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Implications for U.S. Policy

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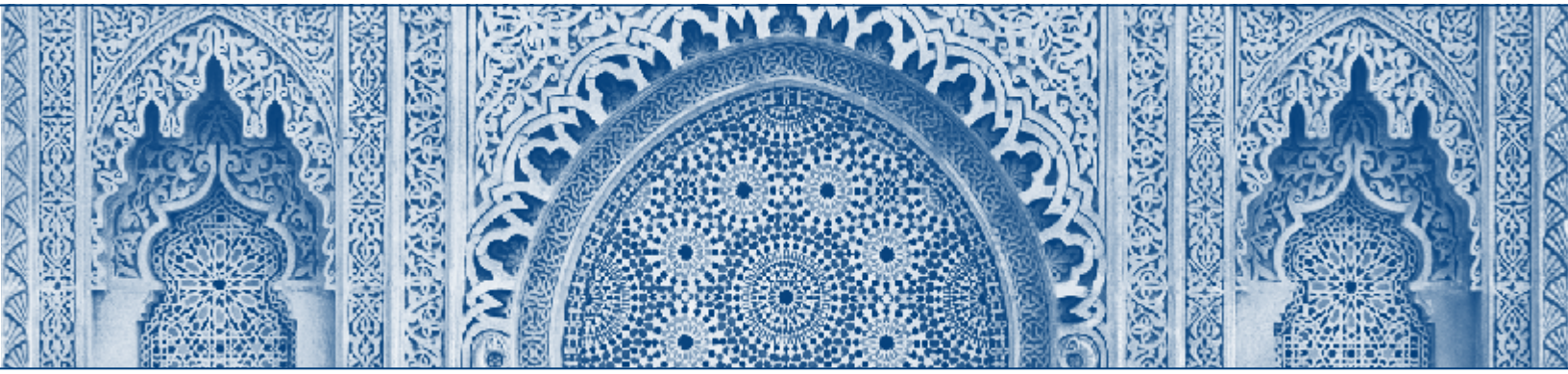

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PROSPECTS OF YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN PAKISTAN:
Implications for U.S. Policy

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Summary

Pakistan exhibits symptoms that point to high potential for youth radicalization. The situation is marked by a poor education system stratified along socio-economic lines and disparate economic opportunities across segments of society. These warning signals increase the likelihood for young members of society being lured towards extremist causes. Moreover, the presence of an extremist infrastructure, the impeccable organizational discipline and widespread social networks of Pakistan's Islamic political and militant outfits, a failure of the moderate forces to deliver credible results, and myopic U.S. policies further enhance Islamist influence.

While Pakistan's bloated youth cohort and a noticeable desire among young men to attain education and find respectable livelihoods could act as an agent for positive change in ideal circumstances, a proactive and multi-faceted policy approach is required to generate desirable outcomes. Given Pakistan's strategic importance and its potential to disrupt South Asian peace, the international community has a high stake in ensuring a positive turnaround. Key policy interventions required in the immediate future, while maintaining a broader objective, must specifically target the younger generation. Youth specific interventions by the U.S. should include:

- Enhancing the quality of Pakistan's public education rather than retaining a disproportionate focus on the madrassah system.
- Intervening in terms of the educational content, with modest agenda of simply returning the textbook contents to the pre-Islamization period.
- Making socio-economic aid conditional upon Pakistan's ability to spread benefits to the masses instead of tying it solely to terrorism.
- Revising U.S. visa and immigration policies for young Pakistanis in order to provide them with a constructive outlet, perhaps through a formal protocol that allows disproportional access to young Pakistani citizens belonging to lower socio-economic classes.
- Consciously attempting to expose young Pakistanis to U.S. culture by reopening information and cultural centers throughout Pakistan.

Broader measures by the U.S. that bear relevance to young Pakistanis should include:

- Playing a constructive role in nudging India and Pakistan towards normalization. Barring normalization, Pakistan will be tempted to maintain a link with extremists, which in turn will allow the militant enclave to continue operating and recruiting young men from Pakistani society. In essence, the state's support to

extremism will have to cease before the specter of youth violence can be laid to rest.

- U.S. officials need to be sensitive to the conservative nature of Pakistani society and their diplomatic jargon needs to be tailored accordingly. The language of western liberalism must not be used to communicate with Pakistanis. For example, by conflating the notions of conservatism and extremism (which carry entirely different connotations for Pakistanis) and dismissing both, the U.S. inadvertently supports 'secular' ideals in a country where an overwhelming majority abhors them. This leads to further resentment against the U.S., which is in turn exploited by extremists to win recruits.

- Exhibiting patience with regard to its Afghan policy and understanding that any efforts to produce short-term results risk a social implosion within Pakistan.

Pakistan's Youth as Agents of Radicalization

The specter of a radicalized Pakistan akin to the Taliban's Afghanistan is beginning to raise serious alarm. The past year was especially troubling as pockets of Pakistani territory periodically fell under militant control. For the first time, militants showed the propensity to move down from the historically lawless tribal belt in the country's north-west to capture settled areas in the hinterland and depose the state's law enforcement agencies.[1] Even apart from such organized efforts, incidents of extremist violence have been rising constantly. In 2007, the number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan was well over 1,000.[2] Terrorist incidents were twice as much as the previous year while the number of fatalities quadrupled as compared to 2006.[3] The fact that the perpetrators of these attacks are almost exclusively young males in their upper teens or twenties has put Pakistan's youth in the limelight and underscored the urgency to address the needs of this segment of society.[4]

The discourse on Pakistan's extremist problem is finally moving away from a fixation on the current wave of attacks and farfetched concerns about a violent extremist takeover in the country. Notwithstanding the temporary territorial gains by militants, the real danger—as objective analysts are increasingly pointing out—is the prospect of gradual permeation of the radical message over a prolonged period within the society at large. Indeed, it will be the orientation of the youth two decades from now that will determine whether Pakistan is a moderate, progressive Islamic state with a medium-sized economy, or an ideologically fixated country that supports a radical vision. Should the extremists manage to muster support from a large enough section of young Pakistanis, the traditionally conservative, yet anti-extremist outlook among the populous may well be transformed into a radical one.

The current demographic patterns of the state make the role of the upcoming generation vital. The size

[1] Militants took over a large part of the Swat valley in the North West Frontier Province in November 2007. An organized militant cohort supported by a local radical cleric managed to neutralize all paramilitary resistance and was only driven back through a concerted military operation. See Mushtaq Yusufzai and Musa Khankhel, "Most of Swat Under Military Control," *The News*, December 1, 2007, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=11437>.

[2] In 2006, 657 attacks claimed 900 lives. In 2007, the total number of incidents was over 1300. For a complete list of terrorist attacks in the country, see "Pakistan Timeline- Year 2007," *South Asia Terrorism Portal,* < http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/timeline/index.html>.

[3] Eric Schmitt, "Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan Rising, U.S. Reports," *International Herald Tribune*, May 1, 2008, < http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/05/01/america/01terror.php>.

