



Is Pakistan a failed state? No.

By C. Christine Fair, June 24, 2010 ■ Thursday, June 24, 2010 - 10:38 AM ■



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Once again, Pakistan looms as a country deemed to be "critical" in **Foreign Policy's** annual **Failed State Index**. But Pakistan is not a failed state, even though some of its institutions have declined incapacity, while others never worked well from the start. This year, Pakistan ranks tenth, below several African countries, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and above Haiti, which has recently been devastated by an earthquake.

Few would disagree that Pakistan has numerous problems. According to the **UNDP**, Pakistan ranks 141 among 182 states included in its Human Development Index. The Human Poverty Index ranks

Pakistan 101 of 135. And the country has an abysmal track record at building the capacity of women, ranked at 152 of 155 countries assessed.

Democracy has returned, after numerous bouts of military interventions and *democratus interruptus*. But, Pakistan's political and civilian institutions lack capacity and competence. While the military takes the blame for this, civilian institutions always legitimize the coups. The Pakistani Supreme Court validates the coup and the dictators' orders and even take an oath to support him. Those jurists who uphold their commitment to the Constitution are booted out and replaced with compliant judicial lackeys. The military leader invariably assembles a "King's Party," by co-opting the most self-serving politicians who put personal power over principle. Finally, they are elected in flawed contests which produces a weak parliament which rubberstamps the diktats of the military leader.

Following a showdown between the Supreme Court and then President and General Pervez Musharraf over the dubious privatization of state assets at below-market prices to favored individuals and the court's insistence that the government produce "missing persons" captured or detained in the war on terror, the Supreme Court is no longer supine and has become an activist institution. Citizens are nonplussed. They want a competent court that understands its place within the balance of power.

Moreover, after decades of supporting Islamist militants in Afghanistan and India, Pakistan now faces a serious domestic threat from some elements of their erstwhile proxies. In past years, Pakistan had a **mixed track record** in confronting the Pakistan Taliban (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), which the public overwhelmingly opposed until April 2009.

So, Pakistan faces severe challenges. But Pakistan has also made important strides which are not captured by this index.

First, Pakistan has taken the challenge of defeating the Pakistani Taliban seriously. The excesses of the militants in Swat, their refusal to honor a controversial peace deal, a video revealing their beating a young woman and their subsequent public rejections of the Constitution and democracy hardened public opinion toward them. The public's **resistance** to military operations decreased, and support for the various peace deals declined. Pakistan's Army and Frontier Corps are taking up the fight and appear to have their citizenry with them.

Unfortunately, the media tends to conflate all militants under the **unhelpful rubric** of "the Taliban": the "Afghan Taliban," "Pakistani Taliban," or the misnamed "**Punjabi Taliban**." Given the propensity to call these and other groups "extremists" or "insurgents," media reports deride the efforts of the Pakistan Army to defeat the TTP.

This is unfair. The Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps face a formidable foe. The Frontier Corps lacks basic equipment and training, including battlefield first aid. If they are injured, they often bleed out before they can get to a medical facility. Their lack of battlefield medical evacuation, smart artillery, and close air support makes their battle against the militants all the more sobering. Previous reports about Frontier Corps defection and even collaboration with the Afghan Taliban appear to be increasingly less relevant.

Second, though it has a long way to go, Pakistan has made enormous investments in its internal security apparatus. The Pakistani Army now understands the need for competent police forces as well as an increasingly competent Frontier Corps as key elements in the "holding" phase after clearing militants of an area. The Army knows it can't sit in places like Swat indefinitely.

Third, Pakistan continues to make strides with decreasing fertility and expanding educational opportunities. Although state-run institutions such as the public schools are a disaster, affordable **private schools** are spreading throughout Pakistan.

Fourth, Pakistan continues to build its infrastructure. Pakistanis increasingly connected with improved roads. That said, Pakistan does face enormous electricity shortages due to Musharraf's failure to make a single investment in this sector during his 10-year tenure.

Fifth, while the specter of A.Q. Khan's nuclear black market -- and his ties to the state -- haunt Pakistan, and while Pakistan has long conducted asymmetric warfare under its nuclear umbrella, Pakistan has made significant strides in securing its nuclear arsenal through the establishment of the National Command Authority and the Strategic Plans Directorate. It should be remembered that the U.S. Air Force "lost" several nuclear warheads for some 36 hours in August 2007. (The air chief was among some **70 people** who were punished.) If the United States can have such a lapse after decades of investing in nuclear-security protocols, Pakistan's relatively nascent institutions may not be foolproof.

Finally, throughout the 1990s, no democratically elected government served out its term, with the opposition colluding the military to prorogue the parliament and call fresh elections. In fact, the first parliament to serve out its complete term was that elected in the problematic 2002 elections. The election of 2008, despite a difficult start with voter registration and manipulation of electoral rules, was reasonably air and peaceful, despite Taliban threats to disrupt the process. That election saw the peaceful and democratic transfer of power which brought President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani into office.

Despite the problems with President Zardari, who is widely viewed as corrupt, an important shift has taken place politically. Perhaps under Army pressure, Zardari began relinquishing the sweeping presidential powers he inherited from Musharraf. In April 2010, Zardari signed the 18th Amendment which returned Pakistan to a parliamentary democracy more in line with its 1973 Constitution, which remains the lodestone of democratic legitimacy in Pakistan. This is the first time in recent history when a president "willingly" ceded power to a prime minister.

In short, the Failed States Index is clearly only one side of the die. While sitting at a computer crunching numbers, even with expert input as the index apparently uses, the larger story is missed. Pakistan has its problems and enormous challenges lay ahead, but it is far from a failed or even failing state.

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