a year since 2001.

An incredible new world of media has sprung up in Pakistan with an unprecedented openness in the past few years. Music videos, fashion programs, independent news networks from all over the world, cross-dressing talk-show hosts, religious debates, stock-market analysis are shown 24 hours a day. There are also remarkable developments in publishing. In nonfiction, Ayesha Siddiqi's *Military Inc.* and Zahid Hussain's *Frontline Pakistan* are two of the most penetrating recent studies of the country and essential for understanding the politics of Pakistan. There have also been particularly impressive new works of fiction by Pakistani writers, among them Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography and Broken Verses*, Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers*, and Moni Mohsin's *End of Innocence*. One of Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories, his wonderfully witty "Nawabdin Electrician," was published in *The New Yorker* of August 27, 2007.

In May 2009, Pakistan signed a multibillion dollar gas pipeline accord with Iran. Under this agreement, Iran will provide 750 million cubic feet of gas per day to Pakistan for the next 25 years. China is interested in joining this strategic gas pipeline project and wants to import about 1 billion cubic feet of gas per day from Pakistan. It is estimated that such a pipeline would result in Pakistan getting \$200 million to \$500 million annually in transit fees alone.

China and Pakistan are also working on a proposal for laying a trans-Himalayan pipeline to carry Middle Eastern crude oil to western China. Pakistan provides China the shortest possible route to import oil from the Gulf countries. The pipeline, which would run from the southern Pakistan port of Gwadar and follow the Karakoram highway, would be partly financed by Beijing.

The U.S. has tripled non-security aid to \$1.5B annually for Pakistan to build schools, clinics and roads. The U.S. is also making efforts to engage the Pakistani people, not just the rulers by improved public diplomacy, educational exchanges and projects that will actually change people's lives.

All these positive developments are a big boost to Pakistan and its people. The \$1.5B annual U.S. economic assistance to Pakistan was desperately needed for the development of the infrastructure in the North West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Construction of schools, roads, bridges, power grids, factories and mechanized farming will improve the lives of millions of Pakistani people in these areas where religious extremism has taken root because of poverty and lack schools and colleges. Construction of modern schools for both boys and girls instead of traditional madrassas will go a long way to eradicate religious extremism in Pakistan.

It is clear that Pakistanis have overwhelmingly rejected the military rule and Islamist options and chosen instead to back secular democracy. Pakistan's remarkable economic progress during the past several years confirms that it is not a failed state or "the most dangerous country in the world" as the Western media would have liked to argue.

Further Reading

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

- Observes Rishi, "The refugee students, brought up in a totally male society, not only had no education in mathematics, science, history or geography, but also had no traditional skills of farming, herding, or handicraft-making." Others have hypothesized that a "discounted future" is often pivotal in turning individuals to terrorism and nations to war. To what extent will discounted futures lead to conflict within the next ten years, and where? To what extent do other factors such as deculturation facilitate terrorist recruitment? How can future studies mitigate perceptions of a discounted future while avoiding issue advocacy?
- Rishi discusses the connection between land ownership and politics. Similar connections have existed elsewhere, including the early US. Considering new types of wealth that have

since arisen (e.g., capital, then information) – and those that are yet to arise – which sources of wealth will most influence politics in your nation or region in 2015?

- *Rishi observes that “Several trends...point to greater prosperity (in Western terms), increased integration into the world economy and the community of nations, and a rejection of religious extremism.” Are Western notions of prosperity the wave of the future – and sustainable? Why or why not?*
- *Under what circumstances does increased economic integration of nations minimize the possibility of war between them? (consider pre-World War I Europe)*

Also see Iyanatullah’s article on Pakistan, Winter 2008-2009 issue.