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Pakistan in 2009

Tackling the Taliban?

ABSTRACT

Party-based political competition played an important part in shaping key events in Pakistan in 2009. This article examines the impact of party-based competition on the much-delayed restoration of Supreme Court Chief Justice Mohammad Iftikhar Chaudhry, efforts to address (with U.S. assistance) Pakistan's growing Taliban-affiliated insurgency, and both federal and provincial economic policies. This article concludes that party-based competition will continue to shape Pakistan's evolving security and economic situation in 2010.

KEYWORDS: Pakistan, Taliban, insurgency, Asif Ali Zardari, Nawaz Sharif

INTRODUCTION

Following the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf under the threat of impeachment in September 2008, the political landscape in Pakistan was redefined by a combination of change and continuity. The resignation of President Musharraf allowed for two key changes: (a) the restoration of Pakistan Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry more than 16 months after Musharraf removed him from his post during six weeks of "emergency rule" launched in November 2007, and (b) a careful reassessment of the strategic relationship between the Pakistani state and the disparate band of non-state actors and insurgents collectively known as the "Pakistani Taliban." In both cases, however, critical adjustments were constrained by a pattern of persistent partisan rancor with Musharraf's successor, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman President Asif Ali Zardari, squaring off against the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), former Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif.

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Asian Survey, Vol. 50, Number 1, pp. 112–126. ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: AS.2010.50.1.112.

President Zardari opposed the restoration of the chief justice, whereas Nawaz Sharif supported it. Zardari feared that Chaudhry might seek to overturn a legal arrangement known as the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) that Musharraf had constructed with former PPP Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto before her return from self-imposed exile (and subsequent assassination) in 2007. Under the arrangement, several corruption cases pending against both her and her husband, Zardari, were withdrawn in exchange for their support of Musharraf's resignation from the army and his continuation as a "civilian-only" president. Sharif, however, favored Chaudhry's restoration precisely because he believed that the chief justice, having been mistreated by Musharraf, would work to check the power of Musharraf's erstwhile "collaborator," Zardari.

Similarly, Zardari and Sharif embraced fundamentally different strategies in relation to the national security threat posed by Pakistan's Taliban-affiliated insurgency. The Taliban launched a series of attacks throughout the year including strikes against security installations associated with the army and police as well as international, civilian, and sectarian targets such as the Sri Lankan cricket team, the Islamabad headquarters of the U.N. World Food Program, and prominent Sufi shrines. Zardari favored an aggressive push against the Taliban, whereas the position adopted by Sharif was decidedly more ambiguous. In fact, Sharif went out of his way to characterize Zardari's enthusiastic push against the Taliban as an attempt to advance a costly and destructive war simply to satisfy the Americans.

This tit-for-tat pattern of partisan politics allowed PPP Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani to govern more actively in cooperation with Chief of the Army Staff Ashfaq Pervez Kayani. In fact, while Zardari and Sharif continued to snipe at one another, Gilani and Kayani sought to carve out a more pragmatic middle ground. This was clarified in two stages. The first came in March, when Gilani and Kayani intervened to negotiate the restoration of Chief Justice Chaudhry in the face of mounting public unrest. And, in April, the collapse of a negotiated settlement designed to mollify Taliban militants in the Swat Valley, just 100 kilometers north of Islamabad, led Gilani and Kayani to coordinate widespread political support for a massive military response against the Swat-based Taliban.

The latter half of the year, however, found this effort to tackle the Taliban insurgency deeply complicated by overtures of "assistance" stemming from the U.S. In fact, when U.S. Senators John Kerry and Richard Lugar unveiled

a special bill offering \$1.5 billion of non-military “development” assistance to Pakistan each year for the next five years (2010—15), many began to worry that American efforts to support Pakistan—and, more specifically, its incumbent government—were motivated by sinister, neo-imperialist, aims.

The PPP, for its part, rushed to embrace this offer, insisting that U.S. aid sought to reinforce civilian (as opposed to military) rule in Pakistan. But, in due course, senior members of Pakistan’s army pushed back. In fact, they criticized the Kerry-Lugar Bill, opining that the U.S. was engaged in a dangerous game of enticement challenging Pakistan’s sovereignty by trying to shore up new forms of civilian oversight, particularly in the realm of strategic decision making. Sharif seized upon the army’s reservations to reinvigorate the anti-American sentiments that played such an important part in his criticism of the PPP—a pattern that led many political observers to worry that General Kayani might decide to abandon Prime Minister Gilani and cast his lot with Sharif in a bid to force the PPP from power.

