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## **Pakistan after the Floods: Prospects for Stability and Democratic Consolidation**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper uses the summer floods of 2010 as a lens to examine Pakistan's worsening economic, security and governance issues since the February 2008 elections. It initially explains the background to the inundations which displaced 20 million people, caused massive damage to infrastructure and threatened to suppress an already sluggish economic rebound from the world recession. The politicisation of the circumstances surrounding flooding is discussed along with its historical significance. The paper then reveals how the natural disaster exacerbated the multi-faceted challenges facing the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led coalition. It also discusses the political impact of President Asif Ali Zardari's absence from the country at the time of the national calamity. The paper also lays bare the fact that the Government had inherited a declining economic and security situation from the Musharraf era and then that structural economic and governance problems can be traced back to much further in Pakistan's history.*

### **Introduction**

The devastating floods that hit Pakistan on the closing days of July 2010 eclipsed all previous natural disasters facing the country. These include the devastating 2005 earthquake in Azad Kashmir and Cyclone 'Bhola', which ripped through East Pakistan in November 1970. While the deaths attributed to the floods were on a much smaller scale with around 1,500 casualties in 2010 compared to the 350,000 in 1970, the extent and scale of the damage brought by the

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torrents of the Indus River was unprecedented. The floods affected a fifth of Pakistan's land mass. As the floods made their way southwards, they affected 20 million people, destroyed around 875,000 homes and damaged around US\$1 billion in crops.<sup>2</sup> The destruction by Cyclone 'Bhola' had been around US\$1 billion in an overall total. Shortly after this disaster followed the political convulsions which culminated in the breakaway of East Pakistan. Some commentators drew parallels between 1970 and 2010 and talked apocalyptically about the collapse of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

This was undoubtedly an over-reaction, but the disaster and the response to it not only exacerbated structural economic weaknesses, but laid bare the fragility of governance and the trust deficit existing between the PPP-led coalition government, its own populace and the international community. This was seen in the low take-up of the President's Flood Relief Fund and the channelling of international aid through NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and UN (United Nations) agencies rather than the Pakistan Government and in the slow take-up of the US\$460 million UN emergency relief appeal. Moreover, the army's role in meeting the disaster once again revealed that it is the strongest and most effective state institution. Even before the floods, the army had recovered the prestige it had lost during the end of the Musharraf era. A study from the Pew Research Center in the United States (US), revealed growing approval ratings for the army with 84 per cent of those surveyed expressing positive views, compared with 68 per cent in 2007.<sup>4</sup> The recovery in the army's popularity reflected not just the 'professional stance' taken by its Commander-in-Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani but its role in combating militancy. On the eve of the floods, President Zardari's poll standing had already declined dramatically from the 2008 high point. His absence from Pakistan as the floods took their grip and the Federal Government's inability to deal with the natural catastrophe made him appear still more aloof from the people, therefore further weakening his standing with respect to the army.

This paper seeks to reveal, firstly, how the flood disaster has laid bare the failures of governance in Pakistan; secondly it assesses its consequences in the context of ongoing political, economic and security problems. Before turning to these issues, however, it is necessary to set the disaster in its context and to reflect briefly on its causes.

## **The 2010 Floods: Context and Consequences**

The Indus and its tributaries overflow in most monsoon seasons as a result of rainfall and glacier melt. The newly renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (previously the North-West

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<sup>2</sup> This figure was quoted by the World Bank President Robert Zoellick in *Dawn* (14 August 2010), <http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/04-crops-destroyed-pakistan-1-blq-qs-11>. Accessed on 15 August 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For a criticism of this view see, Zubeida Mustafa, 'How Pakistan Survives', *Dawn* (18 August 2010), <http://www.dawn.com/2010/08/18/ina-overtakes-japan-by-david-teather.html>. Accessed on 19 August 2010.

<sup>4</sup> *Dawn* (2 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 2 August 2010.

Frontier) is especially vulnerable to flash floods. These have been exacerbated by deforestation in recent years. The floods gush a large volume of water at speed downstream. There have been 12 serious floods since 1973, which have cost over 7,500 lives and drowned roughly 99,000 village settlements.<sup>5</sup> The July-August 2010 floods were so unprecedented that they were regarded as a once in a lifetime occurrence. They came in the wake of erratic monsoon rains, which in the previous year had been 30 per cent below average. The drying up of river beds in Sindh and parts of South Punjab had encouraged encroachment on them which increased the vulnerability to flooding of large populations who did not have the benefit of early warning flood management alarms.<sup>6</sup> The only flood warning system in Pakistan was that installed with Japanese assistance at Nullah Leh in Rawalpindi.<sup>7</sup>

The cause of the flooding was the unprecedented seventy two hours of rain over the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Azad Kashmir at the end of July. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was to receive four times its average monsoon rainfall in a ten-day period beginning 28 July 2010 (3,462mm of rain). This created flash floods from the Kabul and Swat rivers and the inundation of the Swat valley. It meant that if the system of barrages and barriers did not hold there would be widespread flooding downstream the Indus and Jhelum rivers. The overwhelming of the Taunsa Barrage followed by breaches in the Muzaffargarh and Taunsa-Panjanad (TP) Link canals was a key factor in the disaster in the Muzaffargarh district, the worst affected district of Punjab with over 2.5 million people displaced and hundreds of villages destroyed. This devastation sparked off debate about engineering faults, the desirability for more dams and barrages, the criminality of the Irrigation Department in the failure to keep up embankments and the fact that some flood protection schemes existed only on paper.<sup>8</sup> Much of the debate was about blame displacement and apportionment. It was clear however that the silting of canals and riverbeds raising their height was a factor in the disaster. There were also the usual round of flood time complaints that officials had deliberately breached canals and embankments to save urban centres by directing the waters towards rural localities in Upper Sindh. When the floods encroached further in Sindh, the claim was made that some feudal landowners had directed flood flows away from their own properties even if this meant inundating the fields and homes of poorer populations.<sup>9</sup> Inter-provincial tensions were provoked between Balochistan and Sindh following the flooding of Dera Allah Yar and the surrounding Jaffarabad district, with Baloch authorities claiming that their Sindhi counterparts had breached canals and embankments so that the waters were diverted in their direction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Dawn* (3 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 3 August 2010.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see, Khawar Ghumman, 'Occupation of Riverbeds blamed for flood havoc', *Dawn* (21 August 2010), <http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/occupation-of-riverbeds-blamed-for-flood-havoc-180>. Accessed on 22 August 2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Dawn* (19 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 20 August 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See *Dawn* (13 and 16 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 17 August 2010.

