



CONFERENCE PROGRAM

“Political Transformations in Pakistan”

March 29, 2008



Organizers

Anita M. Weiss, American Institute of Pakistan Studies

Walter Andersen, The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies,
The John Hopkins University, Washington, D.C.

Venue

The Kenney Auditorium (Nitze Building)
The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)
The Johns Hopkins University
1740 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Introduction

9:00 am – 9:30 am

J. Mark Kenoyer, President, American Institute of Pakistan Studies

Muhammad Aslam Khan, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Pakistan

Richard Sacks, Bureau of South and Central Asia, U.S. Department of State

Walter Andersen, Associate Director, South Asia Studies, Johns Hopkins SAIS

Anita M. Weiss, University of Oregon and conference convener on behalf of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies

Session 1: *New Ground Realities: Political Transformations in the Post-Election Context*

9:30 am – 11:00 am, Chair: J. Mark Kenoyer

Hassan Askari-Rizvi, Johns Hopkins SAIS

“An Overview of Political Transformations Today”

This talk will address the history-making socio-political transformations that Pakistan has undergone during 2007-2008 which has tilted the political balance in favor of civilian political forces and societal groups. This transformation has to be viewed as a turning point in the on-going struggle between authoritarian governance and democratic aspirations. Many factors contributed to this transformation but the current change is yet to be institutionalized; there may be more confrontation in the future. The

possibility of stagnation or reversal of the change cannot be ruled out, although the forces of authoritarianism will face more challenges than was the case in the past. Civilian and political forces have gained confidence in their capacity to effect changes in the political system by collective action which amounted to breaking-out of the state of helplessness created by the long years of military domination of political and societal processes and its expanded role in the economy. The following major factors contributed to this change: the suspension of the chief Justice on March 9, 2007 and the movement by lawyers and civil society groups for his restoration, the red mosque incident, the controversy on Musharraf's re-election, the return of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, the election campaign and assassination of Benazir Bhutto, reaction of the politically active circles and political parties against Pervez Musharraf's decision to suspend the constitution, and remove the judges and institute constitutional amendments to secure his presidency. These developments led to the electoral setback for the pro-Musharraf political leaders in the general elections in February 2008. The election results have provided the political leaders and civil society groups with an opportunity to retrieve the initiative from the military-bureaucratic elite. Now they will have to establish stable and efficacious government to address the problems afflicting the Pakistani society.

Husain Haqqani, Boston University

“Paradoxes of Political Parties in Pakistan”

Pakistan's political parties have operated for the last five decades in the context of a politically intrusive military and manipulative intelligence services. Several paradoxes and fissures have distorted the normal functioning of political parties in the country. Pakistan's military-bureaucratic “Establishment” has fixed elections, divided parties and bought off politicians at will. The insecurity induced by this manipulative culture has led pro-democracy parties to prefer loyalty over competence. The absence of genuinely competitive politics has encouraged the usurpation of the nomenclature of political party by clan or patronage based networks. This talk reviews the context in which Pakistan's political parties have so far operated. It attempts to analyze the weaknesses and flaws of Pakistan's political parties as well as the constraints that have contributed to those weaknesses. An effort will also be made to assess the prospect and means of transforming Pakistan's political parties.

Akbar Zaidi, Karachi, Pakistan

“The Politics of Economic and Social Change in Pakistan: Class, State and Transitions”

There is little doubt that Pakistan has been transformed from what was once called a “feudal” state, to what is now a middle-income state, where social groups such as the middle class, now dominate the social and economic scene. As social transformation has taken place over the last few decades, the nature of politics and contradictions within society have also been undergoing change. Aspiring groups, inside and outside of the main political mainstream, have become far more articulate and active, whether in the form of civil society or in the form of collectivised interest groups. What is interesting to investigate in the case of Pakistan, is whether these economic and social changes have also resulted in sharp divisions emerging in terms of visions of the future in terms of ideological choices, largely represented in some spectrum of what one can broadly term “Islamicised” futures. Moreover, with the military also now a dominant player in the economy, questions about where and how civilian interests and visions about the state of the future of Pakistan come into conflict with a militarized state, are worth investigating, as are growing economic links with foreign countries and the growing influence they have been having on Pakistan's politics. The discussion will highlight some recent economic and social developments and try to examine their consequences on social and political transformations.

