

Summary: The Pakistan government's inability to provide for the security and prosperity of its own people has led to questions about its sovereignty, whether in terms of its monopoly of violence, fiscal solvency, or human security. But rather than asking questions of the Pakistani government, Pakistanis are content with blaming Washington for the country's ills. Washington wants Pakistan to succeed, even though, admittedly, the United States has often compromised long-term goals for short-term access. Pakistan can certainly do better by following India's example of self-sufficient economic growth. Pakistanis should also question Chinese and Saudi intentions as vigorously as they do those of the United States. Both countries have used Pakistan for their own interests, without attempting to invest in the country's people. Pakistan can only escape the leash of donors and manipulative outsiders by raising revenue, securing its territory, providing for its citizens, and becoming a responsible international actor.

Addressing Pakistan's Sovereignty Deficit

by C. Christine Fair

Pakistanis of nearly all ideological, economic, and political stripes are wrestling with a fundamental question: is their state sovereign? Today, the state is a fiscal wreck. It is unable to pay its bills, create jobs at a pace needed to keep up with its burgeoning population, or invest in its people. Its security arrangements are shambolic, with foreign terrorists ensconced in its military cantonment areas, sprawling metropolises, and tribal areas alike. While the Pakistani state targets some of these terrorists, it harbors and protects others. Pakistani terrorists have attacked major military installations, intelligence offices, and police facilities as well as a diverse array of civilian targets with impunity. Worse, the attacks on major military installations and personnel have often involved members of the armed forces facilitating the attacks. Since 2004, some 35,000 Pakistanis have been injured or killed by domestic terrorists, who have turned their guns on Sufi Muslims as well as long-established targets such as Shias, Ahmediyas, Christians, Hindus, and anyone who opposes their bloody plans for the state.

The police, who are outgunned and poorly protected, are unable to counter the terrorist threat. Pakistan's court system is a disaster. Judges are afraid to find terrorists guilty, while prosecutors are often too scared to take up

a case. Witnesses are disinclined to provide testimony, which is needed to compensate for the police's inability to assemble forensic and other credible evidence to prosecute suspects. The courts are backlogged, the prisons crammed, and the country's legal regimes are outdated.

The ongoing U.S. drone operations — whose exact nature is obfuscated by the Pakistani and American governments — and the May 2 raid by U.S. Navy SEAL teams on Abbottabad that resulted in Osama Bin Laden's death further prompt Pakistanis to wonder who controls their state and who exactly can protect them from domestic and external threats. In fact, Pakistanis are not alone in wanting to know the answer. In recent weeks, Pakistanis have increasingly asked these questions of their own government, which has been complicit in the country's descent into danger and insecurity. It's about time.

The military and intelligence agencies are effective at deflecting blame and parking all of Pakistan's miseries and challenges at the doorstep of Washington. It is an easy sell to Pakistanis who distrust and dislike the United States, despite its being by far the largest investor in Pakistan's development. (That said, U.S. economic and military aid in recent years amounts to only about one percent of Pakistan's



gross domestic product.) Any enthusiasm for the United States' human development assistance, such as it is, is no doubt eclipsed by justified dismay that Washington has invested many times more in a military that has long dominated the state. Pakistanis are wont to opine that Americans have long conspired to undermine Pakistani sovereignty for its own selfish ends. They are right in some measure. But the compulsion that drives the United States to increasingly operate unilaterally is its growing frustration with Pakistan's inability to assert its own sovereignty, at least on the issues that matter to the United States and its partners.

In the wake of the bin Laden raid, Pakistanis both inside and outside the establishment decried the intentions of the United States. Accompanying every revelation of Pakistan's varied shortcomings in the Western media is a vigorous cry that the United States is yet again seeking to defame, discredit, or shame Pakistan. However, Pakistan does a good job of achieving these aims on its own, and the simple reality is that the United States wants Pakistan to stand on its own feet, pay its bills, exercise sovereignty over all of its territory, expand the coverage and competence of its rule of law institutions, and provide for its burgeoning population. A Pakistan that can take care of its business is good for Pakistan, the region, and the international system. Yet few Pakistanis believe that virtually every dime the United States has spent upon Pakistan — even upon its military — is motivated by the simple belief that one day, a democratic Pakistan will stand on its own feet and become part of the solution more than it is part of the problem.