<sup>9</sup> *Dawn* (16 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 16 August 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See the article by Saeed Shah, 'New Wave of floodwater threatens Pakistan', *The Guardian* (15 August 2010), [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/15/pakistan-floods-ban-ki-moon-response](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/15/pakistan-floods-ban-ki-moon-response). Accessed on 16 August 2010.

## Economic Crisis

The floods not only necessitated a huge rescue and relief operation but, according to economic commentators, threatened to undermine Pakistan's halting recovery from the 2009 recession. Some estimates were that up to two percentage points could be taken off the projected growth rate in GDP (gross domestic product) by 4.5 per cent. In addition to the damage to an already weak infrastructure and the worsening of the power supply situation, standing crops of rice and cotton were destroyed in Punjab and Sindh. In Punjab alone over 1.6 million acres of crops had been inundated.<sup>11</sup> It was reported that in the major cotton growing district of Rahim Yar Khan, the crop could be 20 per cent less for the year 2010-11 than preceding years.<sup>12</sup> This would impact unfavourably on the textile industry, which is crucial to Pakistan's exports. While estimates of a slowdown in the growth of GDP may prove to be exaggerated, it does seem clear that Pakistan's performance in 2010-11 may be barely sufficient to keep pace with the country's projected population increase and additional labour employment demands. The increase in population at around 2.4 per cent is the same as the annual increase in the working-age population.<sup>13</sup> It seems clear that the gap between Pakistan's economic performance and its regional rival India will further widen.

The flood disaster represents yet another setback for the PPP-led government, which had inherited a declining economic situation in 2008. Debt rescheduling and relief together with a massive influx of foreign investment and remittances from overseas Pakistani workers had fuelled an unsustainable consumption-led boom in the post 9/11 period. Pakistan's GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.1 per cent in the five years up to 2005-06.<sup>14</sup> President Musharraf and his technocratic Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had taken the credit for the rapid economic growth. While they encouraged external capital flows, they did not address long-term problems such as pathetically low taxation rates, an export sector highly dependent on textiles and low levels of human development. Warning signs of increasing budgetary debt and pressure on foreign exchange reserves were ignored by the Musharraf regime, which faced mounting political opposition and a deteriorating security situation from 2006-07 onwards. The external impact of rising commodity prices increased indebtedness as the state continued to provide fuel and food subsidies. By the time of the February 2008 polls, the economic growth of the earlier Musharraf era was over.<sup>15</sup> Pakistan's security and economic crises were also becoming more closely interlinked. Direct foreign investment was declining, while the rising tide of suicide bombings was not only taking a toll on human life, but on infrastructure and employment opportunities. As the militant writ extended in north-western Pakistan, both boys and girls saw their education disrupted.

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<sup>11</sup> *Dawn* (13 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 13 August 2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Dawn* (18 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 18 August 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.81.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.56.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Pakistan's GDP reached the peak of 8.6 per cent in 2004-05.

The new PPP-led government remained pre-occupied with the post-election political struggle involving the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and the role of the President. It underestimated the growing economic crisis. By the autumn of 2008, rising oil prices had created a spike in inflation which peaked at over 25 per cent; foreign investment declined as the international banking crisis hit; the depreciation of the Pakistani rupee and the collapse of exports at a time of increasingly costly food and energy imports raised the prospect of Pakistan defaulting on its external debt.<sup>16</sup> Foreign exchange reserves had fallen by November 2008 to only around US\$3.4 billion – that was just one month’s worth of imports.<sup>17</sup> President Zardari had to reverse his earlier public stance and seek support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Stabilisation occurred with the current account deficit narrowing from 8.5 per cent of the GDP for fiscal year 2007-08 to a projected 2.0-3.0 per cent for 2009-10. The budget deficit also narrowed and inflation dropped from its 25 per cent peak in November 2008 to 13 per cent. The improved economy saw an upturn in portfolio investment.

Nonetheless, even before the major setback of the 2010 flood disaster, the security situation acted as a drag on the economy, which did not match the bounce back of other Asian economies from the world recession. Unless growth accelerates, unemployment and poverty will rise at a time of high interest rates and austerity programmes designed to meet the IMF conditions. This situation resembles that of the last democratic interlude of the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> The IMF mission led by the Assistant Director for Middle East and Central Asia, Adnan Mazeri, in mid-July 2010, expressed concern over uncontrolled expenditure, rising inflation, slow revenue reforms and poor performance in the power sector.<sup>19</sup>

The current economic problems, while they were exacerbated initially by the security situation and the credit crunch and recession and subsequently by the flood disaster, must be understood in terms of the country’s long term structural weaknesses. They include the following.

1. A lack of diversification in exports
2. A very low tax base (at present only around two per cent of the population pays direct taxes)
3. Diversion of resources from development to defence

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<sup>16</sup> For the rapid decline in Pakistan’s 2008 account see, *Dawn* (23 October 2008), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 24 October 2008; and Robert Looney, ‘Failed Take-Off: An Assessment of Pakistan’s October 2008 Economic Crisis Pakistan’, *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Brief*, No.46 (21 April 2009), <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/Brief+46.pdf>. Accessed on 31 January 2011.

<sup>17</sup> In July 2007, they had stood at US\$13.3 billion. See Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.83.

<sup>18</sup> William B Milam, *Bangladesh and Pakistan: Flirting with Failure in South Asia* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 2009), p.137.

<sup>19</sup> ‘IMF Concerned over Rising Expenditure, Inflation’, *Dawn* (19 July 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 19 July 2010.

