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Is Pakistan a Failed State?

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Is Pakistan a Failed State?

Aidan Hehir¹

Introduction

Failed states have become a critical issue in contemporary international relations having made ‘...a remarkable odyssey from the periphery to the very center of global politics’.² The 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* famously suggested that the US was threatened more by failing than conquering states and this heralded a burgeoning focus on this alleged global menace.³ This article will examine whether Pakistan corresponds to the failed state model and suggest that while there is significant evidence to suggest it does, the term’s inherent ambiguity, and Pakistan’s own historic resilience, mitigates against a definitive finding.

Defining Failure

Since September 11th the issue of failed states has become a pressing concern, especially for the United States. Given that the attacks were coordinated from Afghanistan, itself a supposed failed state, the link between failed states and international terrorism appeared to be clear. The *Commission on Weak States and US National Security* provides an indicative statement of the increasing prevalent perception of failed states;

*Weak and failed governments generate instability, which harms their citizens, drags down their neighbors and ultimately threatens US interests in building an effective international system, providing the foundation for continued prosperity, and, not least, protecting Americans from external threats to our security.*⁴

While the threat posed by failed states has been continually highlighted there has been relatively little interrogation of this hypothesis despite it being predicated on the clear assumption that failed states are observable phenomena when, in fact, the term is quite nebulous and in many respects subjective.⁵

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² Foreign Policy (2005) ‘The Failed State Index’, July/August. Available online, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3098 [Accessed August 2006]

³ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 1 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> [Accessed August 2006]

⁴ Commission on Weak States and US National Security (2004) ‘On the Brink: Weak States and US National Security’, p. 6-7, Available online, http://www.cgdev.org/doc/books/weakstates/Full_Report.pdf [Accessed October 2006].

⁵ See Aidan Hehir (2007) ‘The Myth of the Failed State and the War on Terror’, *Journal of Intervention and State-Building*, Vol. 1/3, (forthcoming).

While Somalia ostensibly represents ‘...the quintessential case of state failure’⁶ the term has been applied to less categorical cases. Analysts use a wide variety of criteria by which to judge state failure and differ over the validity of their methodology; Rotberg for example rejected the accuracy of the CIA funded research into failed states in the 1990s because of the methodology it employed.⁷ The different terminology also creates confusion; the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development discusses ‘fragile’ states, the World Bank lists 30 states as ‘Low-Income-Countries-Under-Stress’, the *Failed State Index* lists states according to their ‘level of instability’. The plethora of, often sensationalist, accounts warning of the threat posed by “rogue states” adds further confusion as rogue and failed are often conflated.

In terms of the manifestation of failure a broad divergence is evident between coercive and administrative incapacity. In terms of the former, Jackson believes a state to be failed if it, ‘...cannot or will not safeguard minimum civil conditions, i.e., peace, order, security, etc. domestically.’⁸ This conception is echoed by Zartman, and Rotberg.⁹ However, another feature regarded as indicative of state failure is the ‘capacity gap’ - the inability to govern.¹⁰ In this case the state fails to meet the needs of the population. This is highlighted by the definition provided by Foreign Policy which suggests that failure can be ascribed to those regimes ‘[that] lack the authority to make collective decisions or the capacity to deliver public services. In other countries, the populace may rely entirely on the black market, fail to pay taxes, or engage in large-scale civil disobedience.’¹¹ This perspective is further advanced by Gros and the report produced by the *Commission on Weak States and US National Security* which offers a three-fold condition whereby a state can be said to have failed when it cannot ensure security, meet the basic needs of the population and maintain legitimacy.¹² There are, therefore, two broad categories of failure; coercive incapacity and administrative incapacity, with no necessary correlation between the two.

