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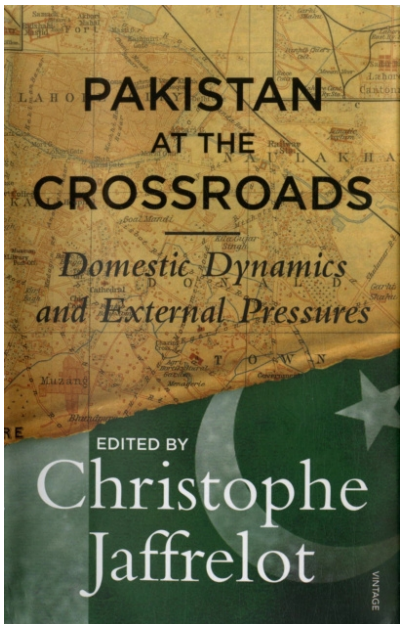
PAKISTAN

Troubled state



- **Author:** Edited by Christophe Jaffrelot
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The collection of essays portrays Pakistan, a state which has been never short of challenges, from every conceivable angle. By ZIYA US SALAM

A LITTLE over 20 years ago, a dilettante of Shahjahanabad in Delhi decided to air his thoughts about Mohammad Ali Jinnah at an informal gathering. Demolishing all notions of the founding father of Pakistan being a devout Muslim, he called Jinnah a nominal Muslim and went on to expand on his alleged fascination for pork, his scant knowledge of Islamic prayers, and so on. It all seemed a shade too much to take as he also talked about Jinnah's residence on Aurangazeb Road in New Delhi in the days preceding Partition.

Although many people walked out pretty agitated, the old man had certainly sown the seeds of doubts in many a mind. However, as time went by and tempers cooled, one realised that Jinnah was indeed a suave man who was happier in specially crafted business suits and silk ties than salwar-kameez. It was only when the demand for a separate state of Pakistan was made that he took a leaf out of Mahatma Gandhi's book and started dressing like the common man—in sherwanis and pyjamas. It was a shrewd makeover from a man who knew the pulse of the people. His sartorial, and possibly, religious journey was symbolic of the journey the state he founded was to undertake.

Dubbed a "theocratic state" by some, a "garrison state" by others, as Christophe Jaffrelot alludes to in his introduction to *Pakistan at the Crossroads*, and a "terror state" by many in the media, Pakistan has been at the crossroads long enough to make infinity intelligible. The state seems worn down by the unending identity crisis it is faced with.

Pakistan has never been short of challenges. A state formed by the partition of the subcontinent, Pakistan has faced more adversities than a lone tree in a desert. In the east, it is confronted with a perpetual challenge from India and in the north-west, the increasing disturbance in Afghanistan. Within, Pakistan has to reckon with the Baluchistan crisis as also the rise of radical Islamist movements. There is then, of course, its military, which never hesitates to play a key role in national politics. So, what does Pakistan do?

A sovereign country, strategically located in close proximity to China and Russia and providing the doorway to West Asia, Pakistan has been reduced to a "client state" through a combination of twist of fate and failed domestic politics. This blow is occasionally softened with the description of Pakistan as a "pivotal state". Not all the problems of the country are of its own making.

Fear of encirclement

Pakistan's relations with India suffered from a trust deficit from the very beginning. No wonder Jinnah chafed at Akhand Bharat, an idea that was voiced in the run-up to and following Partition, and believed that the Indian National Congress had not quite accepted the idea of Pakistan.

He wrote: "The Congress has accepted the present Settlements with mental reservations. They now proclaim their determination to restore the unity of India as soon as possible. With that determination they will naturally be regarded as avowed Enemies of Pakistan-State working for its overthrow." General Ayub Khan warned: "India's attitude continued to be one of unmitigated hostility. Her aim was to cripple us at birth."

On its west, Afghanistan refused to recognise the Durand Line as the international border. Incidentally, Afghanistan, whose name many take in the same breath as Pakistan, was the only country to oppose Pakistan's entry into the United Nations. And thus, the "fear of encirclement" was complete, Jaffrelot says.

The collection of essays draws from two conferences organised at Columbia University, United States. It seeks to present Pakistan from every conceivable point of view. It offers width of vision but not always the profundity to go with it.

Right from its birth in 1947 to the present, it has continued to be a troubled state and this has made it a fighter throughout its existence. With not-so-cordial neighbours all around and the upsurge of communism, Jinnah sold Pakistan to the U.S. as a geographically pivotal state in its fight against the Soviet Union. The U.S. took a while to come around, but it did concur "when the Cold War unleashed itself in Korea. It then recognised Pakistan as one of its regional brokers in charge of containing communism in Asia. This security-based rapprochement was made easier by the rise to power of two ex-armymen, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Ayub Khan, the former having no real problem with the latter's coup in 1958." However, a relationship built on mutual interest can hardly be durable. Interests change and so do relationships.

The Pakistan-U.S. partnership underwent similar ebbs and troughs before finally the enhanced Soviet interest in Afghanistan resulted in the Pakistan Army being offered billions of dollars besides military support by the U.S. The partnership was to culminate in Pakistan joining the U.S. in its war against terror in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York's twin towers. The renewed partnership served the immediate interests of Pakistan, but India was left squirming. All along, China had been a less appreciated, but no less useful, ally of Pakistan, using its insecurity and hostility *vis-a-vis* India to cultivate it for an engagement with the U.S. As mentioned in the introduction of the book, when Henry Kissinger secretly travelled to China to prepare for Richard Nixon's visit, he left from Pakistan, accompanied by high-ranking Pakistani officers. Of course, China and Pakistan swapped territory in Kashmir, much to India's dismay.