4. The resulting low level of human capital and an uncompetitive labour force
5. Uneven development between social classes, regions and rural-urban centres
6. Deteriorating infrastructure and institutional decay

These long-term structural deficiencies reflect the political and economic trajectory of the country followed since independence. Ayesha Jalal summed this up as a commitment to a political economy of defence, rather than a political economy of development.<sup>20</sup> The resulting economic imbalances feed contemporary ethnic and Islamic militancy.<sup>21</sup> Democratic rule since 2008 has seen an increase in military expenditure rather than it being reined in. The defence budget for 2010-11 has been set at an astronomical 442.2 billion Pakistani Rupee. Rising defence costs have been incurred in the military operations in Malakand and the tribal areas. According to official estimates, Pakistan has faced increased expenditures amounting to US\$43 billion in combating militancy and terrorism in the period from 2001-2010.<sup>22</sup>

Today, just as throughout Pakistan's history, the requirements of military expenditure alongside those of debt servicing leave little available for social expenditure in a constrained tax environment. Public expenditure on education as a percentage of the GDP, stands at just two per cent according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2009-10, and compares poorly with such neighbouring countries such as India (3.3 per cent) and Bangladesh (2.6 per cent).<sup>23</sup>

While low educational expenditure undermines Pakistan's long-term democratic prospects, in the short-term, these are damaged by the high cost of commodities for the common people, with inflation remaining at around 13 per cent, and the continuing interruptions in power supply which have brought people onto the streets. Energy shortages also limit the economic growth required to raise people out of poverty.<sup>24</sup> The flood disaster, with the closing down of the Kot Addu power plant in Muzaffargarh, intensified the problems of energy production. Shortfalls in both electricity and gas supplies, resulting in blackouts, threaten both economic growth and political stability.

The PPP-led government has introduced such populist measures as the Benazir Income Support Scheme, but has not tackled the long-term causes of poverty. The radicalism of the late 1960s has long been abandoned and the party under Asif Ali Zardari's leadership is even more conservative and managerial than it was under his late wife. Necessary measures of

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<sup>20</sup> She links this commitment to the responses to the post-partition dislocation and the emerging conflict with India over Kashmir. See Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.55, 60, 140-1.

<sup>21</sup> Baloch nationalism is rooted in a sense of economic exploitation and political marginalisation. For the encouragement to shariatisation arising from poverty, corruption and lack of social justice see, Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> *Dawn* (13 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 13 June 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Khawar Ghumman, 'Only Two Per Cent of GDP Spent on Education', *Dawn* (5 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 5 June 2010.

<sup>24</sup> According to the 2009-10 Economic Survey, energy shortages caused a loss of two per cent of GDP during the current fiscal year. Kabir Ali, 'Power Crisis caused over 2pc of GDP Loss', *Dawn* (5 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 5 June 2010.

land and agricultural tax reform remain unlikely from a government headed by feudal landowners.

## Security Crisis

As with the economy, so with the security situation, the newly elected government inherited a sharply deteriorating position from the Musharraf era. Musharraf's attempt to distinguish between 'foreign' and 'home grown' militants, and between those engaged in the 'freedom struggle' in Kashmir and those committed to other *jihadist* causes, had been modified in the face of US and Afghan Government pressure and in the wake of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) attack on the Indian Parliament in Delhi in December 2001.

Sectarian and ethnic violence and insurgencies have occurred throughout Pakistan's post-independence history. Two new developments in the Musharraf era were the rising tide of suicide bombings after 2006 and the engagement of the Pakistan army in the Tribal Areas for the first time. The Pakistan military and security apparatus found itself increasingly fighting erstwhile militant proxies. The conflict intensified following the commitment of Pakistan troops against the militant dominated *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) in central Islamabad in July 2007.

The 2008 elections, although preceded by the shocking assassination of Benazir Bhutto, were accompanied by a lull in the suicide attacks and passed off peacefully. The resurgence of the ethnic Pashtun Awami National Party (ANP) raised hopes that more sustained dialogue could bring peace to the tribal areas. There had been short lived peace agreements in the Musharraf era. These hopes were not to be fulfilled as the state became drawn into increasing conflict in the tribal areas. The military intervention from 2009 onwards, however, was on a far greater scale than that of the Musharraf era. The militants responded with increased suicide attacks in Pakistan cities.

The decision to launch a large-scale military offensive was prompted by the deteriorating situation in the Malakand Division. Politicians and public alike began to see that the writ of the state was being undermined and that militancy was not just an external problem – the result of US intervention in Afghanistan – but it posed a threat to Pakistan's existence. One should not however overplay the new national unity of purpose in security matters trumpeted by the PPP-led government. For as later surveys have revealed, while there is widespread hostility to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, or Pakistan Taliban), sectarian groups and militants which have for a long time been associated with the Kashmir *jihad*, continue to enjoy support.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Asad Hashim, 'Public Support for Militancy', *Dawn* (22 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 22 June 2010.

The TTP was formed in December 2007 and brought together several groups under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud who based his power in South Waziristan. Mehsud was claimed by the state to be the instigator of numerous suicide attacks, including the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The TTP is not a monolithic organisation, but rather coordinated the activities of existing radical Sunni groups. After the post-election lull, a new upsurge in activity began from the end of 2008. It was focused in Swat, a former princely State, which was now part of the settled area of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

As with Pakistan's contemporary economic problems, the problems in Swat can only be fully understood in terms of historical background. It was not the TTP but a local radical Sunni organisation, the Tehrik-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), created in 1989 by Maulana Sufi Muhammad, which was at the forefront of a violent struggle to impose *shariah* law in the region. The TNSM had engaged the state before in a mini-insurgency in 1994-95. Its cadres had later fought alongside the Afghan Taliban during the US-led invasion in 2001.

The Malakand insurgency included both TTP and TNSM participation. The Swat Taliban was in fact led by Maulana Fazlullah, the son-in-law of Maulana Sufi Muhammad. He made use of a controversial FM radio station to propagate his demands, which included the introduction of *shariah* law. The organisational headquarters of his movement was based in his Inam Dheri seminary. The contemporary insurgency was more ruthless than that of the 1990s but similarly sought to challenge the writ of the state by targeted attacks on government installations. Suicide bombings formed a new element, leading to scores of deaths as for example in the attack on a police station at Charbagh on 23 August 2008.

An agreement was signed between the NWFP government and militants led by Maulana Fazlullah on 21 May 2008. The agreement provided for the establishment of official *shariah* courts. It was hailed as bringing permanent peace, but was seen by the militants as a sign of weakness. Not only was their interpretation of *shariah* law brutally imposed, but Swat was seen as a launching pad for the further extension of a Taliban-run state. The Taliban's violation of the agreement and the movement of militants into the neighbouring districts of Buner and Lower Dir formed the backdrop to the military operation ordered by the PPP Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani on 7 May 2009. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced in fighting which according to government figures claimed over 400 military casualties and 4,000 militants.<sup>26</sup>

Military operations were extended into the South Waziristan base of the TTP in October 2009. Unlike in the earlier half-hearted operations in 2004, which led to the first of a number of peace accords, none of which succeeded, the army made unexpectedly rapid progress in its operation code named Rah-e-Nijaat (Path to Salvation). Success was dependent on isolating

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<sup>26</sup> Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.94.



the pro-Baitullah group from other militant organisations in the region.<sup>27</sup> The TTP had also been disrupted by Baitullah's death in a US missile attack on 5 August 2009. Within twenty days, the army had seized all the major towns and villages. Militants, rather than choosing to stand and fight, disappeared into neighbouring North Waziristan. At the same time they opened up a new front with a wave of suicide bombings in Peshawar, which by December 2009 had also spread to Rawalpindi and Lahore. These attacks continued into 2010.

