

Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU)

Brief Number 52



At the Precipice: Is Pakistan About to Fail?

Linton Besser

10th December 2009

About the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU)

The Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) was established in the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK, in March 2007. It serves as an independent portal and neutral platform for interdisciplinary research on all aspects of Pakistani security, dealing with Pakistan's impact on regional and global security, internal security issues within Pakistan, and the interplay of the two. PSRU provides information about, and critical analysis of, Pakistani security with particular emphasis on extremism/terrorism, nuclear weapons issues, and the internal stability and cohesion of the state. PSRU is intended as a resource for anyone interested in the security of Pakistan and provides:

- Briefing papers;
- Reports;
- Datasets;
- Consultancy;
- Academic, institutional and media links;
- An open space for those working for positive change in Pakistan and for those currently without a voice.

PSRU welcomes collaboration from individuals, groups and organisations, which share our broad objectives. Please contact us at psru@bradford.ac.uk We welcome you to look at the website available through: <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/display/ssidpsru/Home>

Other PSRU Publications

The following papers are freely available through the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU)

- *Report Number 1. The Jihadi Terrain in Pakistan: An Introduction to the Sunni Jihadi Groups in Pakistan and Kashmir*
- *Brief number 41. Future Prospects for FATA.*
- *Brief number 42. Pakistan's Tribal Areas: An Agency by Agency Assessment*
- *Brief number 43. Towards a Containment Strategy in the FATA*
- *Brief number 44. British Islamism and the South Asian Connection*
- *Brief Number 45. India Pakistan. Friends, Rivals or Enemies?*
- *Brief Number 46. Failed Take-Off: an Assessment of Pakistan's October 2008 Economic Crisis.*
- *Brief Number 47. Pakistan's Army and National Stability.*
- *Brief Number 48. One or many? The issue of the Taliban's unity and disunity.*
- *Brief Number 49. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: Ideology and Beliefs*
- *Brief Number 50. Civil Society in Pakistan: Stake Holders in a Contested State*
- *Brief Number 51. A Review of AfPak and the Ongoing Challenge of Pakistan*

All these papers are freely available from:

<http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/display/ssidpsru/Home>

At the Precipice: Is Pakistan About to Fail?

Linton Besser¹

In 2008, there were more than 2100 attacks by terrorists and insurgents in Pakistan, killing more than 2200 people and injuring another 4500.² This was a 746 per cent increase in the rate of violence compared to 2005.³ This year, Pakistan was ranked 10th on the Foreign Policy Failed States Index, ahead of Ivory Coast, Haiti, Burma and even North Korea.⁴ These grim statistics encapsulate the fact that for 62 years, the Republic of Pakistan has been unable to sustain a cycle of legitimate government, and help explain why some say Pakistan is already a failed state. It has lost control, or never exercised any, over large swathes of its territory; it fails to provide basic administrative and security protections for many of its people; and its economy is heavily dependent on foreign aid. This paper will examine how far this nuclear-armed, predominantly-Muslim state actually is from the precipice – and what the consequences might be should it stumble. For its 176 million people, a major crisis is a grave concern; but it would represent a calamity not just for Pakistan. With its crucial position in South Asia, its long-running enmity with India and its porous border with Afghanistan, any threat of political failure in Pakistan represents potentially the gravest strategic threat facing the international system. Such concerns must be re-examined in light of the President Zardari offensive, launched in October, against the Taliban's stronghold in South Waziristan. This paper will look at the ongoing internal and external risks facing Pakistan and at ways its government, and the wider community of states, can minimise these risks and promote stability.

The first challenge, inevitably, is to come to grips with the highly problematic concept of state failure, and its contested value for international relations theory. In general, the model's weakness is its failure to distinguish between the collapse of institutions within established states and the process of 'nation-building' in new states, such as Pakistan, that were forged by the departure of the great British, French, Spanish and Dutch empires: "A post-colonial nation's inability to address general developmental goals it set for itself nearly five decades ago does not necessarily mean that it is approaching collapse."⁵ Some say Pakistan is a "weak state"⁶, but even this caveat is imprecise; low economic activity, for example, or even high levels of poverty, is not enough to proclaim a state as failed⁷. Rather, it is when a combination of minimum

¹ Linton Besser is an investigative reporter at *The Sydney Morning Herald* specialising in security and conflict. He has an interest in both South Asia and the changing dynamics of the Pacific region. He has worked as a journalist and broadcaster for several of Australia's largest media organisations, including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. He is currently also registered as a post-graduate student of International Relations at Deakin University in Australia. The views expressed are entirely those of Linton Besser and should not be construed as reflecting the views of the PSRU, the Department of Peace Studies or the University of Bradford.

² Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, "Pakistan Security Report 2008," (September 27, 2009), 4. www.san-pips.com/new/downloads/03.pdf

³ International Crisis Group, "Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge," Asia Report 164 (March 13, 2009), 3.

⁴ Foreign Policy, "The Failed State Index," (July/August 2009).

⁵ C. Raja Mohan, "What if Pakistan Fails? India Isn't Worried ... Yet," (2004), 118.

⁶ Isaac Kfir, "The Crisis of Pakistan: A Dangerously Weak State," *Gloria Center* Vol 11 No 3 (September 2007), 2.

⁷ Stuart E. Eizenstat et al, "Rebuilding Weak States," *Foreign Affairs* 84 (2005), 136.

civil conditions, such as security and order, are absent, that the state is failing.⁸ Elsewhere, this is described as the “capacity gap”, which occurs when a state cannot meet the basic needs of its people.⁹ In these states, the black market may take the place of a functioning regulated economy in providing goods and services.¹⁰ Aidan Hehir says there are two broad categories of failure: “coercive incapacity and administrative incapacity – with no necessary correlation between the two”.¹¹ Pakistan has ‘failed’ before, some say, during repeated military coups and, most dramatically, in December 1971, when the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was carved away,¹² and it continues to exhibit characteristics of a failed state. Its government, “beset by one political crisis after another” has lost control of its territory and population;¹³ and furthermore, it has failed to establish a singularly effective constitution or credible electoral cycle, with every single elected Pakistani government either deposed in a coup or dismissed “by presidential fiat”.¹⁴ The problems are not just political, but also social. Basic health and education provision is either poor or non-existent, thereby allowing more radical forms of Islam to germinate, and forcing parents to rely on madrassas for education but also food and clothing.¹⁵ In 2001, for example, Dar al-Ulum Haqqaniyya, a madrassa which boasts many Afghani Taliban as graduates, had 2500 students from 15,000 annual applicants.¹⁶ It is for these reasons that some already cite Pakistan as a failed state.¹⁷

But there are, alternatively, those who say the context is important, that Pakistan’s political culture is far more tolerant of government misadventure than others, and that, in fact, elements of the country continue to exhibit order and stability: “Despite frequent changes of government and periodic bouts of military rule, the country’s political system is actually highly predictable and surprisingly resilient.”¹⁸ Schmidt says this is because Pakistan has a long tradition of two groups vying for political supremacy; a civilian upper-class of landowners and industrialists, and the military. The civilian elite is manifest in political parties that distribute resources, and favours, through a network of power and patronage.¹⁹ Indian commentators and analysts have taken a jaundiced eye to the debate, declaring that Pakistan is not in its “terminal stages”, claiming such analysis is part of a campaign that seeks to extort financial and military assistance from the United States.²⁰ While violence mars many corners of the

⁸ Robert Jackson, “Surrogate Sovereignty? Great Power Responsibility and ‘Failed States’,” *Institute of International Relations Working Paper 25* (November 1998), 3.

⁹ Eizenstat et al, “Rebuilding Weak States,” 136; James Gros 1996: “Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia , Liberia , Rwanda and Haiti,” *Third World Quarterly* 17 No 3 (1996), 456.

¹⁰ Foreign Policy, “The Failed State Index,” (July/August 2005)

¹¹ Aidan Hehir, “The Myth of the Failed State and the War on Terror: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1 No 3 (2007), 314.

¹² Steven Phillip Cohen, “The Nation and the State of Pakistan,” *The Washington Quarterly* 25 No 3 (2002), 110.

¹³ Barnett R. Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” *Foreign Affairs* 87 No 6 (2008), 1.

