

What If Pakistan Fails? India Isn't Worried ... Yet

The issue of failed states has risen to the forefront of international relations in the last few years, with Pakistan widely considered as a potential case. The Indian establishment has closely followed U.S. debate over the prospect of Pakistan weakening and disintegrating. Although many Indians relish this thought, as it would weaken its historical adversary, few decisionmakers in New Delhi are convinced that the likelihood of this prospect lies just around the corner. India is currently in no rush to prepare for such a contingency.

Some in New Delhi suspect that attempts to diagnose Pakistan with failed-state syndrome merely serve to perpetuate the long-standing alliance between Washington and Islamabad. Pakistani rulers have been adept at manipulating Washington's fears of political uncertainty in their nation. At every stage, Washington tends to argue that the current regime in Islamabad is indeed indispensable and often advises New Delhi to ease up on immediate disputes with its western neighbor. New Delhi recognizes Washington's enduring political dependence on Islamabad, especially on Pakistan's military, in order to pursue its political interests in south and southwest Asia. Washington's decision, for whatever reason, to discretely handle the Abdul Qadeer Khan affair—the so-called father of the Pakistani bomb whose extensive network of nuclear proliferation was unveiled earlier this year—confirms New Delhi's assessment that Washington will allow Islamabad to get away with anything. Washington declared Khan an individual offender and allowed the Pakistani government to pardon Khan rather than consider him part of a system in Pakistan that has deliberately promoted the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

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Although the Bush administration since the September 11 attacks and the initiation of the global war against terrorism has pressured Pakistan to end its support of extremists and terrorists, especially eliminating Al Qaeda and remnants of the Taliban in Afghanistan, India believes that Washington has been either unable or unwilling fully to press Pakistan to end its support for terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir. India attributes U.S. reluctance to challenge Pakistan on its Kashmir policy to Washington's prioritization of the situation in Afghanistan. This ambiguity in U.S. policy toward the sources of terrorism in Pakistan, however, tends to leave India somewhat skeptical about Pakistan's fragility and the broader debates on failed states and their role in sustaining international terrorism.

New Delhi also harbors some apprehension that the focus on Pakistan as a potential failed state and its implications for nuclear proliferation could end up shining a spotlight targeting the nuclear programs of India and Pakistan. New Delhi is aware that nonproliferation specialists in Washington do not make much of a distinction between the two countries' nuclear and missile programs. The prospect of nuclear war between India and Pakistan combined with the countries' refusals to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime has led India and Pakistan to be frequently grouped together on nuclear issues. Thus, from the Indian perspective, U.S. remedies for nuclear proliferation challenges arising from potential state failure in Pakistan could have the undesirable side effect of raising calls for similar actions against Indian strategic programs.

Is Pakistan Failing?

Indian skepticism toward applying state-failure theory to Pakistan is rooted in the complex evolution of the triangular relationship among the United States, India, and Pakistan. Notwithstanding the historical baggage that surrounds India's assessments of Pakistan, the Indian view that the Pakistani state is nowhere near collapsing has some merit. One of the problems with the theory of state failure lies in the fundamental difficulty of distinguishing between the range of problems that arise during the state-building process in postcolonial societies and the potential for actual state failure. A postcolonial 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.

State failure of the kind in Somalia, for example, is nowhere near likely on the subcontinent. Across South Asia, civil societies, standing apart from the state, remain fairly strong. Despite the current political turbulence, social cohesion endures thanks to the inherited structures of an old civiliza-

tion. Many states in South Asia, including Pakistan, have not fully measured up to popular expectations or presumed state responsibility in meeting the aspirations of the people. South Asia may have slipped into the unenviable position at the bottom of the list for a number of world social indicators. This does not necessarily imply, however, that failure is inevitable in all South Asian states.