According to the National Crisis Management Cell of the Interior Ministry, 1,835 people lost their lives and 5,194 suffered injuries in the 1,906 terror attacks, which occurred in 2009-10.<sup>28</sup> The continuing security crisis led a US index, published in *Foreign Policy* magazine in June 2010, to rank Pakistan as the tenth most failed state in the world, just three places below Afghanistan in a list headed by Somalia.<sup>29</sup> Earlier in the month, the US State Department's Global Peace Index placed Pakistan as the world's fifth most unstable country after Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and Sudan, recording a second year's successive fall in scoring and rank.<sup>30</sup> The Pakistan Government increasingly considered an extension of security operations to North Waziristan. This was the base of a number of militant groups including the Haqqanis, who, according to the US, had links with Al-Qaeda and were at the forefront of the insurgency in eastern Afghanistan. It had already undertaken operations in the Bajaur Tribal Agency. More controversially, it also raised the possibility of the army conducting operations in South Punjab as evidence mounted that bombings were being undertaken not just by militant organisations based in the tribal areas, but by members of banned sectarian organisations operating from the latter region.

The PML-N government of Punjab denied the existence of a Punjabi Taliban. But growing terrorist attacks in such cities as Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore led Western and Pakistani journalists to talk of a Punjabi Taliban<sup>31</sup> at the end of 2009. This was linked for example to the suicide attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in September 2008, which claimed over 50 lives, and the audacious attack on the army's headquarters in Rawalpindi in October 2009.<sup>32</sup> The Punjab Taliban was analysed as a loose network comprising primarily the banned Sipaha-e-Sabha Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and JeM organisations which had previously focused their activities on Kashmir and domestic sectarian violence.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Sayed Bokhari, 'The Battle for Waziristan', *Dawn* (18 October 2009), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 18 October 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Iftikhar A. Khan, 'Defence Claims Rs442bn', *Dawn* (7 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 7 June 2010.

<sup>29</sup> 'Pakistan Ranks 10<sup>th</sup> Among "Failed States"', *Dawn* (22 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 22 June 2010.

<sup>30</sup> 'Pakistan Ranked Fifth Most Unstable Country', *Dawn* (13 June 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 13 June 2010.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the utility of this term see, Katja Riikonen, "'Punjabi Taliban' and the Sectarian Groups in Pakistan', *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Brief*, No.55 (12 February 2010).

<sup>32</sup> See, Mohammad Asghar and Iftikhar A. Khan, 'Brigadier, Lt-Colonel among 6 army-men killed: Hostage Saga Continues: Audacious Attack Rocks GHQ', *Dawn* (11 October 2009), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 11 October 2009.

<sup>33</sup> See Hassan Abbas, 'Defining the Punjabi Taliban Network', *CTC Sentinel* (2-4 April 2009), pp.1-4.

While the ‘Punjabi Taliban’s’ attacks intensified with the commencing of military operations in South Waziristan in October 2009, the new orientation of SSP, LeJ and JeM again must be understood in a longer term historical context. These groups did not attack the state’s security apparatus before the 2007 army assault on the Red Mosque in Islamabad.<sup>34</sup> The Punjab-based LeT stood aloof from the network and refrained from attacking the Pakistan security forces. While its headquarters were in central Punjab, SSP, LeJ and JeM traditionally gathered support in the South Punjab region.<sup>35</sup> Like LeT, they had benefited from the support of the country’s intelligence services in the context of the 1990s Kashmir insurgency and the Zia regime’s earlier sponsorship of Sunni Islam in the wake of the Iranian Revolution.

The five ‘core’ South Punjab districts of Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan have all figured prominently in journalistic accounts of the ‘Punjabi Taliban’. Dera Ghazi Khan was the scene of a major sectarian bomb blast early in February 2009 where investigations revealed links between local supporters of SSP and the then TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud. Its strategic situation abutting troubled South Waziristan and Balochistan and the presence of nuclear production facilities raised western concerns about the region’s ‘Talibanisation’.

How can we account for the impact of militancy in South Punjab? This region is undoubtedly poorer than other parts of Punjab. The Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur districts are third and first respectively for caloric poverty in rural Punjab.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, their position is relatively good with respect to most of Balochistan, Sindh and the NWFP. If poverty alone was the determinant of militancy, this should have been focused on the interior of Sindh, yet it has no purchase there.

Taking a cue from the connections between Pakistan’s religious schools (*madaris*) and militancy, some analysts pointed to the proliferation of Deobandi *madaris* from the 1980s onwards in such districts as Dera Ghazi Khan, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar.<sup>37</sup> According to 2008 Intelligence Bureau estimates, the Rahim Yar Khan district has 559 *madaris* followed by Bahawalpur (481) and Bahawalnagar (310).<sup>38</sup>

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See P.K. Upadhyay, ‘From FATA to South Punjab: The Looming leap of Islamic Radicalism in Pakistan’, *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Comment* (30 November 2009), [www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IslamicRadicalisminPakistanFromFATAtoSouthPunjab\\_pkupadhyay\\_301109](http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IslamicRadicalisminPakistanFromFATAtoSouthPunjab_pkupadhyay_301109). Accessed on 10 February 2011.

<sup>35</sup> There are a number of differing classifications of the Punjab’s regions, depending on such factors as administrative and geographical boundaries, agronomic and cultural zones. The smallest area defined as South Punjab includes the four districts of Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rahim Yar Khan. The most comprehensive includes along with the previous, the Bhakker, Jhang, Khanewal, Layyah, Lodhran, Multan, Rajanpur and Vehari districts.

<sup>36</sup> Safiya Aftab, ‘Poverty and Militancy’, *Pips Journal of Conflict and Peace Studies*, Vol.1, Issue.1 (October-December 2008), p.82.