⁶ Tanya Langford (1999) ‘Things Fall Apart: State Failure and the Politics of Intervention’, *The International Studies Review*, Vol. 1:1, p. 61

⁷ Robert Rotberg (2003) ‘Nation State Failure: A Recurring Phenomenon?’, Discussion Paper for the CIA’s NIC 2020 Project, 6 November, p. 2

⁸ Robert Jackson (1998) ‘Surrogate Sovereignty? Great Power Responsibility and “Failed States”’, Institute of International Relations, The University of British Columbia, Working Paper No. 25, November, p. 3

⁹ William Zartman (1995) ‘Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse’, in William Zartman (ed.) *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner, p. 7; Robert Rotberg (2003) ‘Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators’ in Robert Rotberg (ed.) *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, Cambridge MA, World Peace Foundation, p. 5-6

¹⁰ Stuart Eizenstat, James Porter, and Josh Weinstein, (2005) ‘Rebuilding Failed States’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84:1, p. 136

¹¹ Foreign Policy (2005) ‘The Failed State Index’, July/August. Available online, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3098 [Accessed August 2006]

¹² James Gros, (1996) ‘Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 17:3, p. 456; Commission on Weak States and US National Security (2004) ‘On the Brink: Weak States and US National Security’, p. 13, Available online, http://www.cgdev.org/doc/books/weakstates/Full_Report.pdf [Accessed October 2006].

Pakistan's Record

The *Failed State Index* compiled by Foreign Policy in conjunction with the Fund for Peace has become a key source of information on failed states. Using 12 indicators of failure, states are awarded a mark out of ten with ten being worst.¹³ The researchers derive aggregate scores and then list states ranked in order of failure. In the most recent annual survey of 2007 Pakistan was ranked 12th on the list. This constitutes an improvement from 9th in 2006 though in 2005 Pakistan was ranked 34th. In explaining Pakistan's deterioration from 2005-2006 the authors of the index noted,

The October 2005 earthquake...is the single largest factor in Pakistan's significant jump on the Failed States Index 2006. While the devastating earthquake contributed most to Pakistan's tumble in scores from last year, the escalation of internal strife also played a role in Pakistan's ranking.

While Pakistan's score did worsen in nine of the twelve indicators suggesting a general malaise¹⁴ the impact of the earthquake, however, does constitute the single greatest explanatory factor in their analysis. The indicators where Pakistan evidenced the greatest deterioration - 'Demographic Pressure' and 'Refugee and Displaced Persons' - were both clearly affected by the earthquake. While the report notes that the response of governments to such natural disasters informs observers about the true nature of the state it could be concluded that this natural disaster constituted a unique catastrophe beyond the state's control and hence the scores are not truly indicative of Pakistan's status. However, attributing Pakistan's marked decline between 2005 and 2006 to this one disaster has been compromised by the 2007 ranking published in June of this year.

The 2007 report notes that Pakistan made 'only marginal gains' and notes in particular that it remains at risk from spillover from Afghanistan and 'internal dissent'.¹⁵ The most significant gain occurred under the 'Economy', while modest improvement was evident under 'Demographic Pressures', 'Refugees and Displaced Persons', 'Uneven Development', 'Public Services' and 'External Influence'. In the areas of 'Group Grievance', 'Legitimacy of the State', 'Human Rights', 'Security Apparatus' and 'Factionalized Elites' Pakistan's score actually worsened. The argument therefore that 2006 constituted an aberration thus becomes less convincing in light of the 2007 rankings and in particular the continued decline evident in those areas relating to the capacity of the state and internal cohesion. In a number of key areas therefore Pakistan is exhibiting the signs of endemic failure. The following sections will identify two such trends.

Fragmentation

Pakistan's complicated composition of provinces and territories has historically been a source of administrative and coercive fragmentation. There is much to suggest that

¹³ For information on the methodology see http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=107&Itemid=145, [Accessed June 2007]

¹⁴ Pakistan's score improved under 'Uneven Development' and 'Factionalized Elites' while it stabilised for 'Public Services'.