The Pakistani public, through 2009, appeared to express a growing interest in tackling the “Taliban problem” more aggressively, but it disagreed about the best way to do so and whether the U.S. should be allowed to help. The Pakistani army’s ability to tackle the Taliban in 2010 will undoubtedly depend on the political support the army receives from political elites and the public. But the levels of this support (and the forms it may take) remain difficult to measure, largely owing to persistent forms of party-based political competition. The shape of this competition may, in fact, determine the fate of the Taliban in Pakistan and, thus, the fate of Pakistan itself.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE COURTS: MOVING BEYOND MUSHARRAF

The antagonistic relationship between President Zardari and former Prime Minister Sharif cannot be understood without appreciation for the conflicting terms of two very important agreements—the so-called Charter of Democracy (COD) signed by Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto in 2006, and the NRO formulated by Bhutto and Musharraf in 2007. Structured as a joint commitment to challenge Musharraf’s dictatorship, the COD sought to end the legal framework that buttressed Musharraf’s military regime. In particular, it sought to remove the 17th Amendment to the Pakistan Constitution, especially Clause 58-2b, which permitted the president to dismiss an elected government if that government was deemed unable to fulfil its

“constitutional duties.”¹ (This clause was used to dismiss governments led by both Bhutto and Sharif on three occasions, in 1990, 1993, and 1997.)

Less than 18 months after signing this joint “pro-democracy” platform, however, Bhutto prepared a separate agreement with Musharraf known as the NRO. Shortly after her return to Pakistan, however, Benazir was assassinated. And, in the ensuing elections, her party, the PPP, and Zardari were catapulted into power on what many described as a wave of sympathy.²

Musharraf, meanwhile, had himself reelected president just a few hours after the NRO was finalized on October 5–6, 2007. About a month later, he fired Chaudhry, fearing the chief justice would challenge his reelection on the grounds that Pakistan’s Constitution prohibited the president from holding two offices simultaneously—in this case, president and chief of the army staff. Musharraf subsequently installed an entirely new slate of judges—judges Musharraf (and, following Musharraf’s resignation, Zardari) labored intensively to defend. In fact, both Musharraf and Zardari believed that their power was tied to a compliant set of judges who would not challenge the legality of the positions they held.

Yet, the amnesty outlined in the NRO ended on October 12, 1999. Thus, it did not cover any of the charges against Nawaz Sharif related to the diversion of General Musharraf’s airplane on the day of his 1999 coup when he overthrew Sharif. These charges had led to Sharif’s conviction for “hijacking,” followed by his extended exile in Saudi Arabia after a rather dubious presidential “pardon.” Since Sharif was not covered by the terms of the NRO, his decision to return to Pakistan almost immediately after Bhutto in fall 2007 was, in many ways, owing to the legal ambiguities surrounding this “pardon,” a calculated legal risk. During the spring of 2009, this risk erupted into a full-scale political crisis when the Musharraf-installed judges declared that Sharif’s “hijacking” conviction barred him from standing for future election. The court also declared that certain irregularities in the provincial election of Nawaz’s brother Shahbaz Sharif in the Punjab, rendered the latter ineligible for any future election as well.

1. Clause 58-2b (8th Amendment) was inserted into the 1973 Constitution by General Zia ul-Haq in 1985. It was removed by Nawaz Sharif in 1997 (13th Amendment) and then restored by Musharraf in 2003 (17th Amendment).

2. Following the February 2008 elections, the PPP formed a national coalition government under PPP Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani. In Lahore, the provincial capital of the Punjab, the PPP joined a provincial coalition led by the brother of Nawaz Sharif—namely, PML-N Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

Nawaz Sharif naturally insisted that this decision had been engineered by President Zardari as a continuation of the politically vindictive policies pursued by Musharraf, but Zardari was not swayed. With Shahbaz Sharif removed from his elected post as chief minister of the Punjab, Zardari placed the provincial government of the Punjab—long regarded as an important PML-N stronghold—directly under “Governor’s Rule” (that is, under a governor appointed by Zardari himself). This, in turn, led Nawaz Sharif to throw his support behind a massive protest movement known as “The Long March” that demanded the reinstatement of Chaudhry and the removal of Musharraf’s judges.