<sup>37</sup> Ayesha Siddiqi, ‘Terror’s Training Ground’, *Newsline* (September 2009), [www.newslinemagazine.com/2009/09/terror%e2%80%99s-training-ground](http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2009/09/terror%e2%80%99s-training-ground). Accessed on 21 January 2011.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Bahawalpur has the greatest concentration of mosques of any Punjabi city apart from Lahore. One factor in the mushrooming of these mosques and religious schools in South Punjab is the traditional influence of Sufi Islam in the region. This shrine cult is regarded as un-Islamic by Deobandis who have focused their efforts in the region to counter it. In April 2009, there were press reports of JeM activists attempting to take over Barelvi mosques associated with Sufi Islam in the Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan districts. Sufi shrines have been targeted elsewhere in Pakistan. Sufi shrines have been blown up in the Frontier and the famous Sufi shrine of Hazrat Datta Ganj Baksh in Lahore was the scene of a deadly suicide attack at the beginning of July 2010.

One should not however attribute militancy in this region solely to the rise of Deobandi influence. Work by Andrabi, Fair and Rahman elsewhere in Pakistan has revealed that, as with the linkage between poverty and militancy, so too the *madrassah*-militant connection needs to be nuanced. Existing estimates of enrolment in *madaris* have been inflated; not all of their students are poor and only a small number lend encouragement to militancy; public schools as well as *madaris* foster attitudes supportive of *jihadi* groups.<sup>39</sup>

While recent attention has focused on the spillover of militants from South Waziristan into Dera Ghazi Khan, the early 1947 partition-related migration offers a fascinating, although as yet, unexplored insight into militancy. It is clear that in such localities as Bahawalpur, it is not the indigenous population, but Indian migrants who provide the main support for Deobandi institutions. Work on the SSP in Jhang has shown that in this region of central Punjab, migrant populations who are excluded from power by the Shia feudal landholding elites support the radical Sunni cause.<sup>40</sup> Undoubtedly sectarianism and support for the Kashmir *jihad*, which is popular amongst migrants from India provide the basis for radicalisation. This is in all probability the case in South Punjab, although Sunni radical sectarianism is directed not just against Shias but Barelvis. Militant recruiters have a large pool to work with, as migrants from India make up around 50 per cent of the population of Dera Ghazi Khan City. Much work is required on this, but what we do know at present is that, the founder of JeM in 2000, Maulana Masood Azhar<sup>41</sup> was born in the old city of Bahawalpur. Like Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the leader of LeT, Masood Azhar's family were partition migrants from India in 1947. Although JeM has been banned since 2001, it maintains a strong presence in the city where it has its Dar al Jihad headquarters.

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<sup>39</sup> T. Andrabi *et al*, 'Religious School Enrolment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data' (Washington: World Bank, 2005); C. Fair, 'Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrasah Connection', *Asia Policy*, Vol.4 (July 2007), pp.107-34; Tariq Rahman, 'Pluralism and Intolerance in Pakistani Society: Attitudes of Pakistani Students towards the Religious "Other"' (30 October 2003), [www.aku.edu/news/archives/ismconf-tr.pdf](http://www.aku.edu/news/archives/ismconf-tr.pdf). Accessed on 21 January 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Tahir Kamran, 'Contextualising Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol.20, No.1 (2009), pp.55-85.

<sup>41</sup> Maulana Masood Azhar had originally been active in SSP, before getting involved with the Kashmir *jihad* organisations, Harkat-ul-Mujahadeen (HuM) and Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA).

Commentators feared that the flood disaster would exacerbate the security situation just as it had done with respect to the weak economy. The floods hit particularly hard the south Punjab and Swat regions, which had been centres of militancy. This not only piled further misery onto their long-suffering populations, but further demonstrated the lack of the state's reach in their aftermath. In the absence of an adequate government response, there was evidence that charities associated with militant organisations were very active in relief efforts. A number of press reports noted the activities of the Falah-e-Insaniyat foundation, which is the charity wing of the militant group Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). While such activities were not designed specifically or likely to recruit fresh *jihadis*, they point to the failure of the state to compete for the 'hearts and the minds' of the local populace.<sup>42</sup> A similar state of affairs with respect to relief had existed in Azad Kashmir in the wake of the 2005 earthquake. A number of leading political figures from both the PPP and PML-N, including the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif warned that, in the absence of an adequate response to relief and rehabilitation, extremist groups would gain a grip on the population.<sup>43</sup> The desperation of people in the Muzaffargarh district was brought home by reports of attacks on a convoy carrying relief goods near Jadeywala, which forced the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund and International Organisation for Migration to temporarily suspend their work.<sup>44</sup>

Militant groups, like the population at large, were affected by the communications collapse in the flood-hit areas. Nonetheless, the suicide bomb attack in the heart of the Peshawar Cantonment which killed Safwat Ghayyur, the commandant of the Frontier Constabulary on 4 August 2010, revealed not only that the TTP's operational network remained intact, but that it had no compunction in continuing its attack on the security forces at the height of a national emergency.

### **Political Developments Post February 2008**

The flood disaster initially saw a recrudescence of the infighting between the PPP-led coalition government and the mainstream PML-N opposition. President Zardari's extended absence while being away in Europe made the already unpopular President an easy target. The spread of the floods from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa into PML-N governed Punjab and the failure of the civil authorities to cope with the dislocation mitigated criticisms, although Shahbaz Sharif did complain about inadequate federal financial support. The PML-N may also have toned down its attacks because of the realisation that all civilian responses had been overshadowed by the army's capability.

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<sup>42</sup> *Dawn* (21 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 21 August 2010.

<sup>43</sup> 'Shahbaz's Warning About Extremism', *Dawn* (14 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 14 August 2010.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

The initial political blame apportionment reflected the uneasy relations which had existed between the PPP and PML-N since the February 2008 elections. Despite the mounting security crisis, Pakistan's newly elected politicians were focused initially on the position of President Musharraf and then on the tussle for power which saw the PML-N at least temporarily outmanoeuvred. The 2008 polls had generated optimism that Pakistan could break out of its post-independence cycle of poor governance, authoritarianism, regional tensions and instability, not only because of the defeat of the Musharraf loyalists by the mainstream parties, but also because of the hope that there would be sustained cooperation between the PPP and the PML-N. It is widely acknowledged that the prospects for democratic consolidation in the 1990s had been undermined by their infighting.

