

Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State'

Reviewed by David Waterman

Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State.' Maleeha Lodhi, ed. London: Hurst and Company, 2011. 391 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-84904-135-5.

Maleeha Lodhi, as the editor of *Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State,'* has managed to assemble some of Pakistan's most influential academics, writers, economists and policymakers in one volume, designed to give an insider's perspective on Pakistan's "crisis" from diverse angles, and more importantly, to suggest solutions regarding Pakistan's obvious potential for a better future. The book is not a collection of conference proceedings, but rather the product of a virtual conference in cyberspace, discussing themes of "governance, security, economic and human development and foreign policy [...] what binds all the distinguished contributors is their belief that Pakistan's challenges are surmountable and the impetus for change and renewal can only come from within, through bold reforms that are identified in the chapters that follow" (3).

The first few chapters concentrate on Pakistan's history and the sense of a Pakistani identity, now that the country has existed in very concrete terms for sixty-five years or so. Ayesha Jalal suggests that Pakistan's path toward a national identity for its heterogeneous people has been interrupted, as its history has been co-opted for "political and ideological reasons" (11). Pakistan's position vis-à-vis India, militant Islam and 9/11 are all important factors in the equation as well. Akbar Ahmed recalls Jinnah's role not only in the founding of the nation, but his continuing legacy in terms of an equilibrium between Islam and the State; Jinnah's thoughts are in large part gleaned from his speeches and letters, as he left no monograph before his death (23). Mohsin Hamid, author of *Moth Smoke* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (filming for the movie has apparently begun), assumes his mantle of engaged journalist in an essay entitled "Why Pakistan will Survive." His argument is best summed up as follows: "we are not as poor as we like to think" (41), highlighting Pakistan's strength in diversity, and in economic terms, Hamid suggests that something as simple as a coherent, fair tax code could allow the nation to concentrate on schools and healthcare, while cutting the strings of American aid and its corresponding intervention in Pakistan's affairs. Maleeha Lodhi's own chapter is a detailed overview of contemporary history, calling attention to political asymmetry, clientelist politics and borrowed growth

as well as security concerns and regional pressures on national unity; ultimately she calls for a “new politics that connects governance to public purpose” (78).

The essays then move into more political themes, and the first among them discusses the army as a central element of Pakistani political, and indeed corporate, life. Shuja Nawaz argues that while the army has historically been a significant power broker, the generation of commanders from the Zia and Musharraf eras is about to retire, thus promising the possibility of change, including the realization that “counterinsurgency operations are 90 per cent political and economic and only 10 per cent military” (93). Saeed Shafqat also discusses the political role of the military, saying that while elections are of course essential to democracy, more attention needs to be paid to the rule of law and the incorporation of cultural pluralism (95), never forgetting the role of various elites within the process; he suggests that the emergence of coalition politics is a hopeful sign. Islam’s role in politics is the focus of Ziad Haider’s essay, tracing its evolution from Jinnah’s comments through the Munir report, Islamization under Zia and Talibanization to the “This is Not Us” movement (129) and the hope that moderate Islam represents the future of Pakistan. A chapter entitled “Battling Militancy,” by Zahid Hussain, continues the discussion, tracing the development of jihadist politics given the situation in Afghanistan.

The focus then shifts to economic policy, beginning with Ishrat Husain’s insistence that economic policies cannot remain sound without solid institutions behind them; he cites the long-term nature of economic progress, while successive governments seem interested only in short-term horizons (149-150). Meekal Ahmed follows the Pakistani economy from the early sixties and periods of relative health, through Ayub Khan’s era, also a time of economic stability, which changes under Bhutto and his nationalization programs, and since then has gone from crisis to crisis, both the government and poor IMF oversight bearing a share of the blame. Competitiveness is the key concept for Muddassar Mazhar Malik, who reminds us that Pakistan is “open for business” despite many challenges to overcome, citing economic potential, natural resources and strategic location as strong points (201). Ziad Alahdad then shifts the focus to energy, a sector in crisis which then has an enormous impact on Pakistan’s economy, all of this in a country with abundant natural energy resources; a more coherent exploitation of Integrated Energy Planning would be part of an overall solution (240).

Strategic issues then occupy several chapters, beginning interestingly with education as part of the formula, as advanced by Shanza Khan and Moeed Yusuf, who suggest that politically-neutral education is the foundation not only of

economic development but also the means to resist violent extremism by building expectations and supplying hope, especially for the young. Pakistan of course possesses nuclear weapons, and Feroz Hassan Khan asks the question, wondering if its nuclear capability has allowed Pakistan to focus itself on other priorities, in other words averting wars rather than fighting them, to paraphrase Bernard Brodie, cited in Khan's essay (268). Munir Akram's essay, "Reversing Strategic 'Shrinkage,'" highlights Pakistan's current challenges: the Pakistani Taliban's attacks in KP and large cities; Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan; Balochi alienation; economic stagnation; energy crises; growing poverty, all of which have contributed to "a dangerous mood of national pessimism," according to Akram (284). Afghanistan occupies Ahmed Rashid's attention, as it has for over thirty years now; he critiques strategic claims that have become worn with time, such as the need for strategic depth for Pakistan (although the notion of 'strategic depth' changes when a country becomes a nuclear power), or India's desire (among other countries) to gain influence in Kabul (314-315). The final essay, "The India Factor," culminates the volume by tracing the tumultuous relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbors, the bumpy road to peace, the effect of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, all within the context of peoples who have not forgotten the trauma of Partition and the secession of East Pakistan. In spite of the obstacles, Syed Rifaat Hussain lists many of the promising agreements that have been reached or are in progress, an encouraging sign and a reminder that good relations are beneficial to both nations.

Human development, Maleeha Lodhi remarks in a concluding note, must be Pakistan's priority, and is within reach, as all of the contributors to the volume insist. Lodhi summarizes thus: "Electoral and political reforms that foster greater and more active participation by Pakistan's growing educated middle class will open up possibilities for the transformation of an increasingly dysfunctional, patronage-dominated polity into one that is able to tap the resilience of the people and meet their needs" (350). *Pakistan: Beyond the 'Crisis State'* is a fine piece of work, written by specialists for an audience of intelligent non-specialists, and achieves its objective admirably. Maleeha Lodhi has succeeded remarkably in her edition of this gathering of clear-sighted experts, who never lose sight of Pakistan's potential beyond its current challenges.