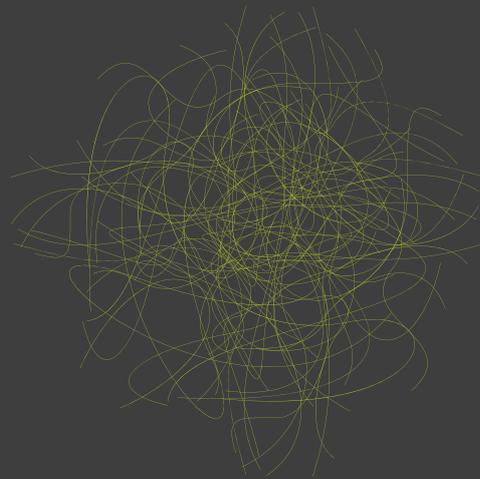


**Sources of Tension
in Afghanistan and
Pakistan: A Regional
Perspective**

**Pakistan on
the Eve of the
Afghanistan
Drawdown:
Key Variables
for the Future**

Owen Bennett Jones

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PAKISTAN ON THE EVE OF THE AFGHANISTAN DRAWDOWN: KEY VARIABLES FOR THE FUTURE

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Introduction

As he looks ahead to 2014 and beyond, Nawaz Sharif should have some confidence that he will complete his third term as Prime Minister. The only political parties that could challenge him, the Bhuttos' PPP and Imran Khan's PTI, are currently on the defensive. The PPP is trying to rebuild after a disastrous election and the PTI is grappling with the realities of holding power in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa.

Having twice been removed from office, Sharif will be mindful of the two institutions that have previously moved against him: the military and the Supreme Court. But here too he can find reasons for reassurance. The army, on the back foot after the Musharraf years, would have little popular backing for a coup. And while the ever more self-confident Supreme Court might consider itself strong enough to challenge an elected government, it would be reluctant to bring down the man who did so much to support the lawyer's movement that restored the Chief Justice to power.

Of course Pakistan's habitually crisis-ridden political system can take unexpected, rapid turns but, by historical standards, Nawaz Sharif is in a remarkably secure position.

His political agenda, however, is daunting and most notably includes major challenges in regard to militancy, the economy, governance and the external environment.

Militancy

Taken together, the various elements of the *Tehrik i Taliban* (TTP) in the North West; *Lashkar e Toiba* (LET), the *Sipah I Sihaba* (SSP) and *Lashkar e Jhangvi* (or their re-named offshoots) in Punjab; the militant wings of the political parties, most notably the *Muttahida Quami Movement* (MQM), in Karachi; and the separatists in Balochistan, have well over a hundred thousand men¹ trained or experienced in small arms. Some operate with impunity entirely outside state institutions. For the foreseeable future, the state is likely to cut deals with some of these groups, while simultaneously, but to varying degrees, confronting others.

1. Author interview with senior government official. Islamabad. October 2013

The Economy

Sharif is also up against a dire economic situation that includes, amongst many other problems, electricity shortages and a large fiscal deficit. The Prime Minister hopes to achieve a significant number of privatizations and to increase trade with India. The latter objective, however, is already running into obstacles. Pakistan is finding it difficult to respond to India's demand that it do more to control *Lashkar e Toiba*. As regards the fiscal deficit, the government has made announcements about raising more tax revenue but given the precedents, there is little reason to believe that this will be achieved on the scale that is required - if at all.

Governance

Many are calling on Mr. Sharif to focus on improved governance. His track record, however, speaks for itself. His last government oversaw the proliferation of nuclear weapons; the deployment of Pakistan's forces in Indian-held Kashmir with no clear strategic objective; the ransacking of the Supreme Court by a mob of Pakistan Muslim League- Noon (PML N) supporters; the seizure of foreign currency accounts, widespread corruption allegations and the attempted introduction of *shari'a* law. With Sharif focused almost entirely on seeing off threats to his premiership, there was next to no progress on the many development issues that face Pakistan - including, most importantly, education. Of course some of these issues - such as nuclear proliferation - were in the hands of the military. But others such as Kargil can in part be laid at Mr Sharif's door.² In any event, there is no sign of the civilian leadership winning control of these policy areas, nor of the military giving them up, so future missteps cannot be ruled out.