[4] The UN defines youth as the cohort between ages 15 and 24. I take children to be all those below the age of 15. While we are not concerned with retaining a stringent age restriction on our conception of youth, the data presented is based on the official definition.

of Pakistan's population between ages 15-24 is estimated at 36 million. A further 58 million individuals are below the age of 15.[5] Coupled together, these account for nearly 60 percent of Pakistan's total population, a proportion that is only second to Yemen. Pakistan also has the rather rare attribute of having a male cohort that is larger than its female counterpart, an important fact given that the literature on youth radicalization is focused almost solely on males.[6] Moreover, while fertility rates in the country have decreased modestly, the current rate of 3.8 births per female is still alarmingly high and will carry Pakistan's youth bulge well beyond 2025.[7] Even in 2030, Pakistan's population under the age of 24 is projected to be 51.4 percent of the total.[8] With such a demographic trajectory, a move by young Pakistanis towards radicalization could allow the ultra-right to gain support for its militant agenda from among the Pakistani populace.

Table 1: International comparison of youth (including children) as percentage of overall population

Country	Number of individuals below 24 years (Thousands)	As % of total population
Yemen	14,225	67.5
Pakistan	93,715	59.3
Bangladesh	85,093	55.5
Egypt	39,437	54.1
U.S.A.	105,176	35.1
United Kingdom	18,667	31.0
Japan	31,869	24.9

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat; World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision; World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

Pakistan already exhibits the presence of indicators- the *warning signals*- that are known to increase the likelihood of youth radicalization. Broadly, these fall under the rubric of socio-economic deprivation. In addition, aspects that are usually considered *safety valves*, namely, the opportunity for migration for large segments of the population and an enabling role of the state, have actually hampered the situation further (we refer to these as *exacerbating factors*). While positive attributes such as the high desire for education and employment among the younger segment of the population and the largely anti-extremist outlook of mainstream society ought not to be ignored, the situation represents a ticking time bomb. The U.S. has a key role to play, but the current U.S. policy focus is misplaced and needs reorientation in order to produce tangible gains.

[5] The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2007*, CD-Rom, Washington, D.C., 2007.
[6] Official statistics for 2006 put the male population at approximately 81 million and the female population at 75 million. See Federal Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Statistical Yearbook 2006* (Islamabad, 2007), p.309.
[7] Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2006-07 (*Islamabad, 2007), p.190.
[8] United Nations, "World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision," Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>; United Nations, "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision," Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

The Warning Signals

While there is no dominant, theoretical model universally applicable, the variables that increase the potential for mass radicalization of young men are well known.[9] Overwhelming majorities of radicalized youth are found to have a strong sense of being discriminated against and are alienated from the larger society. This in turn is believed to be a function of socio-economic deprivation. Poor education standards, lack of economic opportunities, and unequal access to avenues for social and economic mobilization are usually present in countries that undergo radicalization among the young. The problem is often accentuated in societies which exhibit cultural polarization.[10] Unfortunately, Pakistani society displays virtually all these symptoms.

Education

Pakistan's educational anomaly lies not in the macro-level education statistics or access to education, which have undergone significant improvement,[11] but in the polarization of the education system. The education sector consists of three parallel systems stratified along socio-economic classes. The madrassah system, arguably the most publicized aspect of the country's education structure, largely caters to children from the poorest segment of society. The radicalization potential of the madrassah sub-sector has been highly exaggerated, and only small minorities of students are exposed to radical preaching. However, even mainstream seminaries retain a focus on religious education and thus end up producing graduates with narrow-minded conservative (though not necessarily radical) ideological bases.[12]

The Urdu-medium public education system caters to over 60 percent of school-going children, being 90 percent of the total child population of the country.[13] The majority of public school students belong to the lower-middle to middle socio-economic

[9] Women by and large are excluded from the global discourse on youth radicalization, a bias which certainly holds for Pakistan to date. Pakistani females have not been involved in militant extremism. While there are undercurrents that may lure women in the future—this has already happened in Iraq—men are likely to remain at the core of extremist activity in the country for the most part. This belief is born out of the conservative cultural traditions in Pakistan that make women less accessible to extremists for active recruiting and the patriarchal structure which curtails independent decision making on their part.

[10] For a brief overview of the literature presenting this line of argument, see Henrik Urdal, "The Demographics of Political Violence: Youth Bulges, Insecurity and Conflict" in Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet (eds), *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2007), pp.90-100.

[11] For a sense of the trend in Pakistan's educational performance over the years, see the annually released *Statistical Yearbook*.

[12] For a revisionist view on madrassah education that corrects past misperceptions of the importance of this form of education, see Tahir Andrabi et al., "Religious School Enrollment in Pakistan: A Look at the Data," KSG Working Paper No. RWP05-024*, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University;* Policy Research Working Paper No. 3521*, World Bank*, 2005; also see, C. Christine Fair, "Islamic Education in Pakistan," *U.S. Institute for Peace,* trip report, <http://www.usip.org/events/2006/trip_report.pdf>.

[13] Approximately 6.4 million children of school-going age never attend school in Pakistan. "6.463m children don't go to school in Pakistan," *Daily Times,* December 1, 2006, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C12%5C01%5Cstory_1-12-2006_pg11_5>.

strata. The quality of education in the public sector has deteriorated sharply over the past two decades. While there are important provincial differences (Punjab's performance has been relatively better), even the regions with the best indicators conform to the deteriorating trend. Today, there is virtually no quality control for teachers or on student learning outcomes.[14] Moreover, Pakistani textbooks were re-oriented during General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization decade in the 1980s and currently present Pakistan as an inherently besieged state that is under threat from a Hindu India on the one hand and an anti-Islamic West on the other.[15] While apologists correctly point out that no material in the text books explicitly glorifies the violent form of jihad, an inherently paranoid outlook does make the younger generation more susceptible to Islamist ideologies.

The elite have all but abandoned the public education system and have chosen to send their children exclusively to [English-speaking] private sector schools, which provide high quality education. While these schools are also bound by the state to follow similar syllabi in subjects such as Pakistan Studies, a number of them have considerably altered their style of teaching and now encourage objectivity and creative thinking among students. Unfortunately, private schools have a stringent socio-economic screening process which confines their access only to the elite.[16]

The socio-economic stratification inherent in this tri-partite system has resulted in significant differences in the outlook of students across the spectrum. Madrassah students seem to be pro-jihad, an outlook they justify in their interpretation of Islam. Students of Urdu-medium schools are relatively more tolerant and less attuned to the idea of jihad, but still maintain greater acceptance of these phenomena than do students of elite private schools. Children of the elite, however, are highly dismissive of their Urdu medium counterparts and intolerant of young rural men, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds or with madrassah backgrounds. A sizable segment from within the elite schools is attuned to the western way of life and considers itself superior and more progressive than the rest. This segment has gradually isolated itself from the majority of Pakistani young adults and remains completely oblivious to the latter's experiences.[17]

Extensive conversations with young men from across the educational spectrum reveal their starkly

Table 2: Number of students and educational institutions by type

	Number of schools				Enrollment			
	Public	Private	Madrassahs	Total	Public	Private	Madrassahs	Total
Gross enrollment	151,740	76,040	14,680	242,460	21,258,180	12,121,390	586,600	24,829,380
% by school type	62.5	31.5	6.0	100	62.6	35.7	1.7	100

Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics, *Pakistan National Education Census 2005*, <http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/publications/nec2005/nec2005.html>.

[14] For the most part, the teaching body largely comprises of individuals who have been unable to secure other employment and use teaching as a temporary option of last resort. Moreover, since virtually all public school teachers are themselves products of the same system, their own skills are circumspect. For a discussion of the apathy of the teacher training and capacity building framework, see Academy for Educational Development, "Performance Gap Analysis and Training Needs Assessment of Teacher Training Institutions," *Pakistan Teacher Education and Professional Development Program*, 2006.