Thousands of protesters poured into the streets, particularly in the Punjab, and, by early March 2009, the entire country was perched on the edge of political chaos. Zardari issued a special order prohibiting public assemblies in a bid to restrict the protesters, but, notwithstanding the arrest of hundreds if not thousands of PML-N supporters, Sharif pressed on with the protests, declaring that he would not rest until Chaudhry was restored to the bench, Governor’s Rule in the Punjab was withdrawn, and the 17th Amendment was repealed. He also rejected the judges’ view of his electoral ineligibility.

International observers feared that a general collapse of law and order during these protests would provide the Taliban (and al-Qaeda) with an enormous strategic boost, raising concerns about the long-term stability of the state of Pakistan and the security of its nuclear arsenal. This wider political and geostrategic concern prompted General Kayani, the chief of the army staff, to intervene in the political tussle. Prime Minister Gilani subsequently appeared on television during the early hours of March 16, 2009, to announce that Chief Justice Chaudhry and his colleagues would be restored to their judicial positions. Gilani apparently took into consideration Kayani’s views, the concerns expressed by the international community, and also the potentially destabilizing effects of continued violent protests in the country. He was, in many ways, in an untenable situation.

The PPP was, of course, humbled by this reversal. The party’s leadership invited the PML-N to rejoin the federal cabinet, noting that one of the issues that prompted it to resign in 2008 (namely, the removal of the chief justice) had been resolved. But, the leadership of the PML-N declined, citing the need for more progress on an 18th Amendment (to repeal the 17th) and the prosecution of Musharraf for treason. Well aware of its burgeoning

strength on the streets, the PML-N wasted no time in translating its extra-parliamentary power to further its political demands.

The Supreme Court, for its part, accepted a review petition submitted by the PPP, declaring that the pardon Nawaz Sharif received before his exile in 1999 was not confined to a simple “exemption from punishment.” It was, in fact, a full pardon and, as such, negated any effort to bar Sharif from holding elected office.³ Indeed, just two months after this petition was accepted, the Supreme Court ruled that every step taken by Musharraf during his November 2007 emergency was unconstitutional and thus illegal, prompting Sharif to again demand the prosecution of Musharraf for treason.⁴

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE MILITARY: TACKLING THE TALIBAN

Nawaz Sharif’s political stature was greatly enhanced, domestically, by the reinstatement of Chaudhry, but his surging political profile did not end there. Notwithstanding his status as an unelected politician throughout 2009, Sharif remained hugely influential in the context of several other important issues, including how best to tackle the Taliban in light of increasingly urgent remonstrations articulated by the U.S.

Tackling the Taliban in the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (Swat Valley)

U.S. commanders in Afghanistan were deeply concerned about the growing strength of Taliban forces, not only in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the border with Afghanistan but also in the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). Within PATA, the Malakand Division surrounding the Swat Valley (including Upper and Lower Dir, Shangla, Buner, and parts of

3. The Supreme Court also restored Shahbaz Sharif’s eligibility to hold office, thus effectively allowing him to resume his duties as chief minister of the Punjab after Governor’s Rule was lifted on March 28, 2009.

4. Unfortunately for Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistani army was well aware that a charge of treason (Article 6) could be used to implicate not only Musharraf but also scores of senior military “accomplices.” Even the king of Saudi Arabia intervened to remind Sharif that Musharraf had been provided with certain “guarantees” following his resignation in September 2008—guarantees the king himself intended to uphold. Indeed, just as Saudi Arabia had intervened to provide Sharif with a “safe haven” (e.g., exile) following his own ouster in 1999, Sharif was told that Musharraf would also receive “protection.” The charge of treason against Musharraf was eventually dropped.

Mardan) was a source of particular concern. This derived largely from the persistent tensions between the provincial government of the NWFP in Peshawar and the Pakistani army on how to handle a rebellion led by Maulana Sufi Mohammad and his Taliban-affiliated son-in-law, Maulana Qazi Fazlullah.