¹⁴ Cohen, “The Nation and the State of Pakistan,” 112.

¹⁵ Kfir, “The Crisis of Pakistan: A Dangerously Weak State,” 3.

¹⁶ P. W. Singer, “Pakistan’s Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad,” *Brookings Institute Analysis Paper 14* (November 2001), 2.

¹⁷ Hehir, “The Myth of the Failed State and the War on Terror: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom,” 6.

¹⁸ John R. Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” *Survival* 51 No 3, (2009), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰ Mohan, “What if Pakistan Fails? India Isn’t Worried ... Yet,” 119.

country, others, such as most of Punjab province, “provide a core of stability which has weathered many storms in the past and which is unlikely to disintegrate into chaos”.²¹ In these ways, Pakistan is perhaps a “persistently failing state” which exhibits “major signs of failure but which has nonetheless not fully collapsed”.²² These are important considerations because, if it is accepted that elements of Pakistani society are already failing, it becomes possible to consider the consequences of similar, broader collapses of its sovereignty or of its rule of law.

It is necessary, therefore, to examine the risks facing Pakistan to assess the likelihood of further disintegration. There are several, in fact, from the rise of religious extremists, the autonomy of tribal areas, a rapidly decaying economy and, perhaps most importantly, the country’s dysfunctional distribution of power and funds – particularly to the military establishment. It is this dilemma which lies at the root of many of Islamabad’s problems; Pakistan’s cycle of violence and political upheaval is directly linked to the twin issues of the military’s disproportionate funding and the unwillingness of the political class to begin a proper taxation regime:

Since they are not prepared to raise taxes or significantly reduce military spending, much of their time is taken up with the distribution of patronage ... After a year or two of living beyond its means, the government is confronted with a mounting balance-of-payments crisis. At this point, criticism from the political opposition, which sometimes turns violent, rises to a fever pitch amid growing public clamour for change. This provides both the setting and pretext for Army intervention.²³

While the country’s fiscal deficit has largely remained above 4 per cent of its gross domestic product since 2001, military expenditure has soared by an average of 12 per cent compound between 2001 and 2005, reaching almost 30 per cent of Pakistan’s total budget in 2005.²⁴ With a major air force buying program underway, no clear resolution to the conflict with India over the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir and new threats from religious and sectarian militants, this trend is unlikely to change. Looney and McNab believe that as Pakistan consistently fails to address the fact its budget has little or no tax base, these purchases and the maintenance of its giant war machine will create increasingly expensive opportunity costs, as resources are shifted away from services or debt repayment.²⁵ The military’s creeping acquisition of government funds has now emerged as a “serious impediment to trickle-down wealth redistribution in Pakistan and ... better micro-economic indices”.²⁶ The army’s power is so entrenched that it operates ostensibly like a political party, promoting and defending its interests. These interests are furthered by continued hostilities with India, in particular, a conflict it portrays in terms that

²¹ Hilary Synnott, “What is Happening in Pakistan?” *Survival* 51 No 1 (2009), 76.

²² Hehir, “The Myth of the Failed State and the War on Terror: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom,” 6.

²³ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 31.

²⁴ Robert Looney and Robert McNab, “Pakistan’s economic and security dilemma: expanded defence expenditures and the relative governance syndrome,” *Contemporary South Asia* 16 No 1 (March 2008), 63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶ Shaun Gregory and Christine Fair, “The Cohesion and Stability of Pakistan,” *Pakistan Security Research Unit* 30 (April 2008), 6.

“justify [its] disproportionate share of national resources”.²⁷ And with regard to the country’s other fighting front – against the rise of the Taliban – the military has until recently been unwilling to devote the necessary resources to tackle the problem, partly because it would deplete assets on the India border, but also because of a “visceral resistance” to fighting fellow Muslims, with commanders worried “that rank-and-file soldiers may at some point simply refuse to fight”.²⁸