The collapse of the state might certainly be a possibility in Nepal, where the Maoist insurgency has gained control of a large swath of territory outside the Kathmandu Valley, which hosts the capital and the ruling elite, and threatens to overrun the old order. In Bangladesh as well, state failure seems a long-term possibility. There, an unbridled confrontation divides Dhaka between the two leading political parties, driven not only by irreconcilable personal animosity between their leaders but also numerous disputes, including one over the history of the state's creation.

These types of conflicts, however, are not characteristic of the Pakistani situation. No serious and organized popular challenge to state authority exists in Pakistan, nor do people question the basis for the organization of the Pakistani state and its ideology. The attempted car bombings against President Gen. Pervez Musharraf by Islamic extremist groups at the end of 2003 also do not suggest any impending failure of the Pakistani state. Although these groups might be motivated by ideology, they scarcely enjoy popular support. Political assassination, in any case, has long been a tradition in South Asia. Although it has often weakened states temporarily, it has rarely led to the collapse of state structures in the subcontinent.

A primary feature of failing states is a fatal weakening of the central authority. Although India appreciates the many problems that Pakistan faces today, Indian leaders do not believe that the Pakistani state is in its terminal stages. On the contrary, many in India point to the extraordinary strength of Pakistan's army, which lies at the core of the Pakistani nation-state. The army is capable of disciplining any particular section of society at any given moment. The expansion of its profile in national politics since Musharraf's coup in 1999 has faced little resistance from the established political parties. Musharraf's ability to exile the leader of the largest political party in Pakistan—Benazir Bhutto of the People's Party of Pakistan—and to destroy the base of support of the next most popular political leader—Nawaz Sharif of the Muslim League—speaks volumes about the political dominance of the army and the rapid erosion of the two major political parties' credibility.

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The Pakistani courts have justified the army's repeated manipulation of the constitution as a necessity. Musharraf, unlike his predecessors who had ruled without any need for political justification, requires some measure of political and constitutional legitimization for his rule. A relatively free and vibrant press in Pakistan continuously questions Musharraf's legitimacy and attacks many of his domestic policies. Although political parties have been marginalized, Musharraf has to buy or persuade at least part of the political class to go along with him. Yet, this has by no means reduced the over-

whelming power that the army exercises in Pakistan today. In fact, India believes that the army is in a position to crack down fully on the sources of terrorism and religious extremism in Pakistan. Whether it chooses to do so is an entirely different question.

A second measure of a failed state is a bitter and enduring contest among warring factions. Pakistan has survived many types of internal conflicts, including sectarian and ethnic disputes. Although one of these con-

flicts led to the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, there appears to be no real danger of this recurring today. Few other provinces in Pakistan today have the kind of ethnic homogeneity or unity of purpose that East Pakistan had more than 30 years ago. Although Baluch and Pushtun nationalism in the provinces of Baluchistan and the North West Frontier provinces, respectively, are often perceived as potentially threatening, the capacity of the state either to discipline or co-opt them remains fairly strong. Although sectarian clashes between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have become a localized menace in recent years, they have not acquired much intensity or a pervasive hold over the entire population.

Another commonly accepted distinguishing feature of a failed state is the inability to exercise border control. The porous, uncontrolled border that Pakistan shares with Afghanistan has allowed members and leaders of Al Qaeda to move at will across its difficult terrain and could be seen as an indication of impending state failure in Pakistan. The uncontrolled western frontier, however, is part of Pakistan's geographic inheritance. Since the British Raj cut through kindred tribal communities to draw the artificial Durand Line in 1893, separating Afghanistan from British India, state practice has been to leave the tribal populations to their own devices while ensuring their support for the purpose of maintaining access to the outlying regions of the empire.