In 1994, after the Supreme Court declared that a colonial-era regulation known as the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR)—notorious for punishing whole tribes for infractions committed by individuals—could not be enforced in PATA, Sufi Mohammad pressed for a government commitment to enforce *shari'ah* (Islamic law) instead. His demands were articulated in the context of a proto-Taliban reform movement known as the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM, Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law), which, after several months of violent unrest obtained concessions endorsed by then-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and later by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999. These included the posting of special religious judges known as *qazis* to “oversee” the local government courts. This movement was severely disrupted, however, when Sufi Mohammad was captured and jailed in 2002 after leading several hundred supporters across the border to battle American forces in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Shortly after Sufi Mohammad’s imprisonment in 2002, his son-in-law Maulana Qazi Fazlullah sought to accelerate the push for *shari'ah*, teaming up with exiled Taliban forces in other parts of Pakistan to launch a devastating campaign of “reformist” violence throughout the Swat Valley. Over time, however, those living in Swat found that efforts to contain Fazlullah were ineffective; and, by the end of 2008, many worried that the valley, long a haven for tourists, would be lost forever to the Taliban. U.S. officials urged the Pakistani government and army to take swift action against Fazlullah, seeing his expanding influence as a simple extension of the Taliban movement based in Afghanistan and FATA. But, given widespread public opposition to the “collateral damage” caused by U.S. Predator drone strikes in FATA, the Pakistani army was reluctant to act too quickly against Fazlullah and his loyalists in an apparent extension of “America’s War.”

Desperate to avoid the cultural and political annihilation of their fellow citizens in Swat, however, politicians associated with the NWFP government—dominated by the secular Pakhtun-nationalist Awami National Party (ANP) since 2008—initiated a series of negotiations with Sufi Mohammad. In particular, the ANP agreed to reconsider a longstanding TNSM demand

that disputes in the Swat Valley be adjudicated exclusively by *qazis*. Appeals were to be heard by a so-called appellate *shariat* court based in Swat, as opposed to the provincial High Court in Peshawar. In fact, responding to persistent concerns regarding the manipulation of district-level courts by local political elites (including many large landowners affiliated with the provincial government), the ANP agreed to create what was, in effect, an island of legal exceptionalism in which Sufi Mohammad would enjoy considerable adjudicative autonomy and, with Fazlullah, widespread political control.

The ANP insisted that the provincial government would continue to control the appointment of local *qazis* while, at the same time, guaranteeing access to the provincial appellate courts. But Sufi Mohammad opposed this approach, arguing that no appeals would be permitted beyond the courts that he himself controlled. In any case, the ANP continued to wrestle with Sufi Mohammad about the precise configuration of Swat's "new" courts throughout March 2009. These negotiations, however, unraveled in April, when Fazlullah was overheard saying that he would not be bound by the terms of any settlement negotiated by his father-in-law.⁵

Fazlullah subsequently began moving his fighters into the Buner District, bordering the vital Tarbela Dam and the Shangla District, near the strategic Karakoram Highway. Two weeks later, Sufi Mohammad himself responded to the promulgation of a new regulation known as the Nizam-e-Adl (System of Justice) Regulation—in effect, the introduction of special "*qazi* courts" following from his negotiations with the ANP—with a set of highly unpopular statements dismissing the constitutional courts of Pakistan as irredeemably "un-Islamic." In fact, even as the ANP pressed ahead with the creation of a new appellate *shariat* court in Swat, Sufi Mohammad and Fazlullah were exposed as being entirely insincere—effectively using negotiations with the government as a ruse to paper over their contempt for the Constitution and their push to seize power by force. For the first time, the Pakistani public at large was provided with an opportunity to assess the Pakistani Taliban movement's apparent intentions of never laying down its arms en route to enforcing its own understanding of *shari'ah*—an understanding vividly captured in the televised flogging of an anonymous teenaged girl in April.

5. Iftikhar A. Khan, "Action Triggered by Taliban Plan to Take over Buner," *Dawn*, April 29, 2009, at <<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/action-triggered-by-taliban-plan-to-take-over-buner-949>>.

The collapse of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation amounted to a dramatic public relations victory for the Pakistan government, and by the end of April the army was urged to “tackle the Taliban” without further equivocation. On May 7, Prime Minister Gilani appeared on television to announce that the army had been authorized to take “decisive action” against the Taliban in the Swat Valley. He subsequently summoned an “all-party conference” to discuss this operation (codenamed Rah-e-Rast or The Right Path) with his colleagues in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament. But, even before this conference could begin, the emerging political landscape became abundantly clear. The PML-N, for instance, complained that it was not consulted before the army was authorized to begin its assault. Drawing attention to the well-publicized histrionics of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton shortly after Fazlullah launched his invasion of Buner, Nawaz Sharif accused Gilani of caving in to outside pressure and creating a humanitarian crisis with an estimated 1.3 million refugees simply to satisfy the Americans.