Session 2: *Politicized Islam and Political Transformations*

11:15 am – 1:15 pm, Chair: Anita M. Weiss

Matthew J. Nelson, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

“Beyond Madrassas: Understanding Religious Education in Pakistan Today”

Typically, studies of religious education in Pakistan focus on madrasa education, paying special attention to both curricular matters (e.g. the adaptation of the *dars-i-nizami* over time) and extracurricular matters (e.g. *radd* literature and the relationship between religious education, sectarian identity, and contemporary politics). My paper seeks to expand this discussion to include an account of religious education in ostensibly non-religious institutions as well. Beginning with a discussion of parental efforts to provide their children with access to both religious and non-religious education at the same time via emerging patterns of “hybrid” or “part-time” enrollments, my presentation will touch upon the subject of primary and secondary schools very briefly before turning, more specifically, to the relationship between religious education and modern (ostensibly non-religious) universities. Stressing existing forms of ‘extracurricular’ religious education in the context of routine student debates, shifting party politics, and modern campus life, I argue that a deeper understanding of religious education must begin to move beyond the modern madrasa and the question of ongoing curricular reform to engage a much wider set of issues in which students, student activists, and university staff members collaborate in the construction of several new forms of informal “religious” education and contemporary “religious” politics.

Robert Nichols, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

“Faith, Power, Ethnicity: Understanding NWFP History and Politics”

For one hundred fifty years imperial and postcolonial state-builders have attempted to incorporate Pashtun and borderland communities into state ordered political and economic systems. British colonial and Pakistani elected and authoritarian regimes have failed to establish full authority and legitimacy within territories that now include regular districts of the Northwest Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. This presentation argues that current events reflect the historic reality that regional religious, ethnic, and political ideas and interests have successfully resisted state-building efforts that have relied too heavily upon claims to centralized, dominant political authority and subordinated forms of representation and economic development. If much of the 2007-08 turmoil in NWFP and FATA areas derives from contemporary Islamist and Taliban agendas, it also resonates with historic moments of anti-state activism, including the broad regional revolt of 1897, when many rallied behind religious imagery and ethnic identity and political leadership to assert varieties of political, social, cultural and economic autonomy.

Joshua T. White, Johns Hopkins SAIS

“Governance, Islamic Contestation, and Political Stability in Pakistan’s Frontier”

Much attention has been paid in recent years to the endemic problems facing Pakistan’s North-West Frontier, including the spread of insurgent Talibanization into the heart of the ethnically Pashtun settled areas, and the overall weakening of the writ of the state. Although these realities are commonly explained with reference to exogenous factors such as foreign involvement in the region, comparatively less attention has been paid to the internal, structural weaknesses of the state which have facilitated

these problems. Behind the everyday realities of insurgency and religious radicalization lies a growing crisis of local governance. This presentation will trace the ways in which the “devolution” reforms implemented in 2001 adversely affected the capacity of the state to respond to new forms of militancy and Islamic contestation. It will also critically examine an array of proposals that have been put forward which attempt to reinvigorate state authority and address underlying grievances in the settled areas of the Frontier.

Farhana Ali, RAND Corporation

“Hardcore Militants, Suicide Bombings and Al-Qaeda’s War in Pakistan”

The year 2008 began with an upsurge of suicide attacks aimed at hard targets, including the Pakistani military and local symbols of power, intended to derail the state’s ability to mitigate terrorist groups and local organizations. The upsurge in violence by hardcore militants in the rural and urban centers of Pakistan reflects a new trend with high risks of political instability for the government and civil society. Identifying the sources of extremism is only the first step in understanding the underlying causes that motivates and sustains their recruitment. Through the use of suicide bombings, an unprecedented tactic preferred by Pakistan-based terror groups, Islamabad is increasingly faced with a formidable foe that is invisible and indestructible. This presentation informs the ongoing debate of how to frame a counter-terrorist response that is relevant, realistic and reasonable, given Pakistan’s dialectic relationship with militancy and Islamism during the course of its political history. Therefore, an adequate terrorism response against the “Pakistanization” of al-Qaeda and a well-armed, well-funded and well-networked local insurgency demands a policy shift that addresses the population’s needs for long-term success.

Session 3: *Affecting Power: Institutions and Sociopolitical Changes*

2:30 pm – 5:00 pm, Chair: Walter Andersen

Bushra Aitzaz, Lahore, Pakistan

“The Judiciary and Political Transformations in Pakistan”

The judiciary had been a focal point of action taken by the Government of Pakistan this past year. The lawyers’ movement, led by Aitzaz Ahsan, has played a powerful role in pushing the state’s adherence to the Constitution and rule of law as well as mobilizing people in support of restoration of the judiciary following the imposition of the Emergency on November 3, 2007. This talk will review the role played by the judiciary and the lawyers’ movement — with a focus in particular of events of the past year — in affecting political transformation and analyzes the potential role each may play in the new political setup in Pakistan.

