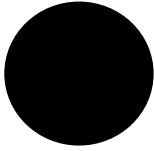


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Paradoxical Pakistan

Jitendra Nath Misra

The Idea of Pakistan

Stephen Philip Cohen

Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004

Pakistan was fashioned by visionaries who dared history and turned it upside down. The creation of a major state while the idea of Pakistan was still emerging was an astonishing accomplishment. Pakistan was also the first postcolonial state that broke into two. Since partition, in the uncoupling of its shared past with India, Pakistan has lost its way. The original project has been transformed from living history into remembered myths. The men of steady resolve who created Pakistan would be dismayed by what it has become. This key U.S. ally in the global war on terror is a nuclear armed state occupying the international spotlight. Because it is so important, those who need Pakistan and other sympathetic doubters worry about its future. Stephen Cohen's book thus serves as a vital aid to both policymakers and scholars. Yet it is more than that.

The doyen of South Asia specialists in the United States, Cohen has impeccable credentials. He has authored, coauthored, or edited ten books on South Asia and has taught at the University of Illinois, Georgetown University, and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He has also served on the Department of State's Policy Planning Staff and is currently a senior fellow for foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington. In 2004, Cohen was named by the World

Affairs Councils of America as one of the 500 most influential people in the field of foreign policy.

Cohen calls his book a "double biography"—one on the *idea* of Pakistan and the other on the *state* of Pakistan. Unlike *The Idea of India*, Sunil Khilnani's classic social history of a similar name which addresses India's multiple identities, Cohen's book deals primarily with a flesh-and-blood Pakistan, a faltering bastion with a far from assured future, yet with internal cohesion and vitality. Yet, Cohen does bring alive the tension between the idea and reality. The idea that Muslims were a separate nation that must have a homeland fortified against Hindu hegemony always lurks in the background, as if mocking the state that strayed from its original purpose. This theme—Pakistan's inability to live up to its founders' ideals—permeates the work.

Whose Pakistan Is It Anyway?

Pakistan often befuddles observers. It is a state of paradoxes: It is a nuclear power with a crumbling educational system. It has a high reproductive rate in a culture that demands public sexual reticence. It is witnessing rapid urbanization as its economy fails. It has a military capable of tactical battlefield innovations that has faced strategic retreat in three wars. It is a bastion of Islam

that cannot decide between competing versions of Islam. It is a declining state with a strong army, a defensive fortress that seeks to alter the status quo, and a partner in the war on terror that is hospitable to terrorists. But the greatest paradox is embedded in the very idea of a Muslim homeland that refuses to accommodate any more Muslims. Israel, the nearest model of a state defined by religion, welcomes Jews without condition. Pakistan will not accept even the most Pakistani of Pakistanis, the Bihari Muslims who left the Indian state of Bihar at partition for a better future in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). After the 1971 war that led to the creation of Bangladesh, many Biharis, still unwavering in their commitment to Pakistan, spurned the offer of Bangladeshi citizenship in the hope that they would one day return to Pakistan. They continue to wait in refugee camps for their day of deliverance, but Pakistan has no need for them. One wonders: would the call by Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, that Muslims and non-Muslims should live as equal citizens in the new state have been heeded if he had lived longer?

Cohen begins by tracing the idea of Pakistan to Islamic rule in South Asia, and linking the political ideas of the reformer and educator Syed Ahmed Khan, the philosopher-poet Allama Iqbal, and the lawyer-turned-politician Jinnah to the new state. He rightly says that for the vast majority of Pakistanis, it is Islam that defines and sustains them. Their role models are Muslims who either conquered India or supported the creation of an Islamic community that was, in Cohen's phrase, "separate and superior" to that of Hindu India. Yet, instead of guiding the new state, the idea of Pakistan lost its allure and began to rub against realities. A new triad—the army, the bureaucracy, and feudal landlords—took over the reins of power. The mass migration of Muslims from India at partition changed the power balance in West Pakistan, and the

new nation's will to survive propelled a Pakistan led by the military on a martial course. Hostility toward India and the strategic prize of Kashmir were always present. From partition up to the present day, competing versions of history and religious belief have animated the contemporary political discourse in both India and Pakistan. Cohen ultimately ducks the key issue: were the benefits of confronting, India even *after* Pakistan had created its safe space, worth the costs?