Benazir Bhutto's assassination brought the party leaderships closer together than ever before. The post-election PPP and PML-N coalition government, however, proved short lived although it had functioned long enough to force President Musharraf to step down on 18 August 2008 under the threat of impeachment. Zardari secured the indirect election to the position of President. The PML-N withdrew from the Government led by Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani because of Zardari's delay in reinstating the judges along with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who had been dismissed by Musharraf during the Emergency of November 2007. Their reinstatement had formed an integral part of the March 2008 Bhurban agreement under which the PML-N had joined the governing coalition. The disagreements between Nawaz Sharif and Zardari over the judiciary at the national level impacted Punjab politics where the PPP was a junior partner in the Government headed by his brother, the PML-N chief Shahbaz Sharif. Months of rising tensions saw President Zardari blunder in imposing Governor's rule in Punjab on 25 February 2009, following the Supreme Court's disqualification of the Sharif brothers from holding office.

The PML-N not only engaged in widespread street protests, but threw itself behind the gathering popular protest movement for the restoration of the judges. In the wake of a widespread breakdown in law and order, the Army Chief General Kayani met Prime Minister Gillani. The tenor of their conversation is unknown, but the PPP government, despite public claims not to give into 'blackmail', reinstated Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and the other judges in March 2009. This ended the running sore between PPP and PML-N. The lifting of Governor's rule and the return of Shahbaz Sharif to the office of Punjab Chief Minister marked the next stage in the normalisation of relations. Nevertheless, the long-term effects of the PPP's attempt to override the Punjab Government were seen at the end of September 2009, when Shahbaz Sharif held a clandestine meeting in Rawalpindi with General Kayani.<sup>45</sup> When news leaked out, it was seen as an attempt by the PML-N to get onside with the army in anticipation of Zardari's fall from power. During the 1990s, both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif had undermined democracy by cultivating the military in this way.

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<sup>45</sup> Azaz Sayed, 'Shahbaz and Nisar Secretly Meet Kayani', *Dawn* (3 October 2009), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 3 October 2009.

It would be wrong nonetheless to say that the 1990s were being totally replicated. Some progress in the way of replacing a politics of confrontation with one of accommodation was admittedly made with the implementation of key elements in the Charter for democracy which had been agreed in May 2006 between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif with the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in April 2010. The removal of the President's power to dismiss the Prime Minister and dissolve the assembly represented a major triumph for parliamentary democracy. Although the accompanying renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa generated controversy and violence in the Abbottabad and Mansehra districts of Hazara Division.

President Zardari's watchword, despite his blunder in intervening in Punjab politics in February 2009, has been 'reconciliation'. Nevertheless it became clear even before the flood disaster that tensions were once again rising between the PPP and PML-N over the issue of disqualification of legislators who held 'fake degrees.' There were growing rumblings of the possibility of mid-term polls.

Relations with coalition allies at the centre and in the provinces had not always been smooth, let alone with the PML-N. Conflicts, especially with MQM (Muttahida Quami Movement), led to the dropping of the tabling of the controversial National Reconciliation Order in Parliament. This left the fate of the indemnity bill promulgated during the Musharraf era to the Supreme Court which nullified it. The MQM also opposed the Shariah Regulation for the Malakand Division which was introduced in an attempt to secure peace in the Swat Valley. Government delays in the restoration of the judges and the introduction of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment negated any positive effects flowing from Zardari's 'consensus democracy.'

Democracy in the 1990s had been undermined by the party's weak institutionalisation as well as by the zero sum game approach to politics. Since the February 2008 elections, little has changed with respect to the former. Pakistan political parties continue to be undemocratic institutions with power flowing top down from their leaderships. The Sharif brothers' firm grip on the PML-N is mirrored by Zardari's control of the PPP. He has surrounded himself with loyal supporters and in the process has replaced many of Benazir Bhutto's allies.

Parliamentary life has also remained as unchanged as lack of party democracy. Parliamentarians see the reward of allies and supporters and the provision of development funds for their constituencies as far more important than the scrutiny of legislation. Most members of the National and Provincial assemblies see election as a means of making money and securing their local power and influence, rather than in terms of public service. The continuing dominance of landholders in the assemblies has meant that it is hardly surprising that periods of democratisation are no more likely than those of military rule to see attempts to address Pakistan's glaring inequalities of income, power and access to education, although their continuation is a threat to democratic consolidation. Ten per cent of the population possesses 26.3 per cent of the national income; the poorest ten per cent of the population

possesses only four per cent of national wealth. The PPP will continue to disillusion its supporters if it does not tackle these issues by matching rhetoric with action. The question remains, however, whether under its current institutional arrangements, it would have both the will and the ability to do so. The party's debacle during the floods emergency makes it extremely unlikely that it would be able to win a subsequent general election.

## **Democratic Consolidation and External Relations**

India's offer of a US\$5 million donation for flood victims masked the fact that democratisation had not brought about an improvement in the relations of the South Asian 'distant neighbours.' Similarly, the US financial support, which by mid-August 2010 was promised at US\$150 million, was indicative of concerns in Washington regarding Pakistan's stability, rather than evidence of growing trust between the two allies in the conflict against Islamic militancy.

Pakistan's democratic travails have been historically linked not only with its elitist political culture and uneven socio-economic structure, but also with its external relations. It is well established that the state's geopolitical significance has encouraged long-term ties with the US, which have bolstered the military and their allies drawn from the bureaucracy and the feudal elites. The US has historically maintained close relations with all three of Pakistan's military rulers, Ayub, Zia and Musharraf, despite the pro-democracy rhetoric, especially of Democrats on Capitol Hill. Pakistan's military rulers have however found it increasingly difficult to escape demands to display democratic credentials and legitimacy.

Benazir Bhutto in particular used her Washington contacts to strengthen the growing belief in the West that democracy alone could deliver the legitimacy and structural changes to the political and economic processes necessary for long-term stability. It was well known that both London and Washington worked hard behind the scenes to enable her return to Pakistan on 19 October 2007.<sup>46</sup> Her assassination removed the hope that she might work in tandem with Musharraf to ensure stability in the frontline state in the 'War on Terror.' Her widower had neither the standing nor the contacts that she possessed. The West has however sought to bolster President Zardari and encourage him to resolutely oppose extremist pressures. Channels to the Pakistan army via the Pentagon have not been abandoned and it is known that Kayani was in discussions with Admiral Mike Mullen, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of the March 2009 Punjab crisis. The new democratic government has not overcome the trust deficit with respect to Pakistan's performance in combating militancy. This focuses on:

1. Pakistan's strategic engagement with the Afghan Taliban groups, such as the Haqqani.

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<sup>46</sup> Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.71-2.