[15] For a detailed account of the bias in Pakistani education curricula, see A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim (eds), "The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Text-books in Pakistan," project report, *Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan*, 2004, pp.9-72.

[16] For one, the financial cost of private education is substantial. In addition, the majority of these schools have screening criteria whereby the family background of each interviewed student is carefully studied and children of the relatively poor seldom admitted.

[17] These views have been reported by Tariq Rehman in his seminal study on attitudes of youth in Pakistan. See "Pluralism and Tolerance in Pakistani Society: Attitudes of Pakistani Students Towards the Religious 'Other'," http://www.tariqrahman.net/language/Pluralism%20and%20Intolerance%20in%20Pakistani%20Society.htm Presented at conference on pluralism at the Aga Khan University-Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilization on October 25, 2003.

different orientations. Madrassah students are much more amenable to Osama Bin Laden's vision and consider him a hero who took on the immoral West. They often point to the Taliban's Afghanistan and Iran as model states. Students from the public schools, who are perhaps most representative of mainstream society, idealize individuals such as Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, famous Pakistani sportsmen, and legendary Muslim historical figures. On probing further, however, a large proportion does inevitably mention admiration for figures like Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein for their anti-West outlook. Products of the private schools share Jinnah as a model, but talk more fondly of Hollywood stars, personalities in the arts and theater, international sportsmen, and the like.[18] An overwhelming majority of private school-educated youth seem to view Turkey as a model for Pakistan to replicate. Rather interestingly, hardly anyone ever points to any Western country as worth emulating.

The divergence in outlooks and, more importantly, the disdain among children of the elite towards their other counterparts are extremely dangerous, given that Islamic militancy and pro-jihad campaigns in Pakistan retain a strong element of class conflict. Rehman (2003) argues that the idea of haves versus have nots is present in the jihadi propaganda of virtually all Islamist outfits.[19] Radical youth who join these campaigns feel a strong sense of discrimination or marginalization, exacerbated by their virtual isolation from other segments of society.

Economic Opportunities

One of the greatest achievements of the Musharraf regime was a macroeconomic turnaround. Musharraf has led the country from a state of virtual bankruptcy at the turn of the century to a robust GDP growth ranging between 5-7 percent over the past seven years.[20] From the perspective of radicalization of the younger generation, however, macroeconomic indicators reveal little. Indeed, unless distribution patterns are efficient and the trickle down effect is realized in an economy, a small minority gains disproportionably from such economic growth. This is exactly what has happened in Pakistan.[21]

Despite the robust GDP growth, inequality, arguably a more important indicator with regard to youth radicalization, has increased. The ratio of the highest to the lowest income quintiles has jumped from 3.76 in 2001 to 4.15 in 2005 and further to 4.2 in 2005-06.[22] Since poor households in Pakistan tend to have a higher number of children on average, especially in rural areas, this implies that an exceptionally large number of young men and women are being forced to live below or around the poverty line. Furthermore, at least one tenth of the rural communities do not even have access to basic facilities.[23] These are the ultra-poor whose children seem destined to have a grim future. In light of the fact that the richest 20 percent of the population are continuing to gain, and possess virtually all luxuries, the sense of alienation among the poor young men is not surprising.

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[18] I have conducted a series of random informal discussions with students from various backgrounds over the past two years in the city of Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, and rural areas in Swat, NWFP. The discussions were not meant to be rigorous and respondents were not selected through any formal methodology.

[19] Rehman, "Pluralism and Intolerance."

[20] Range is calculated from State Bank of Pakistan's data on real GDP which is available at <http://www.sbp.org.pk/ecodata/GDP_table.pdf>.

[21] Shahid Javed Burki talks about economic maldistribution in "Arithmetic of discontent," *Dawn*, December 11, 2007, <http://www.dawn.com/2007/12/11/op.htm>.

[22] Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2007-08*, 2008, p.218.

[23] Population Council, "Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-02: A National Representative Survey," project sponsored by UNICEF, 2002, p.130.

Table 3: Gini Coefficient and Consumption Shares by Quintiles

	2000-01			2004-05			2005-06		
	Urban	**Rural**	**Pakistan**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Pakistan**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Pakistan**
Gini Coefficient	0.3227	0.236	**0.2752**	0.3388	0.2519	**0.2976**	0.349	0.2462	**0.3018**
Consumption Share by Quintile									
Quintile 1	5.3	12.8	**10.1**	4.8	12.6	**9.5**	4.5	13.5	**9.6**
Quintile 2	8.1	16.9	**13.7**	7.6	17.1	**13.2**	8.2	16.8	**13.1**
Quintile 3	12.1	19.5	**16.8**	11.6	19.7	**16.4**	11.1	20.1	**16.2**
Quintile 4	19.4	22.4	**21.3**	18.3	23.0	**21.4**	17.8	23	**20.8**
Quintile 5	55.1	28.4	**38.0**	57.7	27.6	**39.4**	58.4	26.6	**40.3**
Ratio of Highest to Lowest	10.40	2.22	**3.76**	12.02	2.19	**4.15**	12.98	1.97	**4.2**

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Economic Survey 2007-08, 2008.

The rising inequality manifests itself in the high level of underemployment[24] for the young from lower socio-economic classes. While the growing economy has expanded the labor market, and the unemployment rate has declined to an impressive 5.32 percent, the improvement is unable to keep up with the size of the youth cohort.[25] Consequently, the majority of non-elite young men can only find relatively menial jobs.[26] Ever since the donor-driven economic structural adjustment programs took effect in the 1990s, the public sector's capacity to accommodate the younger generation has been severely constrained.[27] Formal bans on fresh recruitment in major public functionaries have become commonplace. Additionally, the system has become inherently corrupt and the few openings that do become available are rarely awarded on merit. Children of the poor, with generally little access to the corridors of power and already disadvantaged due to the poor skill set developed in public schools, are invariably the first ones to be denied these prized positions.

The private sector, on the other hand, has expanded tremendously in recent years and is responsible for much of the macroeconomic growth. Pakistan's telecommunication sector, for instance, is one of the fastest growing in the world. Tremendous investment has also been made in the textile sector, the country's major foreign export earner. Rather ironically, however, the combination of the private sector's growth and a virtual breakdown of the public sector act, to increase the inequality in opportunities for graduates of public versus private schools. Private sector firms solicit employees with diverse exposures, a broad knowledge base, good language

[24] Underemployment here is used to refer to the provision for performing menial jobs with low remuneration for individuals otherwise qualified to undertake jobs requiring much higher skill levels.
[25] Ministry of Finance, *Economic Survey 2007-08*, p.202.
[26] The CIA World Fact Book's caption on unemployment in Pakistan aptly captures the current situation; it states "Unemployment Rate: 6.5 % plus substantial underemployment (2006 est.)."
[27] Pakistan's economy underwent massive structural adjustment at the behest of the IMF and World Bank. While economically sound, donor economic preferences came with serious political trade-offs. Not only did these programs reduce public sector employment, but they also dismantled the 'welfare' system that managed to keep inequality and inflation down throughout the late-1970s and 1980s.

skills, and robust analytical ability. The only young adults that fit the bill are products of elite private schools or foreign colleges (the latter are exclusively members of elite households). A disproportionate amount of entry level positions thus end up going to the already rich, leaving others from lower socio-economic classes underemployed. For educated (even if poorly) young men, underemployment ends up having just as much of an alienating effect as unemployment.

