

Opinion

Pakistan's problems now ours

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In a prescient article forewarning what would become the most crucial issue in determining the Canadian mission's success in Afghanistan, Stewart Bell made a persuasive case in 2004 for Pakistan as "the world's most dangerous country."

Four years later, in January 2008, following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, an *Economist* editorial argued that democracy offered the best chance for bringing stability to what the magazine called "the world's most dangerous place."

In our analysis, Pakistan belongs to a group of second-tier countries, which though not being outright failures, are particularly vulnerable in certain aspects of "stateness." Our fragility rankings (www.carleton.ca/cifp) have ranked Pakistan as one of the top 20 fragile states in the world in most years during the past two decades. Most analysts believe that the country's political and security situation has now been severely worsened by the floods.

Though the floods have not received the same media attention in the West as the Haitian earthquake or Asian tsunami, there is cause for concern—not so much because of the slow response from the international community, but because the implications of the floods run deep. Failure to assist the millions affected by flooding will mean that the Taliban and extremists will continue to win over a population in distress, especially



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as they fill the vacuum left by a very weak Pakistani government.

As Pakistan's inability to control internal conflict, environmental degradation and a highly unequal society increase over time, the legitimacy of the government continues to erode and challenges from within increase. This latest disaster only serves to further undermine the current regime's legitimacy, which will be buttressed by an increase in military control since the military is a key provider of humanitarian aid in Pakistan.

Indeed, aid to Pakistan has historically been used to shore up a centralized authority structure, whether it was perceived to be legitimate or not. That reinforced authority

structure, a kind of bureaucratic authoritarianism, has been in place since the 1950s.

On the other hand, the risks that Pakistan poses to its neighbors have been shaped by its historic rivalry with India. Pakistan's behavior, specifically in reference to Kashmir, was, until it acquired its own nuclear weapons, formed by the need to counterbalance Indian military superiority.

Beyond Kashmir, the news does not get any better. In addition to supporting separatist movements and terrorist attacks in India, Pakistan has provided sanctuary, training and arms to other hot beds of conflict throughout Asia, including Sri Lanka, southern Thailand and, of course, to the mujahideen in Afghanistan during the war against Russian occupation.

More fundamental analyses suggest that the risks Pakistan poses to its neighbors lay in the need to externalize internal tensions through territorial expansion and conquest—what MIT Professor Myron Weiner called many years ago "The Macedonian Syndrome."

This argument is based on the assumption that the only way to hold together an ethnically fractionalized and artificial country like Pakistan is through strong-arm leadership. The key attributes are a highly centralized government, heavy investment in the military security apparatus and a very weak middle class.

In essence, Pakistan's problems are to a large extent self-created and will only worsen with the flooding. The state of Pakistan is a risk to its own peoples.

An analysis of the country's underlying risk factors using our indexing methodology shows that it faces significant performance challenges in all but a few of its core state functions. Of particular concern are its governance and human development scores, low even when compared to others in the region. It is both weak and unstable and ranks as the 3rd most fragile state in Asia. It is particularly weak in authority—ranked 4th in Asia by our measurements because of security challenges presented by various armed militant groups, despite receiving massive military aid from the United States since the 9/11 attacks.

Further, the government has been unable to extend control throughout the country and faces secessionist movements from tribal and militant groups. State legitimacy is also problematic as attempts to retain control of the government and army draw protests from numerous quarters. The country has had an average of over 100 bombings a year over the last several years.

Capacity is also a high-risk area. The capacity of the state to respond to the needs of the population is weak. Although growth rates in per capita terms have been mostly positive since the 1990s, at an average of nearly two per cent, poverty remains a growing problem.

According to the latest UN Human Development Report, 60 per cent of Pakistan's population lives on less than \$2 a

day, and 23 per cent on less than \$1.25 a day. The country is ranked in the medium human development category, only a few notches above Angola, Madagascar and Haiti.

Pakistan faces a range of development challenges in the areas of education, health and respect for human rights, despite receiving more than US\$44 billion in foreign aid since 1960 (our calculations using World Bank data). Pakistan will most likely not meet its MDGs in primary education and gender equality or child and maternal mortality.

A recent article in the *New York Times* reported that less than two per cent of Pakistan's population pays income tax, so the country's revenue from taxes is one of the lowest in the world.

The absence of an efficient tax system means that the rich (who include the politicians that make rules about taxes) are largely untaxed, thus preventing any meaningful redistribution of income or creation of a fiscal pact where government has to be accountable to its taxpayers. Why tax and be accountable when aid, despite being volatile, keeps flowing in year after year?

Beyond immediate humanitarian assistance, Canada and its allies need to articulate a clear long-term strategy for Pakistan. As Canadians, we should have recognized this fact eight years ago when we brokered a deal with Pakistan's leaders to assist us in our war in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, due to our inexperience and perhaps short-sightedness, we have only now come to realize the depth of the problems we face. The Manley report devoted two short references to Pakistan, a clear sign that Canadian policy makers underestimated Pakistan's importance and vulnerability.

Now Pakistan's problems have become our problems in so many different but interlinked ways. We have no long-term coherent policy for a state sliding into the abyss.

Obviously now may not be the time to discuss democratization. But in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, that was precisely what the Americans put on the agenda.

Is democracy a viable alternative for bringing stability to Pakistan? Though the country has flirted with democracy since independence, there is little reason to believe it will be a panacea. An opening up through democratization would create opportunities for increased challenges from within and the possibility that fundamentalists might win elections.

No country, let alone Canada, is in a position to "fix" Pakistan. These changes must come from within. But there are good reasons for hastening and widening the integrated regional approach to stability called the Dubai Process that Canada supports. Such an approach requires a frank assessment of how Pakistan and Afghanistan (and India) are historically interlinked, how Pakistan has historically been the source of much of the instability in the region, and recognition that the current strategy on Pakistan is not working.

Most importantly, it means understanding that Pakistan's internal problems, of which the weak response to the floods are symptomatic, are fundamentally linked to core problems in governance and human development.

Canada's immediate goal should be to assist the Pakistani government. But over and above the immediate threats in the form of disease and health, there are high-risk areas where Canada should invest. This understanding begins with an effective broad-based strategic plan that can bring positive change to the world's most dangerous country.

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