As well as the predominantly internal issues of militancy, the economy and governance, there are a number of external factors that will have an impact on Pakistan's development in the coming years. These can be split into two categories:

First, how will Pakistan handle the reduction in the level of US forces in Afghanistan after 2014?

Second, how will it deal with the relationship with India in general, and the Kashmir dispute in particular?

New governments in Pakistan - including even military ones - are often greeted with expressions of great optimism and hope by the country's "commentariat" and the population more generally. Such optimism however is generally short-lived and already Nawaz Sharif's honeymoon period is over.

This paper will argue, however, that the so called 'new normal' political dispensation under which democratically elected governments can be expected to hand over to democratically elected successors is a significant positive development, which should result in the political system becoming more responsive to people's needs. It will also argue that there is a possibility that the army, after the inevitable failure of the government/TTP dialogue process, will directly confront remaining TTP strongholds.

2. For a full discussion of how much Mr. Sharif knew about the Kargil operation before it was mounted, see: *Pakistan Eye of the Storm* Owen Bennett Jones, 3rd edition, p122.

Many of the key determinants of what will happen in the next few years are already established. The Sharif government is in place. The TTP challenge is entrenched and whatever the precise outcome in Afghanistan, the Afghan Taliban look set to be able to provide the TTP with sanctuaries for the foreseeable future. Even if the army does attack the TTP it will remain a formidable force in the short term. The IMF has already showed its continued willingness to prop up the economy and the *Lashkar e Toiba* (LET) issue is likely to prevent improved relations with India.

Having said all that, there is one variable in particular that could have a big impact: another major attack on the West, originating wholly or in part from Pakistani soil, could leave Pakistan in a highly vulnerable position.

Islamic Militancy

In 2009 the TTP had a high degree of control of 18 administrative units, such as Tribal Areas within FATA, Districts including Upper Dir and Swat and Frontier Regions, such as Bannu. They now control only North Waziristan and parts of Khyber and Orakzai.

As a result, although the number of militant attacks in Pakistan remains very high, the situation has improved since 2009. 5,047 people were killed in 2012 in politically inspired violence compared to 12,632 in 2009.³

The question now is whether the army will push the TTP out of its remaining strongholds, especially North Waziristan. The attitudes of the various power brokers have undergone a surprising switch in recent years. Until recently, most politicians wanted a reluctant military to do more to control militancy. Now the military is anxious to press ahead with the use of force while the politicians prefer dialogue. If the army does decide eventually to move into North Waziristan the clashes are likely to be extremely bloody. The militants can be expected to mount attacks throughout Pakistan in an attempt to undermine political support for any such campaign.

For four reasons, the army might wait until after 2014 before giving serious consideration to a North Waziristan offensive.

First, it is always easier to put things off.

Secondly, after the US drawdown in Afghanistan it will be easier to sell the policy of clearing North Waziristan to the Pakistan electorate as being in Pakistan's rather than the US's interest.

Thirdly, it will have to let negotiations between the government and the TTP run their course.

Finally, the army will want to have a better idea of how the US drawdown is affecting Afghanistan before mounting an offensive.

If it does move into North Waziristan, the army will no doubt try to draw distinctions between the different strands of militancy based there. Various groups which operate under the TTP banner have quite distinct

3. Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, Pakistan Security Report 2012

motivations including the Kashmir dispute, various shades of sectarianism, a desire to install *shari'a*, local power struggles and in some cases, mere criminality.