The expectation-reality disconnect

Youth radicalization is inherently tied to the issue of expectations of the young men in a population. Educational attainment presents itself as a double-edged sword. While a lack of education disqualifies youth from attaining economic mobility and is thus undesirable, a high level of education without the requisite outlet to apply skills raises expectations which, if unfulfilled for long, can create an expectation-reality disconnect. The latter is considered to be a common violence-inducing factor among youth in a society.

In Pakistan's case, the presence of a severe gap between the aspirations of young men and the reality they are confronted with was highlighted by a recent nationally representative survey conducted by the Population Council (2002). The disappointment among the young cohort was found to be a function of their strong desire to attain education and an equally strong resolve to work, but without any realistic opportunity for the latter. Eighty percent of the rural and urban youth included in the survey expressed a desire to be educated at secondary and tertiary levels.[28] Moreover, while traditionally rural families preferred to involve their children in farm labor, as agricultural productivity in Pakistan has declined, land fragmentation has increased, and structural economic changes such as inflation in the face of stagnant incomes for rural families have taken place. Parents—especially those who are literate—have become keen to send their children to school. This is true even for poor households among whom it is becoming increasingly common for parents to save or take loans for their child's schooling. As for the desire to work, the survey found that more than 80 percent of males desire to work provided suitable opportunities are available.[29]

While youth provide a potential engine for positive growth in the long run, the absence of a qualitatively robust education system that could provide marketable skills can only have an adverse impact in the immediate future. With enhanced access to education facilities and an ever-increasing interest in education among the population, both enrollment rates and expectations are likely to rise. If the quality of public and rural private sector education remains poor, and the labor market continues to favor children of the elite, the expectation-reality disconnect could result in added disgruntlement and in turn, a propensity to join extremist ranks.

There is evidence aplenty of the coming crisis. Increasingly, reasonably eloquent, post-secondary degree holders are seeking financial help—that is to say, begging—on the streets of urban towns in Pakistan. These are young men very different from the stereotypical beggars that span the streets of Pakistani cities and have been forced to the street by the labor market crunch. Detailed discussions with such individuals reveal great contempt for a state that cannot provide opportunities. There is also envy and resentment against the elite who are believed to have deliberately created entry barriers for the poor, and there is a sense of alienation from the larger society. These were precisely the signals that preceded a number of African civil wars.

[28] Population Council, "Adolescents and Youth," p.56.
[29] Ibid., pp.67-68.

The Safety Valves

A large male youth cohort living under conditions of socio-economic disparity points to vulnerability in any society. Arguably however, these conditions suggest no more than a *possibility* for radicalization of the young. After all, the majority of the developing world suffers from skewed socio-economic structures. Yet, only a small minority of countries seem to face the problem of youth radicalization.

States that manage to avoid a noticeable level of youth violence despite the presence of warning signals do so through the effective use of mitigating factors- the safety valves. A look at Pakistan's situation however suggests that the commonly discussed mitigating factors, such as youth migration and the conducive role of the state, are absent. The prospects for migration are linked to socio-economic performance and the country's international image. Moreover, far from playing a conciliatory role, the state has contributed to a climate of violence.

Migration

Renowned Pakistani economist Shahid Javed Burki (2001) has argued that Pakistan's bloated youth cohort presents a great opportunity to tap the international labor market.[30] If the state could impart quality primary and secondary education, and additionally prepare the young through specialized training in technical, industrial and service-related skills, they could secure overseas employment, thus easing the population pressure as well as opening up new avenues for foreign exchange earnings. Indeed, in the past, the demand for skilled labor in the West has attracted a large number of Pakistani doctors, engineers and businessmen, while the semi-skilled or unskilled labor force has traditionally found employment in the Middle East.

Opportunities for skilled labor do not necessarily assist the mainstream population since an overwhelming majority of well-trained professionals come from elite backgrounds. This can only change over time if the quality of Pakistan's educational and professional training improves multifold. Moreover, opportunities exist for the socio-economically underprivileged to find unskilled jobs, but future prospects are more uncertain. While global migration from the developing world is projected to increase, the new wave of regionalism is likely to contain migratory patterns within the confines of regional blocks. Already, the Gulf States, having to deal with their own youth bulge, are increasingly relocating South Asian labor back to their countries of origin. This trend is likely to continue. The high

[30] Shahid Javed Burki, "Population as an Asset," *Dawn,* July 31, 2001.

economic growth in South East Asian states on the other hand does present an opening, at least in the medium term.[31]

Perhaps the single most important determinant of foreign employment options for Pakistanis will be the country's international image. Pakistan will have to rid itself of the extremist tag at all costs. The EU and the U.S. have already toughened their visa policies and immigration regulations for Pakistani citizens and are unlikely to budge unless security concerns regarding the country are addressed. The situation is no different in the Gulf and in many East Asian states. Unless Pakistan's perception in the world's major capitals improves, the import of Pakistani labor will continue to be considered a high risk proposition.

Enter – the State: The Islamization of political discourse

State institutions often act as the last buffer against youth radicalization. Even when states are unable to meet socio-economic needs and have consequently alienated a large segment of the young population, they manage to keep the lid on youth disgruntlement through tools such as temporary employment creation, schemes to redistribute wealth, law enforcement, or even through negative interventions involving coercion. The only empirical cases where the state has been unable to perform this role have involved countries in which the state apparatus has all but collapsed, thus rendering its ability to thwart the prospect of youth radicalization ineffectual.[32]

Pakistan's case is a glaring anomaly. A fully functional and reasonably strong state apparatus willfully supported the presence of extremist cadres and infrastructure on its territory for years as a key pillar of its national security policy. While the intent was never to radicalize the state internally, a toleration of extremist activities has inevitably combined with socio-economic distortions to further enhance the likelihood of radicalization for the upcoming generation.

The state has engaged the Islamist enclave at three levels. First, ever since independence, the Pakistani leadership has sought to unite the populace on the basis of religious ideology in order to transcend the country's ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian fault lines, but in the process it has created an exclusivist, polarizing, and intolerant discourse.[33] Second, the military—the predominant institutional force in Pakistan—has defined the country's national outlook through a narrowly defined security paradigm that focuses primarily on territorial integrity. A key element of the security strategy over the past two and a half decades has been the persistent use of militant extremists as the front-men of the state supported sub-conventional wars in Afghanistan and India.[34] Third, the military has also used Islamic political parties, most of whom maintain some connection with one or more jihadi outfits, to further its political interests.[35] The military has maintained tremendous influence over Pakistani politics and has often intervened either directly or from behind the scenes to ensure a political dispensation that is amenable to its vision for the country. The military's support to Islamic political forces reflects its desire

[31] Pakistan and Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding for labor export in 2003. This allowed Pakistan to send as many as 200,000 unskilled and semi-skilled laborers in the first year of the arrangement. See Huma Nawaz Syed, "Pakistan and Malaysia: Economic and Trade Relations," *Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad,* 2007, <http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2007_files/no_1/article/a1.htm>.