This familiar pattern of bitter partisan bickering was further complicated by sectarian tensions, with clerics of a Barelwi persuasion stepping forward to criticize the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation as a bid to reinforce what was, for them, an approach to Islam preferred by the Deobandi school of thought.⁶ During the first three weeks of May, several Barelwi leaders, in fact, began to combine their criticism of U.S. Predator drone attacks with a powerful critique of the ostensibly “Deobandi” Taliban and its assault on shrines that play such an important part in Barelwi spirituality.⁷

The extent to which public, political, and military opposition to the Taliban began to coalesce during late April, May, and June should not be obscured by this sectarian dimension. In fact, by the end of June, the state had regained control over more than 90% of Buner and, by the end of July, the army controlled most of the towns in Swat. Indeed, as the army moved forward—with considerable support from the public at large—Taliban factions

6. Both Sunni, the Barelwi and Deobandi schools of thought take opposing views of several different features of religious practice. Shrine complexes are particularly notable in this regard; whereas Barelwis often incorporate local shrines within their religious practice, Deobandis tend to abjure this.

7. This sectarian critique drew attention to the religious identities of prominent members of the ruling party as well, including those of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Religious Affairs Minister Hamid Saeed Kazmi, and Prime Minister Gilani (all Barelwis), and President Zardari (a Shi’a). In fact, few Pakistanis were surprised when the leader of a prominent Barelwi *madrasa* (religious school) in Lahore—a well-known critic of the Deobandi Taliban by the name of Mufti Sarfaraz Naeemi—was assassinated by a suicide bomber in June.

in other parts of the country began to fragment. Local Taliban commanders like Qari Zainuddin and Haji Turkestan Bhattani rose up to challenge the powerful head of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, The Association of Pakistan Taliban), Baitullah Mehsud, based in FATA.

Tackling the Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (South Waziristan)

Following its successful assault on the Swat Valley, many argued that the Pakistani army should have pressed on directly into FATA, specifically into South Waziristan where Baitullah Mehsud was headquartered. But, even after Mehsud was killed by an American Predator drone strike during the first week of August, the army demurred. In fact, it was a further two months later, following several brash and extremely deadly suicide attacks, before the Pakistani army intervened by launching Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation) to tackle the Taliban in South Waziristan in mid-October.⁸

Baitullah Mehsud's death on August 5 sparked a protracted succession struggle, with initial reports of internecine fighting between rival commanders Hakimullah Mehsud (no relation to Baitullah) and Waliur Rahman, leading some to believe that one or both had been killed. Three weeks later, however, Taliban spokesman Maulvi Faqir announced that Hakimullah had been selected as the TTP's new leader. On October 6, Hakimullah and Waliur Rahman appeared in photos along with long-time Hakimullah associate and former Baitullah rival Qari Hussain Ahmed (widely known for his role in training Taliban suicide bombers), in a show of unity and resolve.

In fact, by the time the army launched Operation Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan, the configuration of forces and the definition of the enemy facing the Pakistani state in FATA had been considerably refined. On the one hand, the army sought to eliminate those committed to attacking the state of Pakistan, including Hakimullah Mehsud and a wide range of militant and sectarian organizations based in southern Punjab.⁹ On the other hand, the

8. These attacks included, among others, numerous bombs in Peshawar and across the NWFP, an explosion at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, the destruction of a 17th-century shrine devoted to a famous Pashto poet (Rahman Baba), and an audacious attack on the general headquarters of the Pakistani army in Rawalpindi.

9. Many of these militant organizations, for example, Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure), Jaish-e-Mohammad (Army of Mohammad), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of [Haq Nawaz] Jhangvi), and Sipah-e-Sahaba (Army of [the Prophet's] Companions), were involved in various suicide attacks. In

army sought to protect those groups that chose to refrain from attacking the Pakistani state while engaging U.S. forces in Afghanistan. These groups included those headed by Waziri tribesmen Maulvi Nazir in South Waziristan and Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan, as well as legendary Taliban fighters with close ties to al-Qaeda like Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani. Indeed, one fighter noted in an interview with the BBC that although “the operation in South Waziristan is the government’s right, the jihad against America . . . [will] continue.”¹⁰

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY: ACCOMMODATING INTERNATIONAL AID

The epidemic of violence sweeping across Pakistan throughout 2009 left many political observers deeply concerned, but ordinary citizens in Pakistan were equally, if not more, concerned about their country’s deteriorating economic situation. As with people around the world, Pakistanis’ concerns were closely tied to the devastating effects of the global financial crisis, particularly its effect on price stability.