A few Pakistanis, and some of the foreign fighters on Pakistani soil, have pledged allegiance to al Qaeda. The impact of the drone attacks, coupled with increased opportunities for militant activity in Yemen and North Africa, mean that the al Qaeda presence in Pakistan could now be as small as 10 senior leaders and 500 fighters.⁴ The army will be content to move decisively - and no doubt with great publicity - against al Qaeda. The North Waziristan-based Haqqani network, by contrast, is likely to remain a Pakistani asset - and the ISI would want to be sure that the Haqqanis could find refuge on the Afghan side of the border before any military operation in North Waziristan began.

Whilst the army attitudes towards Al Qaeda and the Haqqani Network can be predicted with some confidence, there is much less certainty when it comes to various elements of the TTP.

The case of *Lashkar e Toiba* (LET) helps illustrate another factor that will shape army policy on militant groups in the coming years. Before confronting a militant outfit, the army will have to assess not only its tactical orientation and consequent usefulness in advancing what the army sees as Pakistan's national interests, but also its capability. It is arguable that even if it wanted to confront the LET the Pakistani state lacks the strength to do so. As a result of its social work at home and militancy abroad (chiefly India), the LET now has tens - and maybe hundreds - of thousands of loyal supporters in *madrassahs* in the heartland of Punjab.

Pakistani policymakers insist their current toleration of the LET is in fact a sophisticated policy intended to draw the group into mainstream politics. They argue that by allowing the LET leader Hafiz Saeed (for whom the Americans are offering a \$10m bounty) to make speeches and give media interviews, they are gradually turning the LET into a less threatening religious organisation. In reality, however, the LET maintains a formidable militant capacity and, looking ahead, the army may conclude that the only way to neutralize the organisation in the short term will be to reenergize the Kashmiri insurgency and to send the LET's young fighters across the line of control (LOC). Indeed the recent increase in the number of cross LOC incidents raises the question of whether this is already happening.⁵

There have been many examples in the past of the army using proxies in this way without thinking through the long-term consequences. Indeed, the ISI's sustained covert backing for the Kashmir insurgency can be seen as one such example. Should the number of cross LOC incidents continue to increase, it is quite possible that a newly elected BJP government in India could mount a vigorous response, possibly including military action to disrupt training camps across the Line of Control.

Non-Islamic Militancy

As well as having to cope with *jihadis*, the Pakistan state faces challenges from militants with different motivations, including, most notably, Baloch nationalism. The latest round of the Baloch insurgency began in 2004

4. Interviews with senior retired diplomat Islamabad October 2013; senior government official Islamabad, October 2013 and former ISI official with responsibility for North West Pakistan. Islamabad, October 2013.

5. See "Is the Endgame in Afghanistan Likely to Rekindle the Kashmir Insurgency?" by Qandeel Siddique, Centre for International and Strategic Analysis, Report No 8 2103.

and has involved attacks on state security personnel, infrastructure, energy exploration projects and Punjabis living in the Province. In response, the security forces have run a violent campaign: the targeted killing of Baloch activists has occurred not only in Balochistan, but also Karachi.

Finally, there is Karachi.

Although the *Muttahida Quami Movement* (MQM) leader, Altaf Hussain, has occasionally made demands for an independent territorial entity for his *mohajir* followers, it would be wrong to describe the MQM as insurgents. For the most part, it is a party that has turned to extortion, gangsterism and targeted killing to further its own political and criminal interests. In the past, the MQM has protected its position by becoming part of the ruling coalition at both national and provincial levels. In the 2013 elections, however, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Sindh and the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML N) nationally did sufficiently well to govern without MQM support. This unusual situation means that Nawaz Sharif is in a good position to confront MQM violence, with the objective of creating greater stability in the economically crucial city of Karachi. His political record, however, suggests that he is unlikely to have the political resolve to do this. His previous anti- MQM campaigns petered out after a few months.

It's the economy...

According to the State Bank of Pakistan, President Zardari's government achieved economic growth averaging at 2.94% a year with inflation averaging at 13.79%. The growth figure for the pre-Zardari period (2003 to 2007) was, by contrast, 7%.⁶ Some of the factors behind the relatively poor performance of the Zardari administration - such as the floods - will not reoccur. Other factors, however, such as the inability of the bureaucracy to implement policy, a lack of security and low levels of tax collection and consequent fiscal deficits are likely to remain under Nawaz Sharif.