Cohen is right, of course, in giving an essentially Islamic dressing to both the idea and the state of Pakistan. A recent survey found that Mahmud of Ghazni, the tenth-century Muslim invader, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and Jinnah are the national heroes of Pakistanis, for the same reasons that Pakistan has named its missiles after the Muslim conquerors of India. But the Islamic narrative, if powerful, is still incomplete, for even official Pakistan has explored other roots. The populist Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a feudal aristocrat who maintained deep roots in his native Sind and strong support in Punjab, and Pakistan's most important political figure after Jinnah, was able to publicly articulate a historical connection between Pakistan and the Indus Valley civilization, without a loss of standing. In *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan*, Aitzaz Ahsan, a leader of the Pakistan People's Party and member of the National Assembly, explores the theme that the Indus Valley developed a distinctive culture of its own, setting it apart from Indian civilization. The Pakistani politician Wali Khan, son of the legendary Ghaffar Khan, leader of the nonviolent Red Shirt movement of the North-West Frontier Province, and himself a leader of the opposition National Awami Party, had once famously offended Pakistanis by declaring that he had been a Pushtun for thousands of years, a Muslim for a thousand years, and a Pakistani for fifty years. Cohen might fairly have explored alternative sources of

Pakistani tradition, derived from the Indus Valley and Buddhist cultures.

Khaki Politicians

In his pages on the army, Cohen deals with both the social base of the officer corps as well as its strategic thinking, and writes with the eloquence and flair of that characterized his classic, *The Pakistan Army* (Oxford University Press, 1999). His historical analysis is familiar vintage. It is in deciphering present military attitudes that Cohen adds real value. After the 1965 and 1971 wars with India, "Pakistani officers no longer boast that one Muslim is worth five or ten Hindus. However, the dominant view is that Pakistan can continue to harass 'soft' India." Cohen describes Pakistan's military and foreign policy strategists as "sometimes tactically brilliant, regularly outperforming rival India." (This was true of the limited war of 1999 when Pakistani army regulars crossed the Kashmir Line of Control into Indian territory in the lofty Kargil, occupying heights that the Indians had vacated in winter. But the Indians had demonstrated the same kind of tactical innovation in 1984 when the Indian army, fearful of a preemptive move by the Pakistanis, had occupied the uninhabited Siachen glacier in northern Kashmir, where the Line of Control had not been demarcated. The difference is that Pakistan was forced to withdraw from Kargil, while the Indians continue to occupy Siachen.) Yet, in the same breath that he praises Pakistan, Cohen also claims that it is New Delhi, not Islamabad, that has come up with foreign policy innovations in recent years.

Cohen offers the interesting proposition that Pakistan's army and politicians are in a checkmated duel, but otherwise has little to add to the existing literature on the failure of the political class to deliver good governance. Except for the flawed yet brilliant Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, prime minister for six years, all the country's other leaders failed or faltered without notable achievement. True,

but why? Cohen chronicles the known reasons, ranging from weak civilian institutions to the army's countervailing role as guardian of the state. It is not difficult to understand the fear of electoral arithmetic that engulfed the Muslim political class in India before Pakistan's creation, but this fear continued even *after* the birth of the new state and, in a departure from Jinnah's vision, all Pakistan could muster was an episodic democracy. Cohen says that Pakistan was transformed from a homeland for Indian Muslims to a fortress, but does not explain why "fortress Pakistan" feared democracy *within* the new state. Tragically for Pakistan, the same fear of numbers led to its breakup, as linguistic and cultural discord among Muslims replaced the rift with Hindus.

After 1971, hopes had arisen that a new Pakistan would be more united. But Islam could not bind its linguistic and ethnic groups, or bind them enough. Cohen maintains that, short of a war with India or a political earthquake, the chances of Pakistan unraveling are low. But the state remains fragile, and Cohen puts his finger on the basic flaw in Pakistan's original conception. After the homeland had been won, fortress Pakistan no longer had a significant non-Muslim threat within to turn against. Now that Hindus are in such a tiny minority, and Bengalis have formed their Bangladesh, the minority Sindhis and Baluch see the Punjabis as oppressors, and are less enamored with the idea of Kashmir as unfinished business. Ironically, the idea of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland has fueled separatism among those Pakistanis who found that, instead of enjoying a blissful future in a state free of Hindu oppression, they would be persecuted by their Muslim brethren.

Cohen's stark facts and pessimistic conclusions on demographic, educational, and economic prospects show how far Pakistan has fallen behind its peers. Totalling only 250 at the time of partition, religious

schools are currently estimated to range from 10,000 to 45,000. Pakistan's population is likely to reach 219 million by 2015, making it the fifth most populous country in the world. These circumstances are interlinked and traced by Cohen to prevailing attitudes. The Pakistani elite generally sees a large population as a strategic asset in the contest with India, does not take a strategic view of education, and views security in purely military terms, neglecting its social and political components. While frustration has turned Pakistanis toward religious parties, Cohen believes that the army forms a barrier to radicalism and sustains a system inclusive enough to forestall the rise of a religion-based mass movement.