Although this vision of defensible frontiers served the empire well, it laid the foundation for a problem when Pakistan was created in 1947, after the

British partitioned the subcontinent. In continuing the British policy, Islamabad virtually ceded its responsibilities over territories on its side of the border along the Durand Line, which remained the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to local sovereignty. The wars in Afghanistan from 1979 to the present have further complicated the situation. Pakistan's western frontiers became the front line in the final years of the Cold War. Pakistan's support of a variety of insurgent groups trying to oust the Soviet army-backed Afghan regime had the full backing of the West, as well as many Arab states. Large-scale migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan across the war-torn Durand Line made things even worse. Pakistan's policy of creating a friendly regime in Kabul after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in the late 1980s exacerbated the post-Soviet civil war in Afghanistan. As a result, the regions across the Durand Line became a haven for international terrorism beyond the control of any state.

In the last few months, under pressure from the United States, Pakistan has demonstrated the political will to depart from its tradition of noninterference in the tribal affairs of its frontier regions by conducting unpopular military operations inside Waziristan, on the border with Afghanistan, for the first time since 1893. Musharraf has hinted at massive plans to extend the reach of the state and its activities into many previously untouched parts of the federally administered tribal areas along the Afghanistan border. Although these operations cause resentment within the general population and the armed forces, Islamabad does seem to have the ability to absorb the political consequences.

Finally, from the Indian perspective, the relationship between failed states and terrorism, often posited in U.S. international relations literature, has little relevance to the Pakistani case. The principal argument in the literature is that a failing state allows its sovereign territory to become a haven for international terrorism. The rise of religious extremism and terrorism on Pakistani soil, however, has had little to do with the weakening of the state in the last few decades. Rather, it was the result of deliberate decisions by the Pakistani army to instrumentalize political Islam and employ terrorism as a conscious tool in foreign and national security policies since the late 1970s.

Although Gen. Zia-ul Haq, who led Pakistan after a military coup in 1977 until his death in a plane crash in 1988, was personally religious, he chose to begin the process by promoting religion for his own political legitimacy in a predominantly moderate Pakistani society. Not until after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 did the Pakistani state, supported by the strategy and tactics adopted by the United States, begin to employ religious extremism and terrorism as tools of its foreign policy. The United

States found it politically ingenious to nurture and mobilize the mujahideen, or holy warriors, from within Pakistan as well as elsewhere in the Islamic world to challenge the occupation of Afghanistan by the “godless” Communists. This crusade strategy turned out to be enormously successful in bleeding the Soviet bear in Afghanistan and ultimately driving it out. Once the Americans turned their back on Afghanistan, however, Pakistan continued with the strategy of using the deadly cocktail of religious extremism and terrorism to pursue its long-standing objectives in Afghanistan as well as in Jammu and Kashmir. In Afghanistan, Pakistan had long sought a friendly if not pliable regime while Kashmir offered the final retribution to India’s vivisection of Pakistan in 1971 with the creation of Bangladesh.

Therefore, the weakening of the state did not produce Pakistan’s sources of terrorism. Rather, supporting these groups was part of a conscious national security strategy. Although these forces have arguably now acquired a life of their own, threatening the future of the Pakistani state, nothing currently suggests that the Pakistani army is badly positioned to confront and defeat these forces. To an extent, Musharraf, under pressure from the United States, has already undertaken this task, at least on the western frontiers with Afghanistan. On the eastern frontiers, Musharraf has often said that a resolution of the Kashmir issue would allow him to rein in the extremist forces. Thus, the persistence of destabilizing forces in Pakistan reflects Islamabad’s self-defined fundamental interests for its regional policy, not the inability of a failing state to control sources of extremism and terrorism.