The most politically-charged economic issue remains the supply of electricity.

The basic problem - the failure to collect electricity bills - could be eased by devolving the responsibility for collection to private sector power companies. So far, however, the Sharif administration has not implemented structural reform in this area but has instead simply raised money to pay suppliers to produce power in the short term. Meanwhile, the longer-term issue of the country's diminishing natural gas reserves can only be addressed by more exploration at home or increased imports from abroad. The first policy is constrained by the Baloch insurgency and the second by US objections to the Iran-Pakistan pipeline.

It is often said that Pakistan's economy is vulnerable to declining US aid. Due to the number of covert funding streams, it is difficult to establish how much money the US has given to Pakistan in recent years. Informed estimates suggest that since 9/11 the total is well in

6. Economic Policy and Management in Pakistan 2008-2013, Safiya Aftab, Jinnah Institute, April 2013

excess of \$20bn. The sums are diminishing. The Obama administration in 2013 asked for \$1.16 bn aid for Pakistan – almost half the 2012 total of \$2.6bn and a quarter of the 2010 total of \$4.5bn. Military aid was also down to \$397m planned expenditure in 2014 compared to \$1.2bn in 2010.⁷

Pakistan will, however, not be as concerned by the likely decline in US aid levels as many imagine. Recent research suggests that aid in 2011 – a year with relatively high inflows – accounted for just 1.6 % of GDP. Remittances now provide Pakistan with more income than foreign aid, the total remitted having increased from \$1bn in 2002 to \$12 bn in 2011 – a sum equivalent to 6% of GDP. Most of the remittances come from the Middle East. Unlike volatile aid flows, remittances are steadily increasing.⁸

Mr. Sharif's Plans

One of Nawaz Sharif's early post-election achievements was to secure an IMF extended facility worth \$6.6 bn – slightly below the \$7.2bn he asked for. The IMF attached various conditions to be implemented over a 10-year period but given past history it presumably has little expectation of them being respected. Mr. Sharif is well aware that international concern about Pakistan's nuclear assets means the IMF is likely to give the country support even when conditions are ignored.

Nawaz Sharif's economic plans for the future rest on three main pillars: (i) infrastructure projects, (ii) privatization and (iii) significantly increased trade with India.

The first two policies are likely to be implemented at least in some form. The Chinese are interested in funding infrastructure projects – so long as they are in Chinese interests. If a major new railway is to be built, for example, it is more likely to be from Kashgar to Gwadar than the Karachi Peshawar link promised by Mr. Sharif in the election campaign. As for privatizations, Sharif has a track record of selling off state owned assets and can be expected to do so again. There are likely to be legal challenges regarding cronyism.

As regards trade, within hours of his May 2013 election victory Nawaz Sharif was sending out very positive messages to Delhi. His warm words suggested he was aware of how much benefit could be derived from greater cross border commercial activity. Furthermore, President Zardari had prepared the way on this issue – cross border trade more than doubled in the four years to 2010/11.⁹

Looking ahead, however, there are likely to be significant constraints on trade. The Pakistan military will want to protect strategically sensitive sectors from Indian ownership. Businessmen too will resist liberalisation if it means more competition in their sectors. Finally, Sharif is also already discovering that before moving on trade, Delhi is insisting on serious Pakistani efforts to control Lashkar e Toiba and in particular to convict those responsible for the Mumbai attacks. As discussed above, however, the Pakistan government, will find it difficult to move against the LET.

7. US Govt Reduces Aid Requests For Pakistan, Anwar Iqbal, Dawn newspaper 4 July 2013

8. Blessing or Curse: the Stabilizing Role of Remittances Foreign Aid and FDI to Pakistan, Junaid Ahmed and Inmaculada Martinez, COMSATS and University of Goettingen, May 7, 2013

9. Pak India Trade: A Regional Perspective, Hana Shaikh, Jinnah Institute, March 2013

Governance

Poor governance has long bedeviled Pakistan's economic and social development. Frequent military interventions, worsening administrative capacity, high-level corruption, the overweening power of the ISI and a failure to impose the rule of law have all played a role.