Several decades ago, Pakistan’s former leader, Zia-ul-Haq, lent his support to a burgeoning class of Islamists. With Washington’s blessing, ul-Haq sought to tap a new source of political patronage, while the United States sought a partner in the Cold War theatre of Soviet-invaded Afghanistan.²⁹ It is widely accepted that the rise of extremist militants was “the result of deliberate decisions by the Pakistani army to instrumentalise political Islam and employ terrorism as a conscious tool in foreign and national security policies”.³⁰ Now, it is the threat posed by these very groups that most worries analysts and Pakistan’s western partners. There are other dangers that cannot be discounted – such as super-nationalists in Balochistan and other tribal areas of north and south Waziristan³¹ – but none so pressing. Since only 2007, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or the TTP, has managed to take control of about 10 per cent of Pakistan’s overall territory.³² A critical element of this phenomenon is the porous border with Afghanistan, and the decision to devolve security responsibility for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas to local tribes. This is in order to have a “plausible deniability” to demands from abroad for action against militants,³³ but it has undermined security because it was in these areas that many radical groups established themselves after their return to Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.³⁴ Later efforts by General Pervez Musharraf’s to crack down on the Taliban, under pressure from the US, were “selective at best”³⁵, and now, Al Qaeda, local extremist groups and Kashmir-oriented jihadists have combined forces.³⁶ This was highlighted when Al Qaeda lent its support to Laksha-e-Toiba, a Kashmiri cell whose training camps in Azad Kashmir were allowed to operate unfettered, in its attacks on Mumbai hotels in November 2008,³⁷ and reflects the growing support of these groups as they fill the social void left by the state. Local jihadi groups, like the Majlis-e-Amal in the North Western Frontier Province, were left alone to pursue the Islamisation of the region; in 2003, the NWFP declared Sharia law throughout the province and established special commissions to enforce, even at the local level, a strict observance of these Islamic codes.³⁸ These concessions have proved dangerous, yet they continued. In return for an agreement that militants will end their fighting, Islamabad in February this year offered the NWFP not just the institution of Sharia law in the Swat Valley, just 160 kilometres from Islamabad, but also throughout the

²⁷ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁹ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge”.

³⁰ Mohan, “What if Pakistan Fails? India Isn’t Worried ... Yet,” 121.

³¹ Kfir, “The Crisis of Pakistan: A Dangerously Weak State,” 5-6.

³² Pervez Hoodbhoy, “Whither Pakistan? A five-year forecast,” *The Bulletin* (2009), 1.

³³ Rubin and Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” 6.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 1.

³⁷ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 38.

³⁸ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 4-5.

Malakand district³⁹ - a deal described by the US defence secretary, Robert Gates, as an “acceptable compromise”.⁴⁰ But within 14 days, two security officers were killed and three government officials kidnapped by TTP agents in the Swat Valley, despite a “permanent” ceasefire, and Taliban forces moved to the neighbouring Buner area, 60 kilometres closer to Islamabad.⁴¹ Like earlier deals, these concessions “will not constrain but simply embolden extremists”,⁴² and could bring other areas under threat, including the country’s tribal heartland in southern Punjab:⁴³ “Given their current rate of expansion and absent a major volte-face by the Pakistan Army, this may be all the time they need to complete their takeover.”⁴⁴ And as the TTP has captured more territory, its agents have been able to consolidate control over smuggling cartels and other criminal activities, generating new sources of revenue and allowing the wider acquisition of manpower and weapons.⁴⁵

Had this march of the Islamists simply continued, and with Pakistan’s army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) hamstrung by the patronage it is offered by these groups, the strategic, political and social ramifications would be far-reaching:

The failure of Pakistan would be a multidimensional geostrategic calamity ... A collapsing Pakistan would place Iran, India, and China in particular at risk ... The rest of the world would be concerned about the disposition of a failing Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and fissile material, which could easily appear in the hands of other states or of terrorist groups.⁴⁶

These risks, which have been much debated within the international community, were largely ignored by Islamabad until recently when “the Taliban threat exploded in their faces”.⁴⁷ This year, with a new liberal administration in Washington, there has been a dramatic shift in policy; in May, President Asif Ali Zardari announced a new campaign against the TTP, and six months later, two army divisions were relocated from the Indian border and ordered into a bloody offensive against the TTP in South Waziristan. It is precisely the kind of crack-down that had been urged by Washington, and others, for years. Several warnings had been issued against those repeated concessions, many of which touched on the prospect that groups like Laksha-e-Toiba could cut their ties with the ISI and the army, finding cooperation with Al Qaeda and the Taliban more beneficial. The result would be an increased intensity and frequency of violence, and “efforts by Pakistani authorities to resist ... could precipitate an escalatory spiral similar to that seen in pre-surge Iraq, with periodic terrorist spectaculars punctuating a daily diet of roadside bombs”.⁴⁸ The context for such violence would be the kind of social conditions already evident in the territories already under Taliban control, with women forced into burqas and men into shalwar

³⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁰ The News, “Swat-style deal in Afghanistan acceptable, says Gates,” February 2009.