The Current State of Indo-Pakistani Relations

Another significant contemporary legacy of the U.S. war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union was the intense militarization of Indo-Pakistani relations and eventual nuclearization of the subcontinent. U.S. arms sales and assistance to Pakistan in the 1980s, amounting to nearly \$6 billion, induced a competitive military buildup in India. Although the acquisition of conventional arms by India and Pakistan slowed in the 1990s thanks to economic difficulties in each country, they had crossed the nuclear threshold and begun to introduce missiles into their arsenals. During the 1980s, the United States largely ignored the nuclear and missile programs underway in Pakistan because it was dependent on Pakistani support to pursue its Cold War objectives in Afghanistan. India responded with its own programs, and by the 1990s, both countries had become overtly nuclear. The Indo-Pakistani conflict, with its new nuclear dimension, witnessed a series of military crises in 1987, 1990, and 1999 and more intensively at the end of 2001 and in the summer of 2002. Given the real danger of military tensions escalating to a

nuclear level, the international community deepened its engagement with India and Pakistan and demanded an end to Pakistan's support of cross-border terrorism as well as substantive negotiations between New Delhi and Islamabad to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

The greatest harm to come from the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s was the legitimization of antimodern, extremist, and intolerant forces in the region. U.S. and Pakistani state support for militant and fundamentalist Islamic groups in the course of defeating the Soviet Union reinforced the rise of religious radicalism in a region that until the 1980s had largely kept religion at bay in the conduct of state affairs.

Even Pakistan, an avowedly Islamic state, had been moderate in its religious orientation. As Zia co-opted religious forces to lend legitimacy to his military dictatorship and promoted religious radicals across the border to defeat the Soviet army, however, Pakistan saw the rise of extremism and sectarianism. Pakistan's shift inevitably had an impact on Muslims in the rest of the sub-

continent and elsewhere in the world. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the rise of Islamic radicalism also exacerbated growing Hindu fundamentalism in India. Together, Pakistan's radicalization and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism intensified Hindu-Muslim tensions across the subcontinent and more fundamentally gave a boost to anti-Enlightenment ideas in the region. Majoritarianism, sectarianism, obscurantism, opposition to the traditional regional notions of tolerance, and a rejection of the Western idea of separating state from religion became increasingly powerful.

In recent years, a number of factors have created a new set of conditions facilitating the management of Indo-Pakistani relations. Since the September 11 attacks, the international community has become less tolerant of the use of religion and terrorism as instruments of state policy. U.S. pressure on Pakistan has not led to a complete destruction of the sources of terrorism in that country, but it has certainly pushed Islamabad in a direction fundamentally different from the previous two decades. India has welcomed, albeit skeptically, Musharraf's new emphasis on transforming Pakistan into a moderate Islamic state. The Bush administration has also pursued a more balanced policy toward the subcontinent, seeking to improve relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously. Furthermore, the active involvement of the international community in the military crises of South Asia has resulted in greater awareness in New Delhi and Islamabad of the principal consequence of their nuclear weapons: the globalization of South Asian security.

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In sum, the current situation is one in which the prospects of a successful Indo-Pakistani engagement have significantly improved. Tensions between India and Pakistan rose dramatically immediately after September 11, but the new international context provided a different basis for Indo-Pakistani engagement. Whereas all Indo-Pakistani peace attempts before the September 11 attacks had failed, efforts since the beginning of 2004 have begun to gain traction. A full-blown Indo-Pakistani peace process is now in the works. The entire range of bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, is now on the table. Significantly, since January 2004, Pakistan has kept cross-border violence to a level that India is willing to tolerate for now. Although no one can predict the ultimate success of this process, its durability seems greater than in the past.

The current Indian dialogue with Pakistan is built around three elements: Indian willingness to explore an early and final settlement of the long-standing question of Jammu and Kashmir; Pakistani willingness to stop using terrorism as an instrument of state policy; and, along with a discussion of the Kashmir question, movement by both sides toward the normalization of bilateral relations. The possibility of state failure in Pakistan has not yet been a significant consideration. Could it acquire more weight in the Indian calculus in the coming years?