[32] Most literature on the subject that is situated in the African context points to weakness of states as a key reason for youth violence. For an excellent discussion of the linkage between weakness (broadly defined) of states and violence, see Susan E. Rice, "Poverty Breeds Insecurity" in Brainard and Chollet (eds), *Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), pp.33-38.

[33] Najam Sethi, "Nation, State and Religious Identity," *The Friday Times,* August 17-23, 2007.

[34] For an overview of the linkage between the Pakistani state and militant Islam, see Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[35] For instance, Lashkar-e-Tayabba has close ties with Dawaat-ul-Irshaad, Al-Badr and Hizbul Mujahedeen and linked to Jamaat-i-Islami, and Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen is an offshoot of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI). JUI was also the principal supporter of the Taliban.

to undercut the moderate forces, which otherwise command overwhelming support of the masses and thus, unlike the politically irrelevant ultra-right, threaten to neutralize military predominance.[36]

The military did not want to radicalize Pakistan itself. Naïve as it may sound, the military operated under a highly simplistic plan that sought to minimize the domestic fallout from the military-militant alliance while continuing to use the extremists aggressively for sub-conventional war in Indian Kashmir. The military ensured that extremist influence remained limited largely to pockets in Pakistan's North-West tribal areas, a region hosting a large number of young Afghan refugees and some foreign militants. While the onslaught of sectarian violence in the Pakistani heartland during the 1990s was a notable exception, the majority of Islamist outfits continued to look outward. The military also displayed masterful tact in continuing to discredit its extremist partners internally. The Pakistani political elite as well as the military has always spoken of extremism in a negative light, and adopted the notion of plausible deniability to distance itself from events in Kashmir and Afghanistan during the 1990s.

The key state institutions—the military and the bureaucracy—are concerned foremost with institutional integrity and have never allowed themselves to be permeated by Islamist tendencies to any notable degree.[37] The civilian political enclave has also continued to be led by moderate forces, as the military, while using the ultra-right, has cautiously hedged against any possibility of their outright predominance. Pakistani society at large, while inherently conservative in nature, treats religious conservatism as completely distinct from extremism; the former has to do with piety while the latter carries significant political overtones.[38] The establishment has reinforced this distinction and has thus kept the mainstream population at odds with militant agendas. Pakistani voting patterns are reflective of this sentiment.[39]

The extremist enclave, for its part, realized that it lacked popular support and could not afford to challenge the state's agenda by trying to create fissures within Pakistani society. In any case, they had sufficient foreign inflow of personnel and funds not to feel any desperate need to recruit from mainstream Pakistani society.

The Counter-currents: The Military Remains Complacent

The above-mentioned framework remained intact as long as the interests of the military and the extremist enclave continued to complement each other. However, the September 11, 2001 attacks jolted the military-militant alliance unexpectedly and subsequently pitted the two parties in opposing camps. Suddenly, the very attributes of the ultra-right that were earlier viewed positively now posed a major threat to Pakistani society, and more specifically the younger cohort.

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[36] While most contend that the military is predisposed to working with Islamic outfits due to its own use of Islam to maintain institutional integrity, as well as a quid pro quo for support to its sub-conventional war strategy, in reality the military has been wary of according the mullahs a free hand. Despite allying with right wing political outfits, the military has never allowed them to rule the country.

[37] While recent militant attacks on military interests have proven the presence of Taliban sympathizers within military ranks, these represent exceptions to the norm. For a thorough analysis of the ethos of the Pakistani army and a sense of the distinction between conservatism and extremism within army ranks, see Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2004), Chapter 3.

[38] One obvious exception to this distinction is the presently prevalent sentiment in the tribal belt, where the two notions seem to have meshed. However, even that was not traditionally so, and has to be seen in the particular context of a turbulent region where a jihadi agenda has begun to be regarded as morally superior. This is quite the opposite of what the state was attempting in the country's hinterland.

[39] No Islamic party in Pakistan ever received more than 5 percent of popular vote before the 2002 elections. Even in 2002, the 11 percent vote that the religious parties captured was a result of the pooling of the center-of-right vote, which was only natural given that the religious outfits were contesting under a united banner. The trend has reverted as in the February 2008 elections, the religious parties managed to win less than 2 percent of the seats in the national legislature in addition to losing badly in both provinces where they held a coalition government under the previous regime.

Over the past two decades, an inevitable undercurrent allowed the ultra-right a significant, yet largely benign presence in society. This was achieved through the ever spreading welfare, educational, and missionary network of the Islamic political and militant outfits. Their enhanced visibility became highly problematic in the post-9/11 scenario for several reasons. For one, the presence of the ultra-right in universities, mosques, youth organizations, health and welfare organizations, and other social clusters did not exist in large numbers. Also, they had certainly not been geared towards bringing about a structural shift in the society at large. They are in a position to rally youth, especially those disgruntled due to lack of socio-economic opportunities.[40] Moreover, the ultra-right political parties are also the only outfits that are not elitist in their constitution and in fact encourage entrepreneurial youth to further their goal of enhancing outreach. If the socio-economic wedge widens, and more and more young citizens find themselves alienated from the system, the currently overwhelming support to moderate groups may be diluted.

Next, the military's use of the extremist cadre implied that the state had to tolerate the presence of an extremist infrastructure, including both preaching centers as well as jihadi training camps. As mentioned, while the military was able to keep a close watch on these activities and meticulously prevented the menace from spreading to the Pakistani heartland in the pre-9/11 period, the infrastructure made radicalism more accessible to the young. Moreover, the inflow of untracked foreign and local funds allowed these groups to attain financial self-sufficiency. Today, the availability of funds means that militant groups can sustain a large, well-knit social network, a head-start for any plans to start recruiting from among Pakistani youth.

Furthermore, the Islamist cause is assisted by the persistent failure of moderate political leaders to deliver socio-economic benefits to the masses and the equally abysmal political performance by military rulers. While Pakistan's elite-driven political system has created a buffer against outright supremacy for the mullahs, it has also blocked any avenues for the younger cohort to express their political opinions. With a lingering feudal hold, weak democratic norms, and a phony electoral system, Pakistan's political processes have remained highly selective. The average citizen has all but lost trust in the state, a fact that is manifested by the inherently pessimistic and antagonistic outlook of the masses vis-à-vis the state.[41] Already, the ultra-right portrays the inability of the moderate ruling elite to perform effectively as evidence of the failure of secularism. The ultra-right conservatives present the lack of piety, and not institutional failure as the principal problem. This, in their view, can only be rectified by Islamic rule.

An equally dangerous development is skepticism about the professionalism of the army. As army personnel took the spotlight in various roles during the Musharraf regime, the myth of an incorruptible and upright army has been shattered. Similarly, the army's manufactured image as a savior of the Pakistani people has suffered, courtesy of the ongoing military operation in the tribal belt, which has led people to view the military as a proxy force for the U.S.

9/11, U.S. Policy, and the Threat of Polarization

The interplay between Pakistan's U-turn vis-à-vis the extremists, U.S. interests in Afghanistan, and the Islamist stance deserves special attention. Developments since 9/11 have arguably presented the gravest threat of radicalization to Pakistani

[40] The growing incidence of extremist involvement of young males from middle classes- itself a reflection of reduced opportunity costs to do so in the face of restricted economic opportunities- further enhances the penetration of these groups. Middle class individuals are usually part of mainstream society and thus remain more approachable for members of their community. This is much different from madrassah cadres who have little in common with mainstream society.