2. Claims made primarily by the Afghan security services that Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was supporting cross-border terrorism.
3. The Indian perspective that the Pakistan state was not pursuing vigorously enough the LeT that masterminded the 26 November 2008 Mumbai attacks.

The transition to democracy has not impacted favourably on Indo-Pakistan relations. This is despite the fact that some in Pakistan see Zardari as taking a soft tone towards India and the long held view that New Delhi will engage more with civilian than military leaders. In reality, Musharraf produced more innovative suggestions for ending the Kashmir dispute than most elected leaders could countenance. India, as the status quo power in Kashmir, however, wanted to keep Kashmir on the backburner throughout the period of what was termed Composite Dialogue.<sup>47</sup> The Indian charge that the bombing of its embassy in Kabul on 7 July 2008 had the mark of support from the ISI sent a further signal that the advances in relations of the past five years were not irreversible. Some commentators have noted that India's growing influence in Afghanistan post-2001 could become a new source of tension with Pakistan in addition to the long running Kashmir flashpoint.<sup>48</sup> The Composite Dialogue had already stalled before the terrorists set out by boat from Pakistan to launch a wave of killings in Mumbai which left 164 people dead and 308 wounded on 26 November 2008. New Delhi has constantly pressed for greater Pakistan efforts against the LeT, which allegedly masterminded the attacks.

The issue of terrorism-dominated relations between the two countries before talks resumed at Foreign Secretary level in June 2010. These were conducted in an atmosphere of low expectations. Indeed it was clear that US pressures arising from the shifting strategic tide in Afghanistan, rather than any change of outlook in New Delhi were the main factors in their resumption. The issues of terrorism and the future of Afghanistan as much as the long running Kashmir dispute will determine Indo-Pak relations. If Pakistan is sure footed, it may well be able to regain some of the ground it has lost in Afghanistan to India as the US winds down its operation in the country. At the same time, if there is any redirection of *jihadi* activities from Afghanistan to Kashmir, tensions between the distant South Asian neighbours will escalate to dangerous levels.

It is certain however that the military's overweening influence in Pakistan can only be scaled down if there is a normalisation of relations with India. The next section examines the issue of civil-military relations which have dominated Pakistan's post-independence history.

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<sup>47</sup> This was originally set up in 1997 to discuss in separate working parties, eight outstanding issues which hindered a normalisation of relations. It had been halted by the Kargil War in 1999 and the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi.

<sup>48</sup> India, since 2001, has contributed US\$750 million for reconstruction in Afghanistan, has 4,000 civilian and security personnel working in the country, and has provided vital assistance in road-building and training of the Afghan police and civil servants. Pakistan has claimed that the Indian presence is directed against its interests not only in the country, but in the sensitive Balochistan Province. See Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.137.



## Civil-Military Relations

The sense that the military is crucial to Pakistan's survival and is the main functioning institution has been part of its 'mythology' and popularity throughout six decades of independence. This perception received further reinforcement during the floods disaster. The military provided the sole means of communication as bridges and roads were washed away. The army ran relief camps and provided medical facilities for huge numbers of people who escaped to dry land. The army's long-term links with Islamic parties were reinforced as it worked alongside volunteers from such Islamist parties as Jamaat-e-Islami. The power relationship between the army and the elected politicians tipped still further in the former's advantage. None of this signals an imminent military coup, but it does make the prospect of a re-ordering of civil-military relations even more unlikely than it was in February 2008. Yet civilian control over the military, rather than abdication of large areas of governance to an army pulling the strings behind the scenes is crucial for Pakistan's democratic consolidation.<sup>49</sup>

Successive bouts of martial law have increased the Army's influence in all areas of Pakistan's life, as Ayesha Siddiqa has so expertly revealed.<sup>50</sup> This entrenched power reduces the scope for political leaders, especially those like Zardari who are well aware of the military establishment's mistrust. The picture which emerged even before the floods was thus unsurprisingly one of limited progress in establishing political control since February 2008.<sup>51</sup> The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) who replaced Musharraf on 18 November 2007, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has certainly not displayed any personal political ambition. Moreover, he signalled the army's willingness to withdraw from its political engagement by instructing serving officers to distance themselves from contacts with politicians and by calling back officers who were working in the highly controversial National Accountability Bureau.<sup>52</sup> The army, however, continued to jealously guard its institutional interests.

When President Zardari attempted to place the ISI under civilian control in July 2008 this was quickly squashed. Similarly, Prime Minister Gillani's promise to despatch the Director General of ISI, Lt-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha to India, to investigate claims of Pakistan involvement in the Mumbai bombings in November 2008 was blocked. Tensions between the Government and the Army bubbled to the surface over the Kerry-Lugar Bill. Its proposal to authorise US\$1.5 billion of civilian aid to Pakistan for five years predated the Obama administration, but fitted into his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The conditions

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<sup>49</sup> For an authoritative historical perspective see, H.A Rizvi, *The Military and Politics in Pakistan, 1947-86* (Lahore: Progressive Publisher, 1986).

<sup>50</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> For a useful overview see, Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'The Pakistan Military: Change and Continuity under General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani', *ISAS Working Paper*, No.90 (18 September 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, General Kayani denied his own ordinance regarding military non-involvement with politicians by meeting Aitzaz Ahsan in July 2009 and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in late September. Azaz Syed, 'Shahbaz and Nisar Secretly Meet Kayani', *Dawn* (3 October 2009), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 3 October 2009.

for this material assistance were clearly designed to increase civilian oversight of the military.<sup>53</sup> Zardari called the passage of the Bill in Congress as the greatest foreign policy success of his year in office. The sniping of parliamentary opponents that it infringed Pakistan's 'sovereignty' was of little concern to him. The Government was, however, put firmly on the back foot, when the army publicly aired its objections following a meeting of the powerful Corps Commanders on 7 October 2009. While General Kayani may be a benign figure, parallels remain with the 1990s in respect of the army's resistance to any attempts by elected governments to secure greater control over it.