Internal threats

Interestingly, Pakistan's story is not only about allying itself with countries to maintain a semblance of order in the turbulent subcontinent. It is as much about the internal dynamics of the country, its keen military, the Baluchistan challenge and a police force called upon to handle Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

In the essay titled "Internal Security Issues in Pakistan", Hassan Abbas says: "In Pakistan, an understaffed and under-equipped police force is increasingly called on to manage rising insecurity and militant violence, and quite predictably the police performance has been far from satisfactory.... For many years, Pakistan has been engaged in battling a hydra-headed insurgency in FATA and parts of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, formerly known as the North West Frontier Province. An expanding terrorist campaign targeting Pakistan's major cities is inextricably linked to this insurgency. The growing number of suicide attacks across Pakistan underscores the dangerous nature of the crisis. From 2002 to 2006, the total number of suicide attacks in Pakistan was twenty-one while over the next five years, the total number rose to 279.... Pakistan has reportedly suffered close to 50,000 casualties in the war on terror so far."

Pakistan's politicians are no less deserving of attention. Mohammed Waseem, in his essay titled "The Operational Dynamics of Political Parties in Pakistan", gives a fairly clear picture of this dynamics. Politics in Pakistan, unlike in India, has largely been a pursuit of the elite, with most of the leaders hailing from wealthy backgrounds. They are often foreign-educated gentry with no direct link with the poverty and illiteracy of the masses. Tokenism prevails in the quest for democracy, like organising a march to Data Durbar or to Parliament to protest against certain actions of the government. Interestingly, despite their none-too-comfortable past, politics and military are often on the same page with respect to foreign affairs.

Philip Oldenburg makes astute observations. He writes: "The political landscape of Pakistan has always had a prominent place for its judiciary, and particularly the Supreme Court. The emergence of a judicially active court led by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and then the exhilarating 2007-09 Lawyers' Movement seemed to mark a watershed in the Supreme Court's role, from junior partner to the military and bureaucracy in times of crisis, to an institution autonomously exercising power. Indeed, it can be argued that 'had it not been for the revival of the rule of law and for a mechanism to enforce constitutional limits on power abuse by elected officials (in 2008-13)', democracy would not have survived in Pakistan."

Economic front

In the section on Pakistan's economy, Shahid Javed Burki and Adnan Naseemullah paint a disconcerting picture. Nothing much has worked for Pakistan on the economic front.

To quote the authors: "Pakistan's economy—which has been struggling with fiscal deficits, high inflation, declining dollar reserves, and the drying up of foreign direct or portfolio investment that could finance current account deficits—continues to depend on external support. In September 2013, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year conditional extended facility loan of $6.6 billion to Islamabad. The IMF programme was supplemented in March 2014 by a $1.5 billion loan from Saudi Arabia—not to say

anything about the resilient American aid."

No wonder, Pakistan is called the sick man of South Asia—Bangladesh's growth rate is twice that of Pakistan.

It all seems so gloomy, but this gloom stems from the foundation of Pakistan. Burki and Naseemullah point out: "When Pakistan achieved independence, it did not have the capacities of a functioning state. That was not the case for India, which could simply take over central institutions from the British Raj. They inherited a well developed capital city, a well staffed central government, a central bank and a treasury to handle government's finance. The British left foreign exchange reserves to the partitioned states, 17 per cent of which were to be given to Pakistan as its share of these 'sterling balances'. Yet none of these were immediately available to Pakistan. It had to create a new state out of nothing.... Compounding this problem was the arrival of eight million refugees from India while six million Hindus and Sikhs emigrated to India."

When the country's first Finance Minister arrived at his office in Karachi, he famously found a single table and a chair.

So, where does the solution lie? The solution can be found in some of the actions of Jinnah. For instance, do as Jinnah did: forge new allies, look within. Then follow Ayub Khan's development decades of the 1960s. And, importantly, be comfortable in one's own skin. Remember, Jinnah gave up his business suits for the sherwani. Pakistan, too, might have to stop looking at the West and capitalise on its strategic location for trade rather than balance of power.

Historically, it is a location that yielded great dividends in the world of business. As for its relationship with India, it is likely to be the same: some appeasement, some skirmishes, a little conciliation and some crises. This position is unlikely to change as long the military confiscates power in Pakistan and real democracy does not take root.

The book concludes: "Short of the establishment of a real democracy in Pakistan wherein civilians would exercise real control over the military, any long-term rapprochement with India will remain elusive. The current trend in Pakistan where civilian power is no more than a facade does not augur well for the future of India-Pakistan relationship."

The book provides no easy answers. The contributors to the collection open a new window and let the reader take in the view and come to his or her own conclusions. An open-ended approach serves well for a work of this nature.

As for Jaffrelot's involvement with the project, to borrow Ghalib words, the book is the body, his words its soul. His essay carries more weight than many others put together. If *the book* makes for impressive reading, credit has to be given to its editor. Jaffrelot even makes crossroads interesting.