[41] See Moeed Yusuf, "Why Citizens Don't Back the State," *The Friday Times,* July 13-19, 2007.

society, especially the youth who inevitably become the principal targets for militant recruitment.

Anti-U.S. sentiment in Pakistan goes back to the Afghan Jihad period when the U.S. exited Afghanistan, leaving Pakistan with over 3 million Afghan refugees, thousands of madrassahs, and a Kalashnikov culture that plagues the society to this day.[42] Moreover, while anti-communism aligned U.S. and pan-Islamist interests during the 1980s, the end of the Cold War brought about a decisive shift in discourse. Since 9/11, Washington's propensity to equate fundamentalist Islam—arguably an inherently peaceful notion—with extremism has ended up playing to the advantage of the Islamists.

The United States' current Pakistan policy emphasizes 'secularization', a term laden with negative connotations in that it is perceived to be the West's antidote to conservative religious values. The new thrust, partly bought by the Musharraf regime, blurs the distinction between mainstream conservatives and extremists, seeks to employ measures to secularize education curricula, and tacitly supports Western liberal values. While perfectly legitimate from a Western viewpoint, such a rapid change was sure to be perceived negatively in a country like Pakistan, which remains culturally conservative to its core. It has ended up providing an opportunity to Islamists to blow the anti-secular trumpet with greater vigor.[43] By using the Islamic extremism tag, America has allowed the Pakistani Islamists to create the classic "us versus them" paradigm. The U.S. is now presented as an invading infidel. A jihad against the U.S. appears even more attractive under conditions where warning signs are already in play. The relatively poor young Pakistanis are likely to be most affected, not only because they remain the primary targets of Islamist propaganda, but also because unlike the elder generation, they have grown up amidst a prevailing anti-American sentiment.

The danger of polarization emanates from the fact that the secular segment among the Pakistani elite—a growing cohort—remains fearful of the menace of violence within Pakistan. Post-9/11, as discourse on extremist violence has become meshed with the presence of the role of madrassahs in radicalizing poor young men, children of the secular elite have hardened their negative perceptions about the not so well-off conservative youth. They have tended to retreat further from mainstream society, thus leaving a wider vacuum for the Islamist cadre to fill.

In the final outcome, the culturally 'centrist' class —an overwhelming majority that maintains a clear distinction between conservatism and extremism —is increasingly being wedged between the secular elite and the ultra-right. The danger is that if pushed against the wall, the cultural conservatives may feel the need to align with one or the other side. A desire to avoid confrontation with the radicals, their diametrically opposed cultural values vis-à-vis the secular elite, and resentment against the elite for having created barriers to economic and political growth for the mainstream population makes the radical enclave a more probable partner for the centrists. As Denoeux puts it: "when one focuses on their fundamental convictions, their most cherished values, and the kind of society and political order they aspire to create, moderates have far more in common with radicals than they do with Western-style democracies" (which is what the secular elite essentially promote).[44]

The increased propensity of Pakistanis to see violence as legitimate under exceptional circumstances

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[42] Dennis Kux, *The U.S. and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001), pp.253, 324.

[43] A measure of their success is that Pakistan has continued to feature as one of the most anti-U.S. countries in terms of perception of its population in the recent past. The most recent poll puts Pakistan's as the third most anti-American nation behind Turkey and Palestine. Umit Enginsoy, "Turkey 'Most Anti-U.S. Country' in World, Poll Syas," *Turkish Daily News,* June 29, 2007, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=76984>. Also see, "'Anti-U.S. feeling high in Pakistan'," *Daily Times,* February 20, 2005, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_20-2-2005_pg7_7>.

[44] Guilain Denoeux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," M*iddle East Policy Council Journal,* Volume IX, Number 2, June 2002, p.73.

shows the opposition of the centrists. Immediately after 9/11, polls indicated that Pakistanis overwhelmingly denounced the 9/11 attacks and termed them unethical and contrary to Islamic tenets. By 2004 however, as many as 41 percent of Pakistanis were willing to suggest that violence was 'often' or 'sometimes' justified as a defense against Islam's enemies.[45] While support for such actions has dropped significantly ever since, if such a sentiment becomes widespread in the society at large, young members of society will be increasingly lured toward extremist causes and consequently, ideological support for the Islamists will increase.

[45] Support for violence has dropped in the last few months, perhaps as a result of frequent suicide attacks within Pakistan's hinterland. However, the overall sentiment towards the U.S. operation remains highly negative. Richard Wike, "Pakistanis Increasingly Reject Terrorism…..and the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, August 8, 2007, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/561/pakistan-terrorism>.

Correcting the Policy Focus: A role for the U.S.

An interesting scenario emerges from the above discussion. While Pakistan's current environment is conducive to youth radicalization, if exacerbating factors were corrected, the presence of a bloated young cohort, a high desire for education and employment, and the society's propensity to maintain a distinction between conservatism and extremism would act as agents for positive change.

Future policy will have to be multi-pronged, simultaneously addressing all factors we have labeled warning signals and exacerbating factors. The entire international community has an interest in arresting Pakistan's decline, and one could indeed make the case for allied cooperation among states with close ties to Pakistan to ensure the country's progress. Arguably however, the United States' stakes are the highest given its interest in curbing terrorism, Pakistan's geo-strategic location and its potential to act as an intermediary and model for U.S. interests in the Islamic world, and its intrinsic role in South Asian security, which has taken a new meaning after a quantum shift in Indo-U.S. relations. Moreover, the U.S. is currently the single most important source of bilateral aid for Pakistan, and is thus well placed to influence the use of aid money.

The following recommendations can be distinguished according to their specificity with regard to Pakistan's youth. Suggestions regarding education, economic issues, and migration are specific to the upcoming generation. The second set of recommendations—those pertaining to the role of the Pakistani state and U.S. policy towards Pakistan in general—goes beyond the issue of youth per se, but would ultimately minimize the potential for young Pakistanis to be involved in extremist violence. They must therefore form part of the overall policy package.

Education

- The current U.S. policy has remained focused on madrassah education for the most part. While the role of the radical madrassahs may be important for the current Afghan war, it is the public education sector that holds the key to determining the orientation of young Pakistanis in the medium to long term. Indeed, Washington is cognizant of this fact. Already, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a large assistance program for public education in Pakistan and has been engaged in developing teacher training frameworks and revised curricula.[46] While these are the key areas that need attention, little progress has been made thus far on the ground. There is an urgent need to analyze USAID's and other similar programs to determine the reasons for

[46] For a brief overview of USAID educational program for Pakistan, see "USAID Pakistan," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/77177.pdf>.

the lack of tangible gains. Once identified, the key bottlenecks need to be addressed.

- The USAID program should also focus on the elite private sector schools, providing them with funds for need-based scholarships for talented students who could not otherwise afford to attend. However, this would require private schools to move away from the practice of screening students based on their socio-economic background.

- With regard to public sector education syllabi, the emphasis should be on prompting Pakistanis to revise textbooks with the aim of reverting to the content used prior to Zia's Islamization during the 1980s. This is more achievable at the moment than completely eliminating conservative and anti-India biases from the texts. In fact, complete secularization is not even desirable in Pakistan's conservative context.