⁴¹ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 41.

⁴² International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 2.

⁴³ Hoodbhoy, “Whither Pakistan? A five-year forecast,” 2.

⁴⁴ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 43.

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 3.

⁴⁶ Cohen, “The Nation and the State of Pakistan,” 118.

⁴⁷ Feroz Hassan Khan, “Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Separating myth from reality,” *Arms Control Today* (July/August 2009), 13.

⁴⁸ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 48.

kameez, coeducational and girls schools fearful of reprisals and entertainment businesses closed down, as a new “sterile” style of Wahabism begins “to impact upon Pakistan’s once vibrant culture and society”.⁴⁹ There would be an increased displacement of people fleeing persecution or hardship, public floggings, kidnappings, and the bombing of schools and mosques.⁵⁰

And in an illustration of how delicate the Pakistan dilemma is, the world is now witnessing exactly such an increase in violence since the offensive was announced. Not only have hundreds of thousands of innocents been displaced, but there has been a corresponding spike in terrorist activity elsewhere in the country, killing at least 300 in more than 10 separate attacks.⁵¹ In a recent article, Seymour Hersh quotes a senior US military figure who warns the offensive could spark a revolution, or at least further radicalise anti-US elements in the military, adding “we are playing into Al Qaeda’s deep game here”.⁵² In this volatile mix is the possibility that Pakistan’s fission technology and nuclear weapons stockpile could be compromised, conjuring a vision of a Western enemy that “might embrace national martyrdom as a glorious fate”.⁵³ Indeed, sections of Pakistan’s elite have viewed its nuclear capacity as “safeguarding the ideological frontiers of the Muslim world”.⁵⁴ It is for this reason, that it is Pakistan, not Afghanistan, which Barack Obama’s advisor, former CIA official Bruce Riedel described as “the most dangerous country in today’s world”.⁵⁵ The risks are not only a new arms race with India,⁵⁶ but a higher probability of actual nuclear war because the US, faced with a Taliban government, “would have little choice but to strike first”.⁵⁷

Many commentators have, in recent times, disregarded these concerns as implausible worst-case scenarios. Firstly, there are strong views that Pakistan will not fail, and that it is not “doomed to go down the path of violent extremism [and to] the establishment of an Islamic caliphate”.⁵⁸ And many cite the regimented military control of the country’s nuclear assets as a reliable safeguard.⁵⁹ Ferroz Khan cites the special reporting systems, clearance regimes, counter-intelligence operations, accounting procedures and layers of institutional control, including the National Command Authority, the Strategic Plans Division, the Nuclear Security Action Plan and the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority.⁶⁰ Even the tunnel networks which house nuclear assets are dug so deep into Pakistan’s mountains as to be immune to

⁴⁹ Hoodbhoy, “Whither Pakistan? A five-year forecast,” 3.

⁵⁰ Khan, “Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Separating myth from reality,” 14.

⁵¹ Seymour Hersh, “Defending The Arsenal: In an unstable Pakistan, can nuclear warheads be kept safe?” *The New Yorker* (November 16, 2009), 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵³ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 51.

⁵⁴ Haider K. Nizamani, “The roots of rhetoric: politics of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan,” Westport: Praeger (2000), 109.

⁵⁵ John Barry, “How to Fight Al-Qaeda Now: An ex-CIA analyst talks about the terrorists’ power and their vulnerabilities,” *Newsweek*, (October 27, 2008).

⁵⁶ Mohan, “What if Pakistan Fails? India Isn’t Worried ... Yet,” 126.

⁵⁷ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 51.

⁵⁸ Synnott, “What is Happening in Pakistan?,” 75.

