

Shedding the 'crisis state' image

Pakistan is described around the world as 'dangerous', a 'terrorist incubator', and 'the land of the intolerant'. Thus, according to Pakistan's leading dissident, public intellectual and former diplomat Husain Haqqani, who lives in exile, "it is not difficult to understand the frustration of Pakistanis, both at home and in the diaspora, over the negative portrayal of their country." In his new book, Reimagining Pakistan: Transforming a Dysfunctional Nuclear State, Haqqani explains why an objective analysis cannot ignore some disconcerting facts about Pakistan's 70-year history, including "four full-fledged wars, one alleged genocide, ... four direct military coups, ... numerous political assassinations, unremitting terrorism, continued external dependence and chronic social underdevelopment." What then is the way forward? Haqqani offers suggestions for reconsidering Pakistan's ideology, and identifies a national purpose greater than the rivalry with India. An extract:

We can't let the India-Pakistan relationship be hostage to dispute: Husain Haqqani

For the sake of young Pakistanis, who want to be citizens of a functioning state, a reimagining of Pakistan is needed, going beyond the bitterness of the 1947 Partition and the subsequent disasters inflicted upon Pakistanis by their own rulers and leaders. Pakistan, like any other nation, is not a monolith. Its people have energy, talent and aspirations for a good life like anyone else.

One can disagree over or even be agnostic about whether the creation of the state of Pakistan in August 1947 was a tragedy or not. But there is no doubt that the failure of Pakistanis to create a more tolerant and democratic state and the difficult reconciliation between India and Pakistan have proved catastrophic.

Myriad problems

Pakistan's economy is stagnant, its population is increasing rapidly and its institutions of state are too tied to a national ideology rooted in Islamist discourse to be able to address its multidimensional challenges. With terrorists trained in Pakistan showing up all over Europe and in places as far from one another as Mali and Indonesia, Pakistan's change of direction is now a global concern. International assistance, especially from the U.S. and some from China and Saudi Arabia, has brought Pakistan back from the brink in the past. But rising xenophobia and Islamo-nationalism — exhibited prominently after the discovery of Osama bin Laden in a Pakistani garrison town — coupled with Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan make continued U.S. support for Pakistan difficult.

Although China remains supportive, it is likely to develop reservations about Pakistan's ideological direction because of concerns over the support for Uyghur jihadists by Pakistani ones. It is no longer easy for Pakistan's military or civilian elite to create a semblance of stability with covert arrangements with the U.S. or with China. If the influence of Islamists in Pakistan continues to rise, it would most likely be increasingly adversarial towards the U.S. and the West. Islamist enthusiasm for creating an Islamic East Turkestan would not sit well with China. This would only increase Pakistan's isolation. In any case, Pakistan's direction as a nation cannot and should not be determined by the U.S., China and other outsiders; the principal actors in this process would have to be Pakistanis.

Dismissing the possibility of Pakistan ever falling under the rule of extremist Islamists — as some Pakistani scholars and leaders do — is also erroneous. Such 'it-can-never-happen' prognostication has proved wrong in the past and could prove wrong again. Writing in 1963, Ian Stephens had rejected 'any practical possibility' of Pakistan 'falling under the sway of the mullahs,

influential and active though some of them such as Maulana Maududi are'. In his opinion, the power of theocrats had 'proven perceptibly less than in that other ideological state of the 1940s, which most progressives regard so much more amiably, Israel'. We all know how wrong that assumption has turned out to be in subsequent years.

It is more realistic to acknowledge that the currently defined 'ideology of Pakistan' nurtures extremist Islamism and obstructs Pakistan's evolution as a normally functioning state. Pakistan's pursuit of strategic objectives disproportionate to its capacity has been inadvertently encouraged by its alliance with the U.S. and China. The first step in reimagining Pakistan would be to abandon the narrow ideological paradigm of Pakistani nationalism. If Pakistan is here to stay, its leaders must free its people of the burden of believing that it is constantly besieged and under threat.

Pakistan sticks to a sad tradition

Armed with nuclear weapons, Pakistan does not need to live in fear or insecurity. The state of insecurity fostered in Pakistan is psychological and should now be replaced with a logical self-confidence. Once pluralism and secularism are no longer dirty words, and all national discussions need not be framed within the confines of an Islamist ideology, it will become easier for Pakistan to tackle the jihadi menace. The state would have to end support for any militant jihadi group based on false strategic premises. Jihadi terrorism is now a threat to Pakistan and must be eliminated for Pakistan's sake.

The shift away from ideological nationalism to functional nationalism — 'We are Pakistanis because we were born in Pakistan' as opposed to 'We are Pakistanis because our forebears resolved to create an Islamic state' — will help change the milieu in which various Islamist extremist and jihadi groups recruit and operate in Pakistan. Once the state has resolved to end support to all jihadis and is reconciled to a pluralist Pakistan open to multiple visions for the country's future, extremists would have to contend for Pakistani hearts and minds rather than having a captive following generated by a national narrative taught in schools and promoted by the national media.

Ties with India

Pakistan must also overcome archaic notions of national security. Instead of viewing itself as a 'warrior nation' it could be a 'trading nation' that can take advantage of its location for economic purposes. Pakistan could easily be the trans-shipment route for goods and services between India, the Middle East and Central Asia. It could have oil and gas pipelines running through it, with attending benefits. India and Afghanistan would be major trading partners instead of being viewed as permanent enemies or strategic threats. High literacy, global connectivity, increased agricultural and industrial productivity and a prosperous citizenry would be the goals of the state in a reimagined Pakistan.

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The India-Japan economic relationship remains underwhelming in relation to strategic ties

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