Supporters of President Zardari, however, argue that he made significant democratic gains during his term in office and that completing a full term was just one of his achievements. Most notably, they argue, he passed the 18th Constitutional Amendment that, amongst other things, removed the power of the President to dismiss the Prime Minister. In one sense, the Amendment made little difference to Pakistan's constitutional arrangements. As President, Zardari remained all-powerful, just as Nawaz Sharif now dominates from the position of Prime Minister. In other words, power rests in the hands of dynastic figures or major political personalities, rather than office holders. Having said that, the 18th Amendment will make it more difficult for the military to engineer the removal of a sitting government.

More immediately, however, the issue is how Mr. Sharif will manage his third administration. In terms of both corruption and competence he has a poor record. Throughout his second term, anxious to protect himself from military, judicial and parliamentary challenges, Sharif concentrated solely on his own political survival rather than the substantive problems facing the country. Given his current political strength, however, Sharif might decide to concentrate on issues such as health and education provision. And there are, in fact, some reasons for thinking his third term will be more productive than the first two.

Pakistan's TV channels are now independent and assertive. While there are examples of extremists being given airtime, by far the majority of the programming is devoted to the proper task of journalism: public discussion and holding the powerful to account. The judiciary too is increasingly independent. On the face of it Nawaz Sharif has a difficult history with the senior judiciary: when the Supreme Court charged him with contempt of court in 1997 a mob of his supporters ransacked the court building and forced the judges to back down. The Supreme Court, however, is unlikely to seek revenge for that humiliation. The successful campaign of the current Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry to win reinstatement after General Musharraf sacked him relied in part on Nawaz Sharif's backing.

But there is a deeper concern about the administration of justice in Pakistan's hopelessly slow and endemically corrupt courts: many Pakistanis are turning to other methods of dispute adjudication. In some rural areas, the feudal landlords and tribal leaders still administer justice.¹⁰ In cities such as Lahore, some people are going to mosques, rather than courts, to have their disputes resolved.¹¹ And in parts of the North West, the TTP offer speedy, if rough and ready, dispute resolution,¹² although it is worth noting that while some residents find these religious courts initially attractive, support ebbs rapidly when people see the crudeness of the justice on offer.

The feudals' role in dispute resolution is one of their few remaining areas of authority. In the 2013 election it was noticeable that virtually all the feudal candidates lost. Admittedly some lost to relatives, but no longer is

10. Author's own observations in rural Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan.

11. Author interview with senior police officer Islamabad, October 2013. The officer had previously been posted in Lahore in a district in which mosques carried out these activities. Also author interview with Asma Jahangir, Lahore, October 2013.

12. For a recent example see <http://dawn.com/news/1041373/two-taliban-courts-spring-up-in-darra>

the possession of land enough to guarantee victory. Most feudals lost to businessmen who are more in touch with their communities and, corruption issues aside, can be expected to do a better job of representing their constituents. It is another reason to have some confidence in Pakistan's democratic development.

Regional Politics & 2014

While militancy, the economy and governance present major challenges, Nawaz Sharif will also have to cope with rapidly-evolving regional and international developments.

The situation in Afghanistan is especially uncertain. How many troops and what military capacity will the US retain in Afghanistan after 2014? For how long? What will the 2014 Afghan elections bring? Will the Afghan Taliban become part of the Kabul government? Will Afghanistan achieve stability or revert to civil war? Or will the government in Kabul struggle on trying to suppress a Taliban insurgency?

The US has a clear interest in keeping some forces in Afghanistan. As well as continuing the fight against al Qaeda, having a strategically important base and protecting US facilities such as the embassy, it wants to shore up the Kabul government.¹³ There is, however, a real risk that congressional reluctance to spend more money on Afghanistan will condemn the country to sustained instability.