- The recent mushrooming of highly affordable private schools in rural areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh, has been a heartening development.[47] However, at present, these suffer from resource and capacity constraints and have ended up pulling teachers from nearby public schools. Moreover, they remain completely unregulated. Nonetheless, the presence of the private sector in rural areas provides U.S. policy makers with an obvious entry point. USAID programs should assist these private schools in enhancing their quality, create model private schools in the ultra-poor districts, set up remodeled public sector schools and promote the adopt-a-school model to encourage the involvement of non-governmental organizations. The interest of civil society in such schemes is well-established.[48] U.S. support could alleviate the resource constraint currently affecting such enterprises.

- Areas that need attention across the education spectrum include the development of qualitative benchmarks for student learning, standards for teacher recruitment, and the regulation of private sector education in general. While the Pakistani state is cognizant of the need to improve these aspects of the education system and has stated so in recent policy documents, there is a dearth of capacity within the public sector to carry policy visions through. The U.S. could play a constructive role in providing technical assistance to Pakistani education sector managers to ensure progress on this front.

- In order to counter the dearth of qualified teachers in Pakistan, one avenue to explore could be to set up a program to bring in a significant number of foreign teachers, especially those trained to teach English language and basic mathematics and sciences. These teachers could be placed across the various levels of public schooling throughout the country.[49] A program to ensure such inflow of teachers could be negotiated between USAID and the Pakistani Ministry of Education.

- The lack of vocational and other specialized training institutes is a concern linked to the Pakistani labor force's ability to migrate abroad. Currently, while there are some vocational training institutes in the urban areas, the rural parts

[47] Between 1994-95, 2,500 new private schools were established. In 1998, the figure reached 6,000 and in 1999, it was 8,000. The trend has continued ever since. A large proportion of these schools are being set up in rural areas. By 2010, Punjab, the most populous province, is likely to have a private school in at least 50 percent of its rural villages. These institutions cost only $1 per month per child on average. Andrabi, et al., "Religious School."

[48] A number of adopt-a-school schemes are currently operational across Pakistan. See "Public Private Partnerships in the Education Sector: Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2005: Policy, Options, Incentive Package and Recommendations," Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, 2004.

[49] A small number of voluntary workers did come in after the 2005 earthquake to offer teaching services in earthquake affected areas and a few continue to trickle in even now.

of the country are devoid of these facilities. Even where they are present, they do not seem to have been instituted under any coherent policy framework. Moreover, the quality of training is inadequate and the number of schools is insufficient. Again, in its latest five-year policy plan, the Government of Pakistan has made vocational training a priority. However, the issue seems to be one of capacity, an area where U.S. education specialists may be able to assist.

- As for the madrassahs, U.S. programs are attempting to nudge local authorities to secularize the religious curricula. In addition, the U.S. has been a strong proponent of madrassah registration. Such attempts are largely viewed as a U.S. plot to undermine conservative religious training in Pakistan. The former antagonizes the peaceful madrassahs, while leaving the radical ones—which no longer obey the writ of the state—unaffected. Moreover, the fluid nature of the madrassahs and their ability to do without an elaborate physical infrastructure also render the chances of success of any registration drive minimal.

- American policymakers must realize that the choice for families is not necessarily between religious and mainstream education. Religious education is respected in its own right. As much as 11.7 percent of the madrassah enrollment is made up by children from the richest Pakistani households.[50] Perhaps the most prudent policy course will be to set up parallel madrassahs run either by the public or private sector.[51] The syllabi should be allowed to retain their conservative nature, but the teachers inducted in seminaries should be properly trained in theology such that they are able to present their students with a balanced picture. Modern subjects should also be taught, but unlike the current system where the imams acquaint students with these subjects, specialists in each field should be recruited to perform this task. Already, a number of high quality Islamic schools in urban towns have been established because of the negative connotation attached to the madrassahs and the high demand for quality Islamic education for children. However, these schools are often not affordable for poor Pakistanis.

Economic Opportunities

- A persistent criticism of American economic aid to Pakistan over the years has been its unpredictable nature, rather vague conditionalities, and a bias towards military aid. All three concerns are present in the current relationship. American governments in the past have treated aid as a comprehensive whole, and a downturn in relations has seen the withdrawal of both military as well as socio-economic aid.

  Under the current situation, there is a need to segregate military and economic aid. While military aid may be tied to Pakistan's performance on the terrorism front, the flow of economic aid should be guaranteed over the long run. Even if such assistance is to be made conditional, it should be contingent not upon Pakistan's terrorism-related performance, but upon ensuring that tangible socio-economic benefits of the assistance reach the masses. To date, Pakistanis have viewed U.S. aid as a means to appease the Pakistani elite and, if anything, it has further encouraged anti-U.S. sentiments among common Pakistanis. Perhaps the U.S. could seek the assistance of other major bilateral donors, Japan, EU and Saudi Arabia to institute a joint aid-monitoring program.

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[50] C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: A New Look at the Militancy-Madrassah Connection," *Asia Policy*, Number 4, July 2007, p.114.

[51] This recommendation has previously been made by Peter W. Singer in "Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad," Analysis Paper # 14, *Brookings Institution*, November 2001.

- With regard to specific avenues for improvement, poverty and inequitable distribution of wealth stand out as the most prominent issues. The Musharraf government put remarkable emphasis on ensuring poverty alleviation and equality of distribution. Substantial resources were channeled to this cause. That gains have not been nearly as high as were initially projected—inequality has actually risen —is a result of severe institutional bottlenecks and governance constraints rather than a lack of will on the part of the government. Efforts are therefore needed to address the institutional shortcomings that continue to undermine anti-poverty programs. High corruption levels and the absence of meritocracy are obvious avenues that require attention. However, there seems to be no short-term solution to this problem, and in the medium term the system will continue to discriminate against the non-influential segments of society.

- The government's anti-poverty programs are critical. The U.S. could fund anti-poverty programs designed to provide employment to young Pakistanis. An immediate opportunity is to assist with the planned expansion of the *Rozgar Pakistan* scheme that aims to provide limited amount of funds to small-scale entrepreneurs willing to engage in pre-designated activities or the recently initiated Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program.[52]

- Related to anti-poverty programs is the issue of poverty targeting. An in-depth look into poverty alleviation schemes suggests that while those receiving assistance do benefit, a large proportion of the actual recipients are the 'non-poor', ones who are not supposed to be targeted by these programs.[53] This perverse targeting outcome is a result of leakages in the system. Specific programs for technical assistance could be a potential avenue for U.S. involvement. In addition, grants specifically designed to allow the development of poverty-targeting mechanisms could be tied to tangible outcomes in terms of streamlined methodologies for all programs within the country.

Migration

- The link between migration and education and specialized training has already been highlighted. The responsibility for achieving positive outcomes—this implies ensuring availability of skilled labor—on this front largely lies on Pakistani authorities. However, the U.S. could potentially play a major role by opening up avenues for migration for younger Pakistanis (both skilled and unskilled).

  The U.S. would be well advised to revisit its visa and immigration policy for Pakistani nationals. Wary of the extremist tag, America has moved to virtually shut down previously attractive avenues for Pakistanis to study and/or find attractive livelihoods in the U.S. Moreover, the current discriminatory attitude at airports and embassies is causing resentment amongst mainstream Pakistanis. Pakistanis are increasingly challenging the dichotomy of supporting the U.S. as a frontline ally in the War on Terror and being singled out, deported or refused visas in large numbers. This bias needs to be corrected immediately.