¹⁵ Foreign Policy (2007) Failed State Index 2007, available, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3865&page=5, [Accessed June 2007]

at present the state is suffering from pronounced regional fragmentation which cannot but undermine cohesiveness and ultimately internal sovereignty. A number of contemporary issues highlight this problem;

- In recent years the capital Islamabad has witnessed an increasing rise in Islamic radicalization which the government has been unable to quell¹⁶.
- The unrest in the Sindh province where the capital Karachi is described by the International Crisis Group, as 'lawless'.¹⁷
- The Federally Administered Tribal Areas constitute a significant mark against Pakistan's internal sovereignty and the escalation of anti-government hostilities since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 has furthered undermined Islamabad's capacity in the region.¹⁸
- In particular the situation in North and South Waziristan appears to significantly compromise Islamabad's power in these areas. The Waziristan Accords signed on September 5th 2006 are seen as constituting the derogation of state power by some, such as Imran Khan, while according to others the Accords were created with a view to enabling NATO to engage in 'hot pursuits' into this part of Pakistan's territory where 'the Taliban call the shots everywhere'.¹⁹
- In the border areas Taliban fighters and Al-Qaeda operatives have set up bases from which to launch attacks against the coalition forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan has thus '...replaced Afghanistan as a key state for the training and indoctrination of Al-Qaeda recruits for operations abroad'.²⁰
- Following the earthquake in Kashmir a number of Jihadist groups ran the relief effort in the absence of the Pakistan army even bringing victims to their own hospitals²¹.
- The Federally Administered Northern Areas (Gilget and Balistan) have witnessed resurgence of nationalism and violent opposition to Islamabad's rule.²²
- In Balochistan where Musharraf has mobilized the coercive potential of the state his heavy-handed tactics, rather than quelling dissent have mobilized public opinion against the regime and caused international condemnation.

Musharraf has angered many within his country by supporting the US-led War on Terror and yet despite Pakistan's support for the invasion of Afghanistan the post-Taliban regime is more inclined towards India creating a further source of domestic tension. The Karzai regime accuses Pakistan of harboring groups directly involved in

¹⁶ The Guardian (2007) "Islamabad cleric to set up Taliban-style Islamic courts", The Guardian, Saturday April 7, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/pakistan/Story/0,,2052067,00.html> [accessed June 2007]

¹⁷ International Crisis Group (2007) 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism', *Asia Report no. 130*, 29 March, p. i

¹⁸ International Crisis Group (2006) 'Pakistan's Tribal Area's: Appeasing the Militants', *Asia Report no. 125* December, p. 9

¹⁹ Syed Saleem Shahzad (2006) 'The Knife at Pakistan's Throat', Asia Times Online, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HI02Df02.html, [accessed June 2007]

²⁰ Shaun Gregory (2007) 'Al-Qaeda in Pakistan', Pakistan Security Research Unit, Brief Paper Number 5, 1 March.

²¹ Jan McGirk (2005) "Kashmir: the politics of an earthquake", Open Democracy, October 2005. http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-india_pakistan/jihadi_2941.jsp [accessed June 2007]

²² International Crisis Group (2007) 'Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas', *Asia Report no. 131*, p. i

the violence in their state and has been critical of the Pakistani government's inability or disinclination to act against the pro-Taliban forces in the border regions²³.

Radicalization

Though keen to pursue a policy of 'enlightened moderation' and distance his regime from that of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) who presided over the imposition of stringent Islamic law, Musharraf has also failed to stem the tide of radicalism and presided over a sharp deterioration in domestic security. Musharraf has been accused of allowing radical groups such as *Muttaheda Qaumi Mahaz* to flourish out of a personal desperation to hold onto power. According to the International Crisis Group 'The Pakistan Government has yet to take any of the overdue and necessary steps to control religious extremism in Karachi and the rest of the country'. It chides Musharraf's record stating that his '...periodic declarations of tough action, given in response to international events and pressure, are invariably followed by retreat'. They suggests this is caused by '...his dependence on the religious right'.²⁴

The issue of the education provided by certain Madrasa has received international condemnation given the links between these centers and prominent terrorist operatives. Despite vociferous international appeals to rein in the more extreme Madrasas, and the governments own declarations, most have simply refused to abide by the governments decrees regarding educational reform.²⁵ In many cases the Madrasa are the only source of education available to Pakistani children²⁶. These readily observable examples of the state's inability to challenge and discipline divisive internal groups that seek to supplant the existing political structures necessarily raise questions about the overall capacity of the state and the level of internal adherence to, and acceptance of, its rule.

A Failed State?