It would be wrong to understand the post-May 2009 military offensives against the Taliban in Swat, the Khyber and Waziristan Agencies as evidence of increased civilian control over security policy. These were the result of a combination of US pressure<sup>54</sup> and the overreach of militant groups. National opinion regarding the Taliban shifted dramatically when video footage of the public flogging of a seventeen year old girl in Swat surfaced on 2 April 2010. Previously Pakistanis had regarded military action against militants as 'fighting Washington's war'. General Kayani in his previous role as Director General of ISI undoubtedly had links with militant groups, but these would not stand in the way of resolute action if professional interests demanded so. Since 9/11, the Pakistan army has developed a calibrated approach to dealing with former militant protégés. It distinguishes between 'foreign' and 'indigenous' elements and those militants who may be useful to Pakistan's regional strategic interests and those who have become uncontrollable threats to both state and army security.<sup>55</sup> Operation *Rah-e-Rast* (Operation Black Thunderstorm) in Swat in fact strengthened the Army's position in two key areas – firstly it renewed its longstanding claim to be the protector of the nation and secondly it restored its credibility with US critics who were questioning its effectiveness and commitment to the 'War on Terror.' At the beginning of July 2008, there were growing signals from Washington that 'hot pursuit' into Pakistan and unilateral action against militant strongholds in the tribal areas were a possibility. Moreover, these gains have been achieved without the army having to modify its understanding that India remains the country's main security threat. Finally, by increasing the value of its cooperation for the achievement of US strategic aims in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the army has secured an expedient reassessment of the Obama administration's pro-democracy agenda as enshrined in the Kerry-Lugar Bill.

Democratic consolidation in the long-term needs the army's exposure to the same levels of accountability as elected politicians. This would not only involve the pursuit of corruption cases, but full parliamentary scrutiny of military expenditure. However, the army will

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<sup>53</sup> They included greater civilian control over promotions and appointments and parliamentary oversight of military budgets along with certification that the security forces were not subverting the political and judicial processes.

<sup>54</sup> Admiral Mike Mullen, US Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, paid a number of important visits to Islamabad in 2008-09.

<sup>55</sup> For an extended assessment of the army's 'Faustian' dealings with Islamic militants see, chapter five of Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 2009).

continue to seek to safeguard its entrenched economic interests<sup>56</sup> and will always be able to call on a section of Pakistan's privileged political elites to work with it in the event of its seizing power. The army may choose in the aftermath of the floods not to intervene directly, but its already considerable power over the Government and the mainstream opposition has been further augmented.

## Conclusion

Even before the national calamity of the July-August 2010 floods, Pakistan's third democratic transition was beset by crises. Some of these were of the Government's making, others were external and revealed the fragility of the state's economy and main institutions aside from the army. Inevitably the euphoria generated by the 2008 polls could not be sustained. The Parliament alone is insufficient to introduce structural economic and institutional reforms conducive to democratic consolidation. With respect to traditionally 'backward' areas such as FATA, where literacy rates, access to healthcare and safe drinking water are well below the Pakistani average, a generation of developmental activity is required.<sup>57</sup> In the short-term, the best that can be achieved alongside improved security is the establishment of job-creation schemes in neighbouring settled areas, which would increase the economic prospects of FATA residents.<sup>58</sup> Militancy in South Punjab is rooted not only in poverty and political marginalisation of the lower classes by feudalism but in the long-term hold of sectarianism in the region. These are issues which cannot be tackled overnight and require long-term institution building, and a steep change in political culture.

In a number of ways, the pre-flood situation possessed parallels with the 1990s transition, which ultimately represented a missed opportunity for democracy. Party politics remained personalised with little intra-party democracy. Political culture was dominated by conflict, rather than cooperation and tensions were endemic at both state and societal levels arising from skewed resource distribution and an absence of social justice. The military remained a dangerously overdeveloped institution, which continued to exercise influence over elected governments. The army's public stance on the Kerry-Lugar Bill graphically illustrated that it would not easily submit to greater civilian oversight through such mechanisms as an empowered Defence Committee of the Cabinet. Its security wing (ISI) remained only nominally under prime ministerial control.

The floods exacerbated the low standing of the President and pointed up the weakness of civilian responses in comparison with the military efforts. They threaten the rate of economic recovery required to alleviate poverty. Pakistan's indebtedness and dependency on

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<sup>56</sup> On these, see Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> The literacy rate in FATA is for example 17.5 per cent compared with the Pakistani average of 44 per cent. For an assessment on the future prospects of FATA see, Ian Talbot, 'Future Prospects for FATA', *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Brief*, No.41 (22 September 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.170.

international financial support has been further increased. While fears that extremism may be further encouraged as a result of the large-scale human misery may be exaggerated, the continued actions of the TTP and ethnic violence in Karachi at the height of the flood crisis revealed the multi-layered crises besetting the Pakistan state. The daunting security challenges could in future encourage further military rule.

Just as individuals survived the flood through their own resourcefulness and toughness, Pakistan has throughout its six decades of existence displayed a resilience that has confounded its critics. This has been rooted in the energy of the population, despite the depredations of natural disasters, war and misgovernment. Less remarked upon in the international press than the role of hardliners in relief, were the activities of concerned citizens and NGOs including such organisations as the Pakistan Medical Association, the Citizen's Foundation, and the Indus Resource Centre.<sup>59</sup> They form part of an emerging civil society which was dramatically announced to the world by the unprecedented lawyers' movement which undermined President Musharraf and forced President Zardari to back down in his struggle with the PML-N. Its emergence has led some analysts to see the possibility of intellectual and political realignment in Pakistan.<sup>60</sup> At present, this process is in its infancy and Pakistan is a fragile state. The political system and not just the Zardari-led government remains at risk in the aftermath of the floods. Uncertainties continue to haunt Pakistan's third democratic transition. What can, however, be said with confidence is that its outcome will not only be of immense significance for the 170 million Pakistani people but its effects will be felt throughout the region and the international community.

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<sup>59</sup> For mention of their activities see, Zubeida Mustafa, 'How Pakistan Survives', *Dawn* (18 August 2010), <http://dawn.com>. Accessed on 18 August 2010.

<sup>60</sup> See Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 2009). Synnott links civil society's ability to 'bring positive changes to Pakistan's political culture' with electoral, constitutional, institutional and security sector reform and 'real progress on public health and education. See Hilary Synnott, *Transforming Pakistan: Ways out of Instability* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.169.