⁵⁹ Timothy D. Hoyt, “Pakistan Nuclear Doctrine and the Dangers of Strategic Myopia,” *Asian Survey* 41 No 6 (November-December 2001), 976; Khan, “Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Separating myth from reality,” 14.

⁶⁰ Khan, “Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Separating myth from reality,” 16-17.

nuclear assault.⁶¹ Despite these robust protections, there remain inevitable weaknesses in Pakistan's nuclear security, including the points at which previously separated trigger systems, warheads and other vital components are moved and assembled during a crisis.⁶² Another challenge is that much of Pakistan's stockpile is located in the north and west of the country, areas deemed a safe distance from the border with India.⁶³ Other than the scenario of installations being overrun, attacked or otherwise compromised, Pakistan's nuclear security faces other risks, including collaboration scenarios. In 1998, Pakistan's Khan Research Laboratory, led by chief scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, began secretly providing components and expertise to Pyongyang to help it begin a uranium enrichment program - within four years, North Korea purchased special high-tensile aluminium tubing necessary to produce uranium-based weapons.⁶⁴ While Osama bin Laden has reportedly expressed a desire to acquire this technology,⁶⁵ and even bluffed that he has achieved this desire,⁶⁶ the black market is awash with nuclear secrets.⁶⁷ So while the probability of the entire state apparatus falling to the Taliban may be slim, there are other dangers; that an "irresponsible regime" takes power,⁶⁸ or, perhaps more realistically, that leakage from Pakistan's program will occur in the form of "loose nukes" or a "collaboration scenario" where nuclear insiders work together with outsiders to assist those seeking a bomb: "Nowhere in the world is this threat greater than in Pakistan."⁶⁹ The AQ Khan scenario fits this picture, as does the activities of the Umma-Tameer-e-Nau, a group of Pakistani nuclear scientists with close ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and headed by Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood. Mahmood had been running the Khashab reactor⁷⁰ and had discussed with bin Laden his nuclear ambitions.⁷¹ Mowatt-Larssen says the same scenario could arise again, noting that neither man was caught by Pakistani authorities.⁷² In a worst-case scenario, it is unclear how the military would react to a political bid by an extremist group. "By way of example, if a colonel in charge of hundreds of troops decided to take over a nuclear weapons site, would the military be able to resolve such a situation in a way that did not lead to catastrophe?"⁷³

Since the 1980s, the West has held concerns about the integrity of Pakistan's conventional and nuclear arsenal, including the state's links to radical others such as Libya,⁷⁴ and the steady Islamisation of the Pakistan army.⁷⁵ These fears were

⁶¹ Hersh, "Defending The Arsenal: In an unstable Pakistan, can nuclear warheads be kept safe?", 3.

⁶² Shaun Gregory, "The Terrorist Threat to Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons," (July 2009), 3; and Hersh, "Defending The Arsenal: In an unstable Pakistan, can nuclear warheads be kept safe?", 3.

⁶³ Shaun Gregory, "The Terrorist Threat to Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons," (July 2009), 2.

⁶⁴ Chaim Braun and Christopher F. Chyba, "Proliferation Rings: New Challenges to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *International Security* 29 No 2, (2004).

⁶⁵ Yusufzai, Rahimullah 1999: *Conversations With Terror*, *TIME* (January 11, 1999).

⁶⁶ Hamid Mir, "Osama Claims He Has Nukes: If US Uses N-Arms It Will Get Same Response," *Dawn*, (November 10, 2001).

⁶⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, "Loose Nukes," *Backgrounder* (January 2006).

⁶⁸ Mohan, "What if Pakistan Fails? India Isn't Worried ... Yet," 128.

⁶⁹ Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, "Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Reducing the risks of nuclear terrorism," *Arms Control Today* (July/August 2009), 8.

⁷⁰ Dennis Overbye and James Glanz, "Pakistani Atomic Expert Arrested Last Week," *The New York Times* (November 2, 2001).

⁷¹ George Tenet, "At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA," New York: Harper Collins (2007), 264-268.