Planning for the Future

An assessment that Pakistani state failure is not imminent should not blind India to Pakistan's multifaceted problems. Pakistan's rapidly growing population (already greater than Russia's); the army's excessive intrusion into domestic affairs; the presence of nuclear weapons; the rise in poverty levels; the social and strategic consequences of using religious extremism as a tool of foreign policy since 1979, coupled with the inability of the state to deliver a variety of necessary services including primary education; the persistence of premodern formations such as feudalism; the rise of forces that are not merely anti-Western but also antimodern; and the growing strength of Islamic parties do figure in Indian discourse on Pakistan but are not a significant cause for concern at this stage.

Like Washington, New Delhi has put most of its faith in Musharraf and the Pakistani army. Although Musharraf has sought to reduce the influence of Islamism that has overtaken sections of the army, neither his complete success nor the continuation of his policies under his successors is certain. As India embarks on a prolonged engagement with Pakistan, the prospect of fundamental changes in Pakistan, including the weakening of the present state, the rise of an extremist-aligned general in the armed forces, or the

emergence of debilitating divisions within the armed forces, are not far-fetched possibilities. Although India is not currently anticipating political surprises in Pakistan, New Delhi should nonetheless be prepared for their occurrence. To that end, India should consider five elements in its contingency strategy to account for potential radical changes in Pakistani state and society.

First, forestalling state failure in Pakistan should be an important Indian objective. The current Indian commitment to engage Pakistan seriously and explore solutions to the long-standing conflict over Kashmir pursues this objective to an extent. Unlike past interactions with Pakistan, the current Indian policy seeks to open up large-scale people-to-people contact and integrate Pakistan into the regional economy through free trade and projects such as natural gas pipelines and transport corridors. Pakistan is currently conditioning such economic integration and expansive cultural contact to a resolution of the Kashmir question. If India can find a way to resolve the Kashmir question and simultaneously normalize the bilateral relationship, it could neutralize the political wind that has gathered behind the sources of religious extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. Hostile relations with India have been one of the principal reasons for the growth of destabilizing forces in Pakistan. The decompression of Indo-Pakistani tensions, followed by wide-ranging bilateral cooperation, could dramatically alter the political environment in Pakistan and create space for the rise of moderate and modernizing forces.

Second, although resolution of the conflict over Kashmir and economic integration could transform both the internal and external orientation of Pakistan, India cannot be sanguine that its current policy of engagement will move forward without any further twists and turns. India needs safeguards against potential negative developments in its western neighbor. In particular, India needs to reach out to the full spectrum of political voices in Pakistan. Although Musharraf and the army hold the key to the current peace process, India cannot afford to exclude the many other political forces, weak as they are at the moment, from its engagement. Such forces might be critical to resisting extremist elements and creating alternative political futures for Pakistan.

Third, given the extraordinary dangers that would arise from Pakistan becoming a failed nuclear state, India needs to accelerate its current program for missile defense and develop capabilities for counterproliferation that al-

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low its forces to operate in a nuclear environment. India's unexpected support for the Bush administration's missile defense initiative in May 2001 surprised many in Washington. Yet, one element of the intuitive logic behind the Indian decision has been the search for ways to mitigate the potential threat from Pakistani nuclear weapons and missiles. Although the effectiveness of missile defenses will continue to be questioned and counterproliferation capabilities are difficult to procure, advances on these fronts could help in-

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duce some restraint in a future radical regime in Pakistan.

Fourth, developing the conventional military force capabilities to defeat a potential future rogue regime in Pakistan is an option. It would, however, be difficult and controversial. In the past, India has never enjoyed the kind of conventional military superiority over Pakistan required to enable the use of force to achieve political ends. India would need massive financial resources, not readily

available at the moment, to rapidly modernize and upgrade its conventional military forces to acquire an effective edge over Pakistan. Sustained and high economic growth rates in the coming decades could, however, produce the necessary resources to modernize India's armed forces. At the political level, the very attempt to develop such a force could trigger an arms race with Pakistan and undermine the current peace process. Even if India were to develop such capabilities, their use against Pakistan would encounter many difficulties, including the risk of nuclear escalation and the political costs of conventional action.