As for Pakistan, its post 9/11 policies towards Afghanistan have had a number of conflicting objectives. Some elements of the Pakistani military still hanker after the days when the Taliban were in power. The prevailing view, however, in Pakistan policy making circles, is that the Afghan Taliban can no longer rule alone and that the very attempt to create another Afghan Taliban government would lead to another Afghan civil war which in turn would result in a refugee crisis.

Pakistan's strategy in recent years has consequently been focused not on the restoration of the Afghan Taliban to power but rather on the diplomatic role Islamabad could play as the US pulled out. Pakistani military leaders hoped their ability to 'deliver' the Afghan Taliban in a process of negotiations about a political settlement would give Pakistan diplomatic leverage.

It is an approach that now looks somewhat forlorn. As 2014 approaches and with the chances of a comprehensive political settlement in Afghanistan diminishing, the extent of Pakistani influence over the process is becoming ever more limited. Worse still, the Afghan Taliban can be expected to provide sanctuary to the TTP fighters as they wage war on the Pakistani state.

One issue that will continue to concern Islamabad is the extent of Indian influence in Afghanistan. For some Pakistani policy makers, limiting Indian influence is more important than achieving stability in Afghanistan. In other words, some in the Pakistan state would be willing to limit Indian influence by continuing to support a rumbling Taliban insurgency that, no doubt, would be encouraged to target Indian diplomatic and commercial assets in Afghanistan.

13. "Afghan Forces Suffering Too Many Casualties says NATO top commander", Guardian newspaper, Emma Graham Harrison, 2 September 2013

Longer-Term Problems

Nawaz Sharif has indicated that improvement in the Indo-Pak relationship is one of his top priorities: an objective that will require significant progress on Kashmir. A solution, however, remains difficult to achieve. General Musharraf's efforts to reach a compromise over Kashmir were rebuffed by India, in part because the ISI continued to order Kashmir-related militant attacks some of which caused fatalities in major Indian cities. As discussed above, history may be about to repeat itself: the increased number of LOC incidents is encouraging Indian hardliners to argue against a settlement.

The second major regional issue facing Pakistan is the Durand Line.

Afghanistan, which has territorial claims that reach deep into Pakistan, has never recognised the Durand Line - a position that has been articulated on a number of occasions by President Karzai. Because of its weakness in recent decades, Afghanistan has not been able to advance its claims. It is likely that any strong, stable government in Afghanistan would raise this issue with greater determination. A growing number of policymakers in Islamabad are wondering whether, in the long term, they in fact have an interest in a weak central government in Afghanistan.

Faced with such daunting challenges, there is only so much Nawaz Sharif can do. Even those who have confidence in his business acumen accept that predictions for the economy range from the dire to the merely poor.¹⁴ And in foreign policy too there is no reason to believe in rapid transformation. On the issues of militancy and democratic development, however, there is a lot to play for. The question of whether or not there will be a concerted military campaign against the TTP's remaining strongholds is important and could affect the way Pakistan develops in the next five years. The not unrelated issue of whether or not there is an attack on the West wholly or in part from Pakistani soil is also important: it could change everything. Western ground forces attacking Pakistan would be a real possibility.

Hopes of Democracy

The May 2013 general election was, for many observers of Pakistan, one of the most hopeful events they could recall. For the first time in the country's history a democratically-elected government handed power to another democratically elected government. Although there was some vote rigging, most Pakistanis accepted the broad outlines of the result as a fair reflection of public opinion.

If, as most expect, Sharif does complete his term, then there are good reasons to believe that the political system could become more responsive to the needs and desires of the electorate. During the 2013 election campaign, Sharif spoke often about the issue of most concern to the voters: electricity. Since coming to power Sharif has demonstrated that he still understands the importance of this issue: the democratic system, it seems, has successfully transmitted the peoples' needs to the government even if it has only so far come up with short-term solutions.