Most impartial observers of Pakistan's contemporary plight would surely conclude that the country is in a perilous position. The nature of the present regime doesn't provoke optimism about its ability to redress the present situation; the military has penetrated deep into Pakistan's governing structure and the prospect of democratic reform is dependant on the evolving political scene as Musharraf's position on elections becomes clearer. The escalation of ethnic and religious tension, which meant that, as Riikonen notes, 'Sectarian violence has worsened progressively within the last two decades'²⁷ is a troubling characteristic of contemporary Pakistan and resolving this internal strife is of paramount importance.

²³ Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006) "General Musharraf's speech on Taliban", Spokespersons Statements, Sep 13, 2006. <http://www.mfa.gov.af/detail.asp?Lang=e&Cat=2&ContID=54> [accessed June 2007]

²⁴ International Crisis Group (2007) 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism', *Asia Report no. 130*, 29 March, p. i

²⁵ International Crisis Group (2007) 'Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism', *Asia Report no. 130*, 29 March, p. i

²⁶ Robert Looney (2003) "Reforming Pakistan's educational system: The challenge of the Madrassas" *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies.* Washington: Fall 2003. Vol.28, Iss. 3; pg. 257.

²⁷ Katja Riikonen (2007) 'Sectarianism in Pakistan', Pakistan Security Research Unit, Brief Paper Number 2, 1 March.

Yet a transition to democracy is possible, though highly dependant on the military, and certain economic indicators, such as GDP growth, suggest Pakistan's economy is stable. Indeed, US Under-Secretary for International Trade Franklin L. Lavin recently stated, 'On the basis of my interaction with Pakistan and the American business community, I can say with confidence that Pakistan is the opposite of a failed state'.²⁸ Barring another disaster on the scale of the 2006 earthquake it is unlikely that Pakistan will find its resources strained in the near future as they have been recently but this depends on the maintenance of US monetary support²⁹.

Fundamentally, determining whether the term "failed" can be applied to any state is subjective and often political. As a pejorative term "failed state" has proved to be malleable enough to be applied to a vast array of states and a powerful rhetorical device; as an objective definition of an observable condition, its utility is less evident. Yet leaving these concerns aside, much evidence suggests that owing to its obvious internal divisions, coercive incapacity and high level of terrorist activity Pakistan can plausibly be deemed a failed state, as the Failed State Index attests.

However, while the chief indicators of failure, as advanced by proponents of the empirical determinability of state failure, are readily evident in Pakistan the answer to the question "Is Pakistan a failed state?" is affected by Pakistan's history. Since its inception Pakistan has comprised an uneasy mixture of overlapping competencies, internal divisions and border disputes – not least involving Kashmir – yet the state is approaching its sixty year anniversary (albeit without Bangladesh formerly East Pakistan) and has never been a bastion of ethnic harmony, national unity or democratic governance. It is therefore difficult to ascribe the label failed to a state that has endured so much yet continues to exist. In this sense it may be more accurate to describe Pakistan as a "persistently failing state" – one which has continued to exhibit major signs of failure but which has nonetheless not fully collapsed. A "failed state" in the literal sense would be one which has ceased to exist like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia or one where the central government demonstrably lacks any coercive capacity such as Somalia. States such as these have failed because, in addition to economic and social malaise, centrifugal forces have become irresistible. The accelerating dissolution evident in Pakistan, coupled with other negative trends, thus presents unwelcome parallels between it and terminal cases.

If Pakistan is to extricate itself from its historical predicament and recent sharp decline, the key areas to be addressed are domestic security capacity and governmental cohesion. Only Chad, Somalia, Iraq and Sudan, have a worse combined score than Pakistan under the indicators 'Security Apparatus' and 'Factionalized Elites' and in Pakistan's case the trend is downwards. The rising levels of internal opposition to Islamabad's rule manifest both in the border areas and major cities, combined with the state's inability to respond robustly and effectively to this dissent, must be redressed if the state is to prevent its further disintegration from persistent to terminal failure.

²⁸ 'Pakistan Not a Failed State', *Dawn*, May 6, 2006, <http://www.dawn.com/2006/05/06/top11.htm>, [Accessed June 2007]

²⁹ Kronstadt. K. A (2006) "Pakistan-U.S. Relations", Congressional Research Services, Updated March 6, 2006. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IB94041.pdf> [accessed June 2007]