The Most Allied Ally

Regarding U.S.-Pakistan relations, Cohen specifies Washington's policy options concerning terrorism, nuclear proliferation, relations with the Islamic world and democracy. Despite the 9/11 strategic windfall for Pakistan, he maintains that military assistance to Islamabad should nevertheless be linked to progress in countering extremism. In Cohen's view, the United States should press for democratization and reforms in Pakistan's educational system. It should nurture the unofficial dialogue and the peace process now underway between India and Pakistan, and promote a nuclear and military balance. Not least, Cohen believes that Pakistan and the United States have a common interest in preventing the collapse of Afghanistan.

Cohen forcefully argues that continuing institutional linkages with Pakistan's military through training programs is necessary to maintain U.S. leverage. But he is dismissive of nightmare alternatives to the present military leader, President Pervez Musharraf.

His study astutely demonstrates how Pakistan has worked around its asymmetrical relationship with the United States to

promote its own interests: "Pakistanis are expert at deciphering American interests and appealing to short-term American fears in the hope of establishing a mutual dependency in which Pakistani obligations are minimal while American ones are substantial." Cohen contends that, while the United States might close its eyes to Islamabad's tolerance of terrorism in Kashmir, it will not demonstrate the same understanding where vital interests are concerned, such as the transfer of nuclear technology. Pakistan might then "face the prospect of direct American action or a strengthening of India's strategic or nuclear capabilities."

The recent U.S. decision to sell advanced F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan shows that Cohen is right and wrong at the same time. He is right because, by maintaining a calibrated ambivalence about its role in the war on terror, Pakistan has turned adversity into opportunity. Indeed, U.S. support for the Musharraf regime shows that the competing strands of moral ardor and realpolitik remain at odds in the conduct of American foreign policy. Promotion of democracy in the Muslim world is likely to play second fiddle to strategic interests when the two conflict. But Cohen is also wrong. Washington is not likely to strengthen India's nuclear capabilities in the face of Pakistan's proliferation. Moreover, the United States is noncommittal about two issues that matter most to India: its aspiration to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and the transfer of civilian nuclear technology to help meet its growing energy requirements. But what the United States has masterfully done is choreograph a diplomatic minuet that balances the tangible largesse provided Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally" with a policy review that allows U.S. companies to bid for the transfer of equipment and technology to the Indian armed forces. India may have muted its opposition to the F-16 sale, yet it also has a long memory of Pakistan's aggressiveness after its ac-

quisition of U.S. weapons and, worse, their use against India.

Born of the Same Womb

If Pakistan's organizing principles are different from India's, as Cohen demonstrates throughout the book, "the paired minority conflict" between the two states seems likely to be unending. He is right in saying that the Indian denial of the *idea* of Pakistan remains at the core of the conflict. Unless the competing visions of the two states can be reconciled, confidence building and strategic restraint regimes are "irrelevant." The idea of Pakistan is based on a remorseless dismantling of history. The Indian assertion that the original idea of Pakistan died with the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 meant that "India was regarded as a state that could teach Pakistan nothing, except revenge." In distancing itself from India, Pakistan "ceased to learn from the one state that it most resembled."

However, Cohen has little to say on the battleground where these identity wars are being fought: Kashmir. Do current tactical probes by Pakistan in the negotiations on Kashmir mean that Pakistan has taken a strategic decision to inject realism into the perennial dispute? Cohen suggests that "India's growing strategic and economic power and Pakistan's relative decline" might have "prompted the decision to soften Pakistan's position on Kashmir in late 2003." If so, short of a critical Indian blunder, it is Pakistan that is more likely to look for alternative solutions on Kashmir than India, which can continue to let the existing partition evolve into a settled reality while maintaining the formal position that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir belongs to India.

Yet, in the same breath that he attributes the change in Pakistan's stand to its relative decline, Cohen asks India to unravel its carefully crafted strategy of attrition, an approach China has so successfully employed in its border negotiations with India. The question Cohen is unable to answer is why

India needs to offer the additional concession of a "human rights' solution" to make Pakistan swallow "the bitter pill" of a settlement based on the status quo. At one point, Cohen comes close to sounding as if he thinks Pakistan should be rewarded for leveraging the terrorism issue: "Pakistan's movement against terrorists operating in Kashmir will have to be linked to progress on a peace process since Pakistan will not want to unilaterally strip itself of a key policy instrument. To summarize, nothing will happen if America demands merely an end to support for terrorist groups without offering positive inducements in the form of aid and active support for a dialogue with India."