14. For the IMF's assessment see: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2013/pr13322.htm>

Should there be a second democratic transition of power, politicians might address other issues of concern to the electorate such as health care and education services. Increasingly politicians could see effective governance as important for securing support on election day.

Pakistan, in other words, may be on the verge of becoming a better functioning democracy.

In the past the army has managed to secure either a premature change of civilian administration or taken over itself. Bruised by the public's disenchantment with the Musharraf years, the military is currently unsure that a direct or even indirect intervention would enjoy popular support. Should the politicians be able to establish the efficacy of the democratic process then the army will find it increasingly difficult to intervene in the future.

Greater army reluctance to interfere in politics could have profound implications. The elected politicians might be able to claw back control of issues currently in the hands of the army. As things stand most aspects of foreign and nuclear policy, Kashmir and relations with India, the US and Afghanistan are firmly in the hands of the armed forces and the ISI. Stronger politicians with greater legitimacy and confidence could challenge that dispensation.

Fears of Militancy

Even though the TTP has lost territory in recent years, it will have taken solace from recent political developments. Whilst President Asif Zardari did nothing to lead the fight against the TTP, he did give his Generals free reign and allowed them to do what they pleased on the issue. With his departure from the Presidency, that has changed. Nawaz Sharif, who campaigned on a platform of dialogue with the TTP, has already tried to open negotiations. There is no reason to believe that such an approach will work – senior army officers say that since 9/11 the military reached 14 separate agreements with the TTP, none of which were honoured.¹⁵ Nonetheless, as the recent election results show, public opinion supports a process of dialogue.

The two parties' negotiating positions are now becoming clear. The government wants an end to TTP attacks on security personnel and sectarian targets. In other words it sees a ceasefire as the end point of the negotiation. The militants meanwhile are demanding an end to drone strikes, no more US supplies for Afghanistan to move through Pakistan, compensation for fallen fighters, prisoner releases and amnesties, an army pull out from the tribal areas, the establishment of *shari'a* law in those areas and a free hand to fight in Afghanistan.

The most likely outcome is that the TTP, whilst banking the enhanced legitimacy their inclusion in the process has given them, will take whatever concessions are on offer and give nothing in return.

The TTP is also encouraged by a diminished challenge from the Awami National Party (ANP). In recent years in North West Pakistan the ANP's Pukhtoon nationalism has constituted the only sustained and coherent

15. Author interview with former senior military officer Lahore, May 2013. Also interview with former senior military officer Islamabad, October 2013.

ideological challenge to the TTP's religious politics. Aware of the threat posed by the ANP, the TTP has attacked the party with relentless violence. As a result, the electorate currently perceives the ANP as weak and delivered it a major blow at the last elections by returning just two ANP Members of the National Assembly. It will take the party many years to recover.

The TTP then is currently in a strong position and can be expected to fight back hard against any army offensive. In the face of a TTP bombing and/or kidnapping campaign in Pakistan's cities, it is far from clear that the politicians would provide the army with the support it would both want and need for a sustained military campaign.

The state's weakness is also apparent in the administration of justice.

For many years now all levels of the judiciary in Pakistan, fearing that the state is unable to protect them, have shown a reluctance to convict religious militants and there is no sign that this attitude will change. The problem is worsened by the inability of the police to mount proper forensic investigations that would produce strong evidence in court or to protect witnesses. A continued sense of impunity will encourage the militants to believe that they can fight without having to fear capture.

The number of sectarian attacks in Pakistan is increasing sharply, a trend that could well continue. Shi'a, Ahmedis, Christians and Hindus are all targeted by Sunni extremists. Whilst there were 44 sectarian attacks between September 2010 and September 2011, there were 153 between October 2011 and December 2012.¹⁶ The state has so far shown neither the ability to penetrate the groups of people planning plots nor the capacity to punish those few people they manage to arrest.