Anita M. Weiss, University of Oregon

“Political Transformations and Women’s Rights in Pakistan”

In Pakistan, the debate over what constitutes accepted roles and rights of women finds different constituencies deeply divided over what activities and privileges are acceptable and unacceptable for women, who is to define what these social roles and rights are, where responsibility lies to articulate

and clarify what is acceptable and unacceptable for women, and who is to ensure these rights. This debate has been particularly poignant over the past few years as Pakistan has seen reserved seats for women in the national and provincial parliaments revived, the federal government began the process of revising the Hudood Laws which resulted in the Protection of Women Act 2006, and Pakistan's CEDAW Report was submitted and successfully defended before the Division for the Advancement of Women at the United Nations. The kinds of political upheavals that Pakistan has undergone during the past year have important implications for women's rights. For example, a second bill on women's rights — to ban anti-women practices such as forced marriages, marriage in exchange for vengeance, and deprivation of women's inheritance — while submitted to the National Assembly over a year ago has been sidelined in the wake of the ongoing political crises Pakistan has been facing. This talk reviews key features of recent legislation promoting women's rights in Pakistan and analyzes the impact recent political transformations may have in promoting — or constraining — the empowerment of women further.

Aasiya Riaz, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency

“Pakistani Media and Political Transformation”

The February 18 General Election tells a spectacular tale of the road to political maturity in Pakistan. The independent news media in Pakistan is considered a veritable source in changing political fortunes in Pakistan. But has the independent media been a cause or a catalyst in this political transformation? Touching briefly on the media effects theory, especially media's effect on democratisation, the paper argues that the media played the role of an amplifier in a society that stood poised on the issue of “Rule of Law” following the March 09, 2007 attempt by Gen. Musharraf to dismiss the Chief Justice of Pakistan. Not only March 9 catalysed a political movement that came to symbolise the decades-long struggle for constitutionalism and created an unlikely hero in the Chief Justice of Pakistan, the polarized Pakistani society witnessed a change: regardless of politically partisan considerations, people began to emphasise principles over prudence. The paper outlines the crucial role played by the media in bringing the issue out in the open and keeping it alive while discussing the challenges it has been facing in carrying out this mandate. In this struggle, individual dissidents (TV anchors and analysts) became cult figures as media houses (owners) became vulnerable to state intervention. These individual dissidents improvised ways to reach out to public and played a crucial role in sustaining the struggle. Alongside this muzzling by the government, the influence of the media on political transformation increased with number and quality of ties existing between the media and the civil society.

Zia Mian, Princeton University

“Pakistan in the Shadow of the Bomb”

Since the May 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan have been through a war and a severe crisis that stopped just short of war that were in large part a result of the acquisition of these weapons. A dangerous and costly India-Pakistan arms race has continued and accelerated as both countries expand their nuclear complexes in ways that will enable them to greatly increase their rate of production of nuclear-weapon materials and develop missiles to deliver nuclear weapons. This has been fed by a state-supported nuclear nationalism, but this now shows signs of waning with the disgrace of A.Q. Khan and the growing domestic and international concerns about the vulnerability of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, materials, technology and expertise. The return to democracy is however unlikely to mainstream an anti-nuclear politics, since both the Pakistan Peoples' Party and the Pakistan Muslim League vie to claim credit for the bomb. Einstein's famous observation in 1946 that the bomb has changed everything except our way of thinking would appear to hold true for Pakistan.

Rifaat Hussain, Quaid-e-Azam University

“Pakistan's Political Crisis, Elections, and Implications for Pakistan-U.S. Ties”

By bringing the centrist and secular forces back to power, the February 18, 2008 parliamentary elections in Pakistan have spawned hopes of the country's final transition to a stable and democratic order. That PML (Q), backed by President Musharraf and the six party alliance of religious parties (MMA) comprehensively lost out to their arch opponents, the Pakistan's Peoples Party and the Pakistan Muslim League (N) is a clear manifestation of the popular urge for change and a devastating indictment of the failure of the policies pursued by the Musharraf regime to gain public support and traction. Whether the victory of the two mainstream political parties would result in Pakistan overcoming its democratic deficit, underscored by repeated military intervention in Pakistani politics, would critically hinge on how Washington relates itself to the emerging democratic order in Pakistan. Will Washington continue to view Pakistan in alarmist terms as a state on the verge of failure which can only be rescued by an autocratic ruler, or will it try to adopt a broader and differentiated approach in which issues of democratic development, rule of law, economic development and social justice are accorded strategic salience? My argument is that Pakistan cannot realize its full potential as a progressive, moderate democratic Muslim state without questioning the wisdom of its past alignments with Washington that were driven by the latter's geo-strategic interests. Pakistan must turn inward to get the fundamentals of its economy and polity right and in this paradigmatic shift Washington must lend it a helping hand by promoting policies that would ultimately benefit the people of Pakistan.