⁷² Mowatt-Larssen, "Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Reducing the risks of nuclear terrorism," (2009), 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴ Farzana Shaikh, "Pakistan's nuclear bomb: beyond the non-proliferation regime," *International Affairs* 78 No 1 (2002), 39.

heightened after the September 11, 2001 attacks against New York,⁷⁶ and have since taken on a new relevance, with a rash of recent attacks on nuclear installations, including a coordinated suicide bombing in August last year outside the entrances to one of Pakistan's central nuclear weapon assembly points at the Wah cantonment.⁷⁷ It was to head off these risks that, after the 2001 attacks on New York, the US forged a new intelligence and security arrangement with Pakistan, which included shared knowledge of its nuclear assets and their whereabouts, and US Government grants and expertise to better secure these assets. There is now also, a highly-trained US special forces unit on-call to help secure the arsenal in the event of threat.⁷⁸ But beneath this high-level intelligence relationship, it is important to note that there remains throughout Pakistan, and certainly among its security personnel, deep resentment and suspicion of Washington. Although the country's nuclear arms are ostensibly under the control of the military, the secretive ISI is also influential.⁷⁹ The intelligence service is populated by commanders said to "espouse versions of radical Islam arising out of their assistance to the Afghan mujahedin in the 1980s".⁸⁰ And in all of this, perhaps the greatest risk is one of strategic miscalculation by a third party – principally the United States – as it tries to decipher its intelligence and make rolling decisions about the integrity of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.⁸¹ Not only do senior Pakistani officials believe the US would be willing to share sensitive Pakistani information with India, but the ISI and the army are cynical about Washington's motivations in its relationship with Islamabad, fearing it would even invade Pakistan in the event of a major crisis, simply to secure the state's nuclear stockpile.⁸² Such ill will was demonstrated in September last year, during a US operation on the border with the Afghan region of Khost, when Pakistani troops opened fire on US soldiers.⁸³

How is this nightmare scenario to be avoided? Dramatic reforms are needed of almost every facet of Pakistani government and society to begin on the long road to political stability. These are long term changes that require domestic commitment but also foreign assistance. Perhaps the greatest challenge to be overcome is an overhaul of Pakistan's fiscal policy and budgetary discipline. For too long, both sides of politics in Islamabad have focused on preserving the advantages of the industrial and agricultural elites, while ignoring the fact that only 1 per cent of the country's population pays any income tax.⁸⁴ The little money that does trickle into the state's coffers is disproportionately distributed. To the detriment of the social sector and particularly basic schooling, which Pakistan "massively underfunds", the military receives the lion's share of state revenue,⁸⁵ encouraging the rise of religious madrassas. It is not just education, but also health, water, energy, justice and electoral

⁷⁵ Stephen P. Cohen, "The Pakistan Army," Berkeley: University of California Press (1984); Brian Cloughley, "A history of the Pakistan army," Karachi: Oxford University Press (1999).

⁷⁶ Shaikh, "Pakistan's nuclear bomb: beyond the non-proliferation regime," 41.

⁷⁷ Gregory, "The Terrorist Threat to Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons," 3.

⁷⁸ Hersh, "Defending The Arsenal: In an unstable Pakistan, can nuclear warheads be kept safe?," 2-3.

⁷⁹ Seymour M. Hersh, "Watching the warheads: the risks to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal," *The New Yorker*, (November 5, 2001), 48–54.

⁸⁰ Shaikh, "Pakistan's nuclear bomb: beyond the non-proliferation regime," 38.

⁸¹ Khan, "Nuclear Security in Pakistan : Separating myth from reality," 12.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸³ BBC, "Shots Fired in US-Pakistan Clash," (September 25, 2008).

⁸⁴ Schmidt, "The Unravelling of Pakistan," 30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

infrastructure that suffer while defence budgets continue to grow unchecked.⁸⁶ In order to redistribute these funds, there needs to be a root-and-branch reform of civilian and military governance – and its relations to religious extremists. These relations, now intergenerational, form a core obstacle to progression: “The military’s patronage of regional jihadi groups ... also tacitly supported by some elements of the civil bureaucracy, is the primary impediment to sustained government action.”⁸⁷ In this way, state collapse in Pakistan can be avoided by proper reorganisation of its security apparatus,⁸⁸ which for too long was focused on India at the expense of the Taliban.⁸⁹ All administration should be civilian, an adjustment that would require bipartisan agreement⁹⁰ and ongoing commitment to the campaign against domestic terrorism.⁹¹ Civilian law enforcement and intelligence agencies, courts, judiciaries and the development of transparent criminal legislation all require greater resources.⁹² This redistribution of funds would provide new social opportunities for Pakistanis and “do much to counter the pernicious belief that they are suffering as a result of fighting someone else’s war”.⁹³