With Nawaz Sharif in place, it is likely that the central administration will do even less than its predecessor to protect minorities. Whilst the PPP proved incapable of preventing attacks on religious minorities, it did at least make some efforts to do so. Salman Taseer, the murdered Governor of Punjab, for example, with the support of President Zardari, argued for the reform of the blasphemy law that is used disproportionately to target minorities. Previous Sharif administrations have not only done nothing to limit the blasphemy law, but on the contrary have helped extend its provisions to require the death penalty.¹⁷ The PML N's decision to give a party ticket in the 2013 election to a politician who had offered a financial reward to anyone who assassinated Salman Taseer is a further indication that minority protection is not one of the party's priorities.¹⁸

While some TTP activists see sectarian attacks as a distraction from their main purpose of fighting the Pakistani state, in the longer term the rise in sectarian militancy is likely to strengthen militant groups as a whole. Increasing numbers of radicals are gaining experience not only in how to mount attacks but also how to live outside the state structures. There are already close links between the leading sectarian groups such as the Lashkar e Jhangvi (LEJ) and the TTP: there have been cases in which the two organisations fought along side each other. Leaders from both groups will be keen to further foster such relations.

16. Extremism Watch: Mapping Conflict Trends 2010-2011 Jinnah Institute 2011 and Extremism Watch: Mapping Conflict Trends 2011-2012 Jinnah Institute 2012

17. <https://dawn.com/news/585332/the-blasphemy-law-by-i-a-rehman>

18. <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-175873-SSP-leader-who-fixed-bounty-on-Taseer-given-PML-N-ticket>

Whither Pakistan?

For decades now, dire prognostications have been made about Pakistan. Many have been proven correct. The army's indulgence of Kashmir militant groups *did* lead to a broader *jihadi* culture. The failure to address the needs of the Baloch people *did* lead to a violent insurgency. The inability of the politicians to govern well and their flagrant corruption *did* undermine support for the democratic process and help the army get away with its political interference.

At the same time, many of the most pessimistic predictions have turned out to be overly negative. The nuclear arsenal *has not* fallen into the hands of jihadis; the economy *has not* collapsed (whatever that might mean) and the country's territorial integrity *has not* been compromised. Indeed, looking back, the best prediction might have been that while Pakistan will continue to face major challenges it will, somehow, muddle along. Looking ahead continued TTP violence balanced by a gradual entrenchment of democratic norms suggests the country will continue manage in difficult circumstances. Indeed, the ever broader and deeper understanding in the West of Pakistani politics and society has led many observers to write in the last two or three years about Pakistan's remarkable resilience.

Such accounts, however, often miss important nuances.

Whilst the drift towards religious conservatism is a national phenomenon in many ways, there are now two Pakistans and they are heading in different directions.

The provinces of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa and Balochistan are becoming ever more violent, and socially repressive. While the media tends to focus on religiously inspired violence, residents in the West and North-West face many other issues including kidnapping, rigid dress codes and a social atmosphere in which women are discouraged from working. Elsewhere in Pakistan, particularly in urban centres such as Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi there is, if anything, a move in the opposite direction, with increasing numbers of young people in particular expressing themselves in the media and through other means. The difference in lifestyles between a typical young Peshawar-ite and their Lahori equivalent – to take one example - is becoming increasingly marked.

While the situation in Afghanistan will clearly have an influence on events in Pakistan, the fundamental decisions still rest with the politicians and generals: do they think that confronting domestic militancy is worth it? Is having the capacity to deploy militant groups in India and Afghanistan so important that it is worth paying the price of some militancy at home? Whilst to outsiders these questions seem to have obvious answers, to many Pakistanis policymakers, they still present genuine dilemmas.

Pakistan has never been short of advice.

For the most part it is agreed what the country needs to do: improve governance, educate the population, fight corruption, administer justice, collect taxes and oppose militancy. As most Pakistanis look ahead, they

can only hope that the militants will be weakened and that democratic structures will – as is quite possible - become sufficiently embedded for the politicians to become both willing and able to implement some of the reforms that everyone agrees are needed.

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