India has not been squeamish about the use of force in its neighborhood. As the legatee of the British Raj in maintaining political order in South Asia, India has repeatedly used force in the subcontinent since its independence in 1947. Many current themes of the U.S. strategic debate, such as regime change, humanitarian intervention, and state preservation, have all been part of India's regional history. In 1950, New Delhi helped Nepal rid itself of the oppressive rule of the Ranas and restore the Nepalese monarchy to its rightful place in Kathmandu. In the late 1950s, India aided Burma in its war against insurgent forces. In 1971, India provided military assistance to Sri Lanka to counter a threat from extreme leftist forces. In the late 1980s, India intervened in Sri Lanka to end the threat of secession from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Also in the late 1980s, India intervened in Maldives to defeat a coup against the legitimate government in Male. More famously, India's humanitarian intervention in East Pakistan in 1971 led to

the creation of Bangladesh. These experiences in using force in the region, however, pale in comparison to a potential intervention in a nuclear-armed Pakistan. Moreover, India's costly, unpopular, and unsuccessful action in Sri Lanka has induced a great deal of caution in New Delhi against future military interventions in the region.

Fifth, and finally, the development of any of the above options or of a combination of them would have to involve considerable cooperation with the international community, especially the United States and China. India will need significant international support for a political resolution of the Kashmir question or the containment and defeat of a future radical regime in Pakistan. Yet, acquiring international support from other great powers runs counter to the conventional wisdom in New Delhi. India has traditionally promoted a policy of keeping other powers out of South Asia. This Indian variation of the Monroe Doctrine, involving spheres of influence, has not been entirely successful in the past, but it has been an article of faith for many in the Indian strategic community. India has, however, modified this policy at the margins in recent years, for example, by allowing Norway to mediate in Sri Lanka between the government and the Tamil rebels since 2000. It also has consulted with the United States and the United Kingdom on finding ways to help the Nepalese monarchy deal with the threat of Maoist insurgency.

Given the scale of the effort required to deal with potential state failure in Pakistan, India should develop the concept of "security multilateralism" on the subcontinent. Although New Delhi will always have to take principal responsibility in preserving subcontinental order, it should welcome the help of other responsible forces in dealing with the emerging challenges of state failure in the region. India is unlikely to accept the role of the United Nations in preserving regional stability, given its own negative experience with the organization in dealing with the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. Cooperation with other great powers, then, acquires some importance. Thus, a prudent Indian approach aimed at reducing the political and economic costs of intervention against Pakistan would require substantial cooperation with the United States and China.

Will such cooperation be forthcoming from two of Pakistan's most important allies? Suggestions for such cooperation among India, the United States, and China on regional security would have been dismissed as outlandish until recently. Political consultations among the three powers on Pakistan might have become a feasible option today given India's rapidly expanding relations with both the United States and China. State failure in Pakistan and its consequences would give Washington and Beijing much to worry about regarding their own long-term interests in the region. Accordingly,

New Delhi should engage both nations in bilateral discussions on the future stability of Pakistan. Until now, the United States and China, given the high stakes in their relationships with Islamabad, have been reluctant to be perceived as engaging New Delhi on the question of Pakistan's stability. Yet, a serious dialogue among the three countries on the future of Pakistan has become an urgent necessity. On their own, none of them can prevent state failure in nuclear-armed Pakistan or manage its consequences.

State failure in Pakistan might not be likely, but the potential that an irresponsible regime might emerge in Islamabad cannot be completely ruled out. Given the presence of nuclear weapons, the consequences of such an outcome—remote as it may seem in New Delhi—could indeed be disastrous. Therefore, India will have to develop some contingency planning to address such a situation. Over the long term, political cooperation among India, the United States, and China holds the key to preventing state failure in Pakistan and has the potential to facilitate Pakistan's evolution toward political moderation and economic modernization and lay the foundation for regional stability and economic integration in the subcontinent.