In April, a special group of donor countries known collectively as “The Friends of Democratic Pakistan” met in Tokyo to pledge more than \$5.5 billion in an effort to prevent the government of Pakistan from defaulting on its foreign debt obligations. Unfortunately, this rescue package was tied to strict International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions in an effort to enforce greater fiscal discipline, and, in due course, these rules simply reinforced the economic and political dislocation they were ostensibly introduced to avoid. The IMF, for its part, expected the government to expand its tax net, targeting large landowners and local corporations to reduce its enormous budget deficits. But, in practice, the lingering strength of large landowners in the National Assembly led the government to embrace a course of “regressive” taxation instead. This began with the introduction of a so-called carbon tax targeting petrol and other basic fuels—a tax that was passed without opposition as part of the national budget in June before being challenged in court by allies of the PML-N in July. This reaction—channeled

the past, some of these organizations fought in Kashmir against Indian occupation, whereas others were known for their militant sectarianism.

10. Syed Shoaib Hasan, “A Very Strange Taliban Burial,” BBC News Online, June 25, 2009, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8118373.stm>.

through the Supreme Court—threatened to deprive the state of Rs 120 billion (\$1.5 billion).

Zardari intervened to avoid a fiscal catastrophe by withdrawing the existing “tax” and replacing it, through an executive decree, with a “petroleum development levy” instead. This levy was subjected to yet another round of opposition launched by the PML-N. In fact the PML-N argued that Zardari had simply used the power of the executive to avoid an official stay order issued by Chief Justice Chaudhry. In other words, the party argued, Zardari was guilty of contempt for the chief justice himself—a familiar accusation that many members of the PML-N were only too eager to exploit.

In the meantime, however, riots broke out across the country in late July to protest persistent energy shortages. These protests were revived following an increase in the price of oil, once again in keeping with IMF-mandated reductions in existing state subsidies. In September, 19 people were killed in Karachi, in the province of Sindh, during a stampede prompted by offers of free wheat. Shortly thereafter, reinstated Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif intervened to reduce the price of both wheat and sugar with a raft of subsidies throughout the Punjab, prompting Chaudhry to encourage a similar pattern of fixed prices for sugar in markets nationwide.

The wages of police officers throughout the Punjab were doubled in an effort to respond to ever increasing levels of terrorist-related violence, but this led other public sector employees to demand parallel inflation-indexed increases to handle their own rising costs of living. The PPP found itself politically outmaneuvered in every case. On the one hand, the PPP’s commitment to an extension of “America’s war” was perceived as leading to the need for additional police protection. On the other, the party’s commitment to strict IMF conditions was blamed for preventing the central government in Islamabad from matching the much-needed subsidies introduced by the PML-N in the Punjab.

CONCLUSION

When U.S. Secretary of State Clinton arrived in Pakistan on October 28, she hoped to trumpet the Kerry-Lugar Bill, recently signed into law by President Barack Obama, and its \$7.5 billion five-year plan to bolster non-military “democratic” development assistance to Pakistan. In fact, she hoped to reinforce a pattern of close bilateral cooperation based on a joint commitment

to address “the threat of terrorist violence” worldwide. Instead, Clinton found herself at the receiving end of several rather pointed complaints. What she found was a seething military establishment distressed by U.S. aid conditionalities that threatened to undermine well-established patterns of exclusive military control over strategic decision making in Pakistan. Clinton also encountered a hostile political environment sharply divided along specific partisan (PPP vs. PML-N) lines, an educated middle class profoundly suspicious of American activities in the region (above all, “extrajudicial” killings by unmanned Predator drones), and an impoverished majority still groaning under the weight of entrenched “traditional” elites. Clinton was astonished to find that although her arrival coincided with a car bomb that killed nearly 120 innocent civilians in Peshawar, her visit was overwhelmed with frustrations targeting the U.S.