What is Sovereignty, Anyway?

What does it mean for a state to be sovereign? Some of the most obvious aspects of state sovereignty are the ability of the state to monopolize force and exert the writ of law more or less homogeneously over its territory. States conceive of this differently. For Americans, sovereignty must be exercised nearly uniformly over the expanse of the state. The same is not true for many countries in South Asia. Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh all have places over which the state does not govern uniformly. However, even with this model of sovereignty for Pakistan, the state has become increasingly unable to project force and ensure law and order. In fact, on all measurements of internal security and security governance, Pakistan's exhibits declining — not improving — capabilities.

A second aspect of sovereignty is the ability to exert fiscal independence. While Pakistan is making vigorous efforts — with varying outcomes — to manage its security affairs, it has largely capitulated on efforts at achieving fiscal responsibility. Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of tax compliance in the world. Its political elites refuse to impose agricultural or industrial taxes that might directly affect them and their patronage networks. While the International Monetary Fund required Pakistan to expand its tax net, Pakistan agreed to expand a general sales tax, a regressive form of taxation that hits the poorest the most. But the poor need not fear an expansion of the tax net, as even such meager commitments are flouted out of a lack of political consensus.

Third, a state should be able to take care of its people by providing human security, which includes access to food, education, medical attention, employment, and so forth. Here Pakistan's record is mixed. The Pakistani state managed to steer its citizens through the catastrophic floods of 2010 with considerable international resources. Pakistanis are also experiencing higher living standards, better quality of life, longer life expectancy, and decreased child mortality. However, these gains have not been made fast enough. Pakistan will still struggle to create jobs for its fast growing population, and its education system is broken. Pakistan has been unable to generate the interest in foreign investment that its rival, India, has.

The Perils of a Rentier State

There is an argument to be made that Pakistan — working with the United States, in particular — has forged a development model over time wherein Pakistan “rents” out its strategic significance in exchange for American financial assistance and support within multi-lateral lending and donor institutions. Such a relationship has allowed Pakistan to perpetually defer making genuine structural changes that alter the relationship between the elites and the rest of the country. It has also allowed Pakistan to invest in the “deep state,” prioritizing its security agencies rather than its people, fully confident that the world believes Pakistan is “too dangerous to fail.” This has been a gamble, and one that has paid off for Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies, but not for Pakistan's citizenry or for the prospects of a viable and vibrant democracy.



This relationship has proven adequate for both the U.S. and Pakistani governments for a very long time. If the United States “invests” \$100 million in Pakistan’s educational system, the Pakistan government can simply reallocate their own educational funds, which are now freed up by the U.S. program. U.S. institutional contractors who “manage” the contract take a healthy fee, which routes many of those funds back to the United States, while officials in Pakistan take their cut as well. In the meantime, the program has justified the U.S. presence in the country. The net result is that Pakistanis see very little of the “investment,” while Americans demand gratitude for what they believe is their largesse. Of course, this is not the way one does development if development is the primary goal. While Pakistanis have their own objectives — focused upon the fungibility of money and reallocating funds towards state priorities such as nuclear weapons and military investments — for Americans, it’s about buying influence. Both the United States and Pakistan want to maximize what they can get, knowing that their relationship will inevitably deteriorate. It is little wonder that both Americans and Pakistanis are dismayed, confused, and genuinely irked about the nature of this relationship and its payoffs for both sides.

But Pakistan can do better; it is not a Somalia. Why is it that neighboring India can provide for itself, having transformed itself from an aid-receiving to an aid-granting state, while Pakistan must grovel at the table of the IMF and other multilateral and bilateral donors? Indeed it is India’s financial success that has drawn global capital to its doorstep, with states seeking to sell it weapon systems, surveillance technology, power plants, and other infrastructure and commodities needed and demanded by the country. It is India’s growing economic heft that gives it leverage in the strategic partnerships it forges — including those with the United States and Israel.

There is no reason why Pakistan cannot step out of the shadow of its servitude and into the light of sovereignty. After all, Pakistanis are hardworking and proud patriots. But the sad truth is that Pakistan’s elites — many of whom sit in parliament — have chosen to subjugate their country for the accumulation and preservation of their personal wealth. At the same time, Washington has been all too eager to step into this game in hopes of maximizing its influence and expanding its presence in the country. While Wash-

ington wants Pakistan to stand on its own, it has no delusions that this is likely. Instead, it is happy to defer its long term-goals for short-term access.