Recent events suggest that Cohen may be right about the softening of Pakistan's position. Agreements over a gas pipeline project, the expansion of rail and road links, including the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service in Kashmir, and the reopening of consulates suggest that Pakistan is willing to promote relations over a broad front without making progress contingent on a solution, or even substantial steps toward one. This has occurred in tandem with a decline in terrorist infiltration and the longest uninterrupted cease-fire in Kashmir since November 2003. But the fragility of the process militates against optimism. During President Musharraf's visit to Delhi in April 2005, the joint statement spoke of an "irreversible" peace process and a "final settlement" in Kashmir, but the two countries had also spoken of a final settlement in Kashmir as far back as 1972 in the Simla Agreement.

Another missing link in Cohen's work is a chapter on Pakistan as a nuclear power. In his previous book on Pakistan's army, Cohen provided glimpses into Pakistani strategic thinking, which Indian scholars quote as proof of Pakistani malevolence. "A Pakistani nuclear capability," Cohen wrote, "would paralyze not only the Indian nuclear decision, but also Indian conventional forces,

and a bold Pakistani strike to liberate Kashmir might go unchallenged if Indian leadership was indecisive." This theory had been expounded before India's nuclear tests of 1998, but was put into practice in Kargil in 1999, showing the familiar Pakistani cultural disdain for Indian resolve, a mirror image of the skepticism the Indians themselves harbor about Pakistan's technological capabilities. Despite the ferocious and successful Indian response in Kargil, Pakistanis still believe that "with nuclear weapons, missiles, and a tough army, Islamabad can withstand considerable Indian pressure and will usually find powerful international support to back it up." Cohen traces Pakistan's nuclear doctrine of first use against an onrushing conventional force to that of the United States in the mid-1950s, based on the visits of U.S. nuclear warfare experts to the Staff College in Quetta in 1957, a visit that would result "in modification of the old syllabus." This is an important finding that needs further exploration.

The Six Futures

Cohen meticulously examines six different futures for Pakistan: the status quo, a normal democracy, an authoritarian Pakistan, an Islamic state, a failed state, and postwar Pakistan. He concludes that, short of a catastrophic event like a nuclear war, or a conjunction of a military defeat, an economic crisis, and political turmoil, state failure "can be ruled out." The present military-dominated oligarchy will continue over the next five to eight years. Until Pakistan's strategic environment changes radically, leading to the army's abandonment of its guardian role, all Pakistan will have is a "revolving door democracy." As Cohen puts it, "Pakistan's army is strong enough to prevent state failure, but not imaginative enough to impose the changes that might transform the state.... The army is the key to changing Pakistan, but the army is itself slow to change.... [It] wants neither to govern directly nor to allow civilians to rule in

their own right." The Musharraf regime resembles earlier military regimes in its survival strategies, and short of a revolution, ideological redirection, or military defeat, only a "staged transfer of power" to civilians is viable in Pakistan's "armored democracy."

Most will share Cohen's disappointment over Pakistan's failures, yet many will also agree with him that Pakistan, far from becoming a failed or radical state, still has a resilient core that can rejuvenate the nation and redeem its uncoupled history. Its elite, including the army, supports a moderate Islam, and the armed forces remain united and disciplined. Pakistan still possesses professionals, thinkers, scholars, administrators, and religious leaders of high accomplishment. As Cohen writes, Pakistan's size, strategic location, links with the Islamic world, and nuclear capability militate against the total collapse of the state, although some of its parts might fail. Pakistan's nuclear capability provides it insurance against state breakup engineered by an outside power, just as the larger world of Islam provides intellectual and spiritual sustenance to the idea of Pakistan.

Cohen is at his best when dealing with the idea of Pakistan, the role of the military, and Pakistan's future which he wisely calls its futures. He carefully deciphers Pakistani thinking on its place in the world, in the framework of American interests in the region, offering a point of view that is at once both Pakistani and American. His Pakistan of the future will neither shun the ambitions of the past, nor become a status quo state, and its rulers will continue to embrace the idea of strategic parity to redress the imbalance in numbers with India. Pakistan's informed skeptics do worry about the limitations of the state, but only just.

Cohen's grand survey resonates with empathy. He has benefited from privileged access to Pakistani policymakers, providing an able and omnibus summation of his past writings on Pakistan. Despite its coupled history with India, Cohen concludes that

Pakistan is gradually moving toward the larger world of Islam, and becoming a partner in Islam's collective rage against the ascendant West. One wishes that Cohen had probed unofficial Pakistan for its own vision of the country. What kind of impact might

popular sentiment have on official Pakistan in the future? Certainly, support for a genuine peace dialogue with India will necessitate a "dialogue of civilizations" as a first step toward a durable peace. ●