In fact, in the wake of the Musharraf-Bush era, Clinton was reminded that, for many Pakistanis holding government positions, the biggest threats to Pakistan were still seen as those based in Washington (or, if not there, then in New Delhi). For instance, when a suicide bomber affiliated with a militant organization known as Jundullah (Soldiers of God) killed 40 Iranians in southeastern Iran in October, Iranian officials accused American intelligence agents of supporting sectarian (e.g., anti-Shi’a) militants based in Pakistan. In contrast, Pakistani officials blamed New Delhi, citing concerns that Indian intelligence agencies were involved in supporting regional Baloch insurgents to keep Islamabad off-balance.

Clinton also learned that Pakistani officials were deeply concerned about India’s presumed efforts—so far unchecked by the U.S.—to “encircle” Pakistan. Many saw this as a multi-pronged campaign, operating from the east, via diplomatic pressure following the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai;¹¹ from the south, via support for militant forces in Balochistan; and especially from the west, via enormous infrastructural investments in Afghanistan. These included pledges totalling more than \$1.2 billion for hydroelectric dams, power lines, hospitals, roads, and schools. Clinton discovered that it was impossible to understand Pakistan’s posture on the war in Afghanistan without thorough appreciation for the extent to which Pakistanis sought

11. In this context, India was dismayed by the release of Maulana Hafiz Saeed by Pakistan in June. Saeed is the leader of an organization known as Jama’at-ud-Dawa (Party of Proselytization), the charitable parent body of Lashkar-e-Taiba, which was widely accused of planning the 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai.

to check the influence of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his allies in New Delhi and Washington.

Pakistan took important steps in 2009 to resist the growing Taliban threat within its borders but, in the course of doing so, the threat metastasized and Pakistani politicians and citizens alike disagreed about the best way to respond to it. In fact, it is this pattern of intense political disagreement that is likely to matter most in the future, particularly as the Taliban begin to spread out beyond PATA and FATA to Quetta, Karachi, and Lahore. How will ongoing efforts to “tackle the Taliban” be addressed in Pakistan, including in its major cities? How will these efforts intersect with long-simmering ethnic and sectarian animosities? And, finally, how might governmental policies differ if Nawaz Sharif returns to power? These are questions that Pakistan will be forced to address during the coming months and years. Much will depend on the ways in which they are understood, owned, and answered.

Postscript

The final months of 2009 brought precious little relief from the various crises—political, military, and economic—affecting Pakistan. In November, Zardari hoped to formalize the terms of the NRO with a parliamentary order, only to find that key coalition partners within the Parliament itself such as the ANP from the NWFP and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM, United National Movement) from Sindh refused to support him. And, on December 16, the Supreme Court struck down the NRO altogether, raising concerns that Zardari—along with 8,000 other politicians and bureaucrats—would see their corruption cases, which were temporarily quashed by the NRO, eventually revived. As president, Zardari insisted that he was immune from prosecution because of additional layers of protection but, as PPP chairman, he called upon several ministers to resign, even as they prepared to fight their own corruption cases in the courts. The PML-N, for its part, continued to press for the repeal of the 17th Amendment—in every sense a push to further limit the powers of Pakistan’s (severely weakened) president. This matter—the potential perusal of prosecution against Zardari—has yet to fully play itself out.

In the meantime, President Obama unveiled a new strategy for America’s war against the Taliban. Additional troops were sent to Afghanistan and greater pressure was placed on Pakistan, including an authorization to conduct increased drone strikes. Pakistan opposed this plan, fearing that

additional U.S. troops in Afghanistan would push the Taliban across the border into Pakistan even as anti-American sentiments within the country were inflamed by further drone strikes. The U.S., however, pressed on.

In December, after several years of negotiations, a special commission known as the National Finance Commission (NFC) announced a new formula to divide the country's resources between and among Pakistan's provinces. Many expected this new formula to reduce the disenchantment of Pakistan's less densely populated provinces, including Balochistan where a popular resistance movement continued to stress lingering economic and political demands. Yet, political leaders in the provincial capital of Quetta rejected as insufficient a further package of reforms promising jobs for Balochistan-based youths and investigating numerous cases of "extrajudicial disappearance" at the hands of the Pakistani army. Few expect the tensions in Balochistan to be resolved anytime soon.