Running to China and Saudi Arabia?

In the aftermath of the Bin Laden raid, Pakistani officials went to great lengths to court China publicly by announcing, among other things, that China will take over the deep-water port at Gwadar. The provocations would have been more convincing had the Chinese bothered to play along. Despite the public relations campaign that Pakistan’s establishment sustains regarding its relations with China, the truth is simple. China has done remarkably little for Pakistan. Beijing did not help Pakistan in any of its wars with India — in 1965, 1971, or 1999 — when it often took the same line as the United States. It did little to help Pakistan in the 2001-2002 crisis with India and it even voted in the UN Security Council to declare Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) a terrorist organization in 2009 in the wake of the Mumbai terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, roads, ports, and other infrastructure that the Chinese are building in Pakistan principally benefit China. The Chinese obtain contracts on favorable and profitable investment terms, use their own employees, contribute little to the local economy, and facilitate the movement of cheap (but also dangerous and poorly-crafted) Chinese products into Pakistan.

It is a sad fact that China, like the United States, uses Pakistan for its foreign policy aims. It provides Pakistan nuclear assistance and large amounts of military assistance to purchase subpar military platforms in hopes of sustaining Pakistan’s anti-status quo policy towards India. By encouraging Pakistani adventurism against India, Beijing hopes that India’s military forces remain focused upon Pakistan, not China. Consequently, China wants to sustain the animosity between India and Pakistan, without an actual conflict ensuing that might force it to show its hand by not supporting Pakistan. While the United States wants to minimize the chances of conflict in South Asia, China is only too happy to use Pakistan for its regional brinkmanship.

Pakistanis are also wont to romanticize Saudi Arabia while underplaying the deadly and pernicious role that state has played in Pakistan since the 1970s. Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates and Iraq, embroiled Pakistan in a sectarian proxy war after 1979 in response to Iran’s own

efforts to fund Shia dissidents against General Zia ul Haq's efforts to make Pakistan a Sunni state. The Shia militants have largely been extirpated, but Saudi Arabia's sectarian legacy remains, with countless Shia and Ahmediya corpses providing a heinous body of evidence for this sanguinary legacy.

Unlike the United States, Saudi Arabia doesn't even pretend to care about Pakistan's human development. Astonishingly, an increasingly debt-ridden U.S. government provided more assistance to Pakistan's flood victims than Pakistan's oil-rich Islamic brethren in Saudi Arabia. While the U.S. government has not figured out how to give aid in a way that minimizes corruption and maximizes benefit, Pakistanis should note that at least the United States tries to do so, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, which simply abdicates. Saudi Arabia does, however, fund madrassas, albeit of a highly sectarian variety. This is something Pakistan does not need, and Pakistanis themselves do not prefer, according to data provided by Pakistan's Federal Bureau of Statistics. Although madrassas do not always produce terrorists, they do fuel sectarian hatred, with the most pernicious Deobandi madrassas having long ties to al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban, and an array of anti-Shia militias as well as groups fighting in Kashmir.

While Pakistanis regularly express outrage over the purported innocents killed by American drones, Saudi-funded madrassas and the hate they routinely spew have claimed tens of thousands of victims. Like the United States, Saudi Arabia too uses Pakistan for its own policy agenda. Pakistan is key to Saudi Arabia's efforts to isolate Shia Iran and to promote the dominance of Wahabism over other Sunni sub-sects. And it has even used Pakistani soldiers in Bahrain to make sure that Bahrain's Shia do not upset Saudi interests. Pakistan has paid a bloody price for Saudi assistance, yet most Pakistanis seem blithely indifferent to this reprehensible truth.

Ultimately, there are no such things as "friends" in international relations. Countries will help Pakistan because they expect that doing so will advance their interests, not necessarily those of Pakistan and its citizenry. Pakistan will not free itself of donors and manipulative outsiders until it raises its own revenue from domestic resources, exerts control over its own territory, takes care of its citizens, and

becomes a responsible partner in managing — rather than undermining — regional and international security. In other words, it must exert its sovereignty.

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