Under this refreshed civil administration, the jihadist threat must be tackled head on. Pakistan’s military should remain focused on the real threat emanating from the FATA and the NWFP, and from radical mosques and madrassas elsewhere in the country;⁹⁴ this should translate into the disruption of communications and supply lines and the closure of base camps of extremist groups.⁹⁵ Common and centralised law enforcement should be imposed on these tribal areas which, at the same time, should be offered electoral relief.⁹⁶ The central government will also need a sophisticated public education campaign to counter the Taliban apologists who capitalise on anti-US sentiment.⁹⁷ And these efforts must be coupled with a genuine attempt by both Pakistan and the international community to address Islamabad’s other great source of insecurity – India. Although there has not been room in this paper to fully address the way Afghanistan’s sectarian and Taliban groups interact with those in Pakistan, the West’s eight-year-old campaign in Afghanistan has important implications for this issue. India has been re-establishing consulates in Afghan centres, and helping to fund a major highway linking these centres to Iranian ports at the Persian Gulf, thereby “eliminating Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan for access to the sea”.⁹⁸ These developments, which conjure a pincer-type security strategy by India, do nothing to reassure Pakistan about the war in its Afghanistan, but suggest instead an attempt to gain a strategic advantage.⁹⁹ After a string of crises in the past 30 years involving India, Islamabad cannot disregard the threat posed by its eastern neighbour, and so it is forced to juggle this border (and principally the Kashmir dilemma), the “war on

⁸⁶ Synnott, “What is Happening in Pakistan?”, 77.

⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 23.

⁸⁸ Eizenstat et al, “Rebuilding Weak States,” 141.

⁸⁹ Rubin and Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” 3.

⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” 2.

⁹¹ Ahmed Hassan, “Call for urgent review of war on terror: Joint session adopts resolution,” *Dawn* (October 23, 2008).

⁹² International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” ii.

⁹³ Synnott, “What is Happening in Pakistan?”, 76.

⁹⁴ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 49.

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge,” ii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁹⁷ Hoodbhoy, “Whither Pakistan? A five-year forecast,” 2.

⁹⁸ Rubin and Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” 6.

⁹⁹ Schmidt, “The Unravelling of Pakistan,” 37.

terror” in Afghanistan, and its threats from within.¹⁰⁰ Here, international assistance is vital. Resolution of the Kashmir conflict, perhaps through a suggested “contact group”¹⁰¹ would unlock much of Pakistan’s potential for reform, and the United States and China must do what it can to both convince India to play a lower profile in Afghanistan and to promote wider trade links with Pakistan.¹⁰² Financial assistance from the US must be tied to social reconstruction programs rather than military assistance, such as the new \$1.5 billion per annum, five-year program for non-security related financial assistance recently sponsored by US vice-president, Joe Biden.¹⁰³

In many ways, whether Pakistan has failed or not is a moot argument; it must not be allowed to fail *further*. With an enormous population, a sagging social sector manipulated by religious and sometimes violent interests, with the military as political powerbroker, and with the world’s most dangerously exposed nuclear arsenal, Pakistan as a state holds strategic importance not just for South Asia but for the world. The social and political implications of a full-blown crisis of government are dire; but should nuclear expertise and material be made available to those radicals now steadily acquiring sovereign Pakistani territory the strategic implications are potentially deadly. With concerted international effort, however, and a major reform agenda, the Islamist push can be rolled back and stability returned. Crucially, this must be achieved over the long term not by military growth but contraction – freeing up resources for vital social services like health, education and law enforcement.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Kapur, “India and Pakistan’s Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe,” *International Security* (Fall 2005), 138-139.

¹⁰¹ Rubin and Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” 8.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰³ Synnott, “What is Happening in Pakistan?”, 77.