- Over the long run, the U.S. should consider an arrangement with Pakistani authorities to allow students and young employment seekers who

[52] The Rozgar Pakistan scheme has been launched by the National Bank of Pakistan. Visit National Bank of Pakistan's official website <http://www.nbp.com.pk> for information on the program.

[53] For a detailed discussion of Pakistan's poverty targeting approaches and shortcomings, see Moeed Yusuf, "A Poverty Targeting Strategy for Pakistan," working paper, TA 4277, *Asian Development Bank*, 2007, pp.15-28.

have been screened and cleared through a joint mechanism to enter its territory. The protocol could even be designed to disproportionately favor applicants from lower socio-economic classes. Of course, this recommendation presupposes the ability of the Pakistani state to improve the skill sets of its youth cohort.

- Apart from students and workers seeking to relocate to the U.S. for a significant period of time, the U.S. and Pakistan could also seek to arrange short visits by Pakistani youth delegations with representation from across the socio-economic strata. The Fulbright Program could spearhead this initiative. It may be pertinent to allow translators to accompany such a delegation to avoid the negative consequences that a cultural shock may have, especially for those from the lower socio-economic strata.

The role of the state

- The state's engagement with extremists will arguably be the most important determinant of Pakistan's future direction. Until and unless the state decisively breaks ranks with extremist cadres and abandons its sub-conventional warfare strategy once and for all, extremists will continue to recruit from among the younger population and they will also remain attractive to disgruntled and vulnerable members of society. While the realization that extremists are no longer manageable has set in, the military, despite having been forced to put its sub-conventional war strategy vis-à-vis India in cold storage for now, still relishes what it considers a tactically brilliant option. Such an interest is likely to be reinforced if Indian conventional military superiority becomes absolute or if India remains indifferent on the Kashmir question.

While the United States is correct to remain neutral in the Indo-Pakistani conflict, it should not detach itself from the conflict. The U.S. must continue to facilitate the process and convince India to respond favorably to Pakistani overtures on Kashmir. It should also push both sides to engage a broader set of domestic stakeholders in a quest to create mass constituencies for peace. America should also not hesitate to involve other states with a stake, namely China, Saudi Arabia, and even Russia to actively nudge the two parties towards permanent peace in bilateral relations.[54]

U.S. approach to Pakistan

As mentioned, the United States' perception in Pakistan has a direct bearing on the receptivity of the extremist message among young Pakistanis. Therefore, any policies that seek to remove the current negative outlook remain pertinent to the overarching objective of reducing the propensity of the young to join extremist cadres.

- Presently, the U.S. emphasis on secularization has created a communication gap. It unnecessarily provokes Pakistanis who cherish conservative values and attaches a negative connotation to a move towards secular ideology. America is not threatened by Muslim conservatism in Pakistan (or for that matter across the Muslim world). While such a formulation is difficult to comprehend for the West, mainstream Pakistanis abhor both secularism and extremism at the same time. By branding the policy as one that is designed to secularize public schools and madrassah curricula and promote western liberal democracy, by viewing stereotypical attributes such as an increase in bearded men or veiled women as a sign of increasing extremist

[54] Stephen P. Cohen and Moeed Yusuf, "Opening the Door to Peace in South Asia," *The Brookings Institution*, October 8, 2007.

tendencies, and by branding the 'mullah' as the necessary hostile actor, the U.S. has not only alienated the mainstream population, but has also allowed Islamists to raise the level of their rhetoric.

U.S. interests would be served just as well by allowing Pakistani society to retain its conservative elements. In fact, supporting mainstream conservatism is likely to produce greater gains than attempting to bring about a structural shift towards secularism. Key in this regard is to pay careful attention to the kind of messages directed at Pakistan, even surgically vetting their wording and the body language used to relay them. Such an approach would significantly reduce the opportunity for the ultra-right to paint an anti-Islamic picture of the U.S. Over the long run, a positive influence on the thinking of the upcoming generation can be expected.

- Another similar concern specific to the U.S. fight against extremism is Washington's propensity to brand the current menace of terrorism as "Islamic extremism". Such counterproductive discourse should be abandoned and the distinction between U.S. outlook towards Islam and terrorism should be more clearly stated in language that can be understood by the average Pakistani citizen.

  The high profile nature of the War on Terror has led U.S. officials to occasionally make provocative statements criticizing the Pakistani government's inability to tame extremists. While largely meant to satisfy domestic political interests, such allegations create further resentment among Pakistanis who point towards over 1,500 military and paramilitary casualties and tremendous collateral damage as losses attributable to the U.S. agenda.[55] The recent string of unilateral strikes despite calls from the Pakistani government to rethink the strategy have created a fresh public stir. The strikes are beginning to play into the hands of the ultra-right. A more prudent approach would be to tone down aggressive communication and actions in the public sphere, instead confining coercive diplomacy to behind-the-scenes negotiations or conducting coordinated tactical actions.

- A related concern is how U.S. policy in Afghanistan impacts social cohesion within Pakistan. Notwithstanding the unrealistic commitments of the Pakistani leadership, the state is in no position to conduct an all-out military campaign without facing a severe militant backlash and perhaps even a social implosion. Any attempt to find a short-term solution, or coerce leaders in Islamabad to implement the U.S. script could allow the Islamists to gain prominence and mobilize more young men to join extremist ranks. The resultant Islamist propaganda, especially if the U.S. chooses to intrude upon Pakistani sovereignty, could spread the currents across society.

  Both the U.S. and Pakistan would do well to learn lessons from India's counterinsurgency experience in Kashmir. The Indians, at least after they had gone through their protracted learning curve, adopted a multi-faceted approach that was dominated by a socio-economic and political—but not a military—approach.[56] Applying lessons from the Indian experience will surely reduce collateral damage and with it, anti-U.S. resentment among Pakistani youth, but it will also force the campaign to be stretched

[55] The acute resentment towards the U.S. agenda is evident in the growing anti-U.S. sentiment in Pakistan. As already mentioned, Pakistan is currently the third most anti-American nation in the world.

[56] See Moeed Yusuf and Anit Mukherjee, "Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: Learning from India," National Security Outlook, *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research,* September 2007.

over a number of years. To begin with, the U.S. would have to come to terms with the fact that immediate gains are unlikely. If achieved, Washington should focus on nudging Pakistan to apply the use of minimal force principle and emphasize the politico-economic agenda to bring constructive livelihood opportunities to young tribesmen.

- There is still skepticism among U.S. policy makers with regard to Pakistan's sincerity in fighting extremists on its territory. The concern is not unfounded. For a country that considers itself a medium-sized nuclear power, it is absurd to imagine it falling in line with the U.S. agenda at the cost of its own regional strategic interests. The fact is that U.S. options are highly constrained given that Pakistan's support is imperative for its Afghan campaign. Washington will have to realize that Pakistan is unlikely to accept a hostile Afghan government on its borders. An enhanced Indian presence in Afghanistan is likely to further accentuate Pakistani worries. Failing to comfort Pakistan in the developments in Kabul will not completely eliminate it as a stakeholder and will prompt Islamabad to retain ties with the Taliban. Again, this automatically implies the toleration of an extremist presence and a perpetual threat of the menace spreading across Pakistan's youth cohort. At the very least, the Indian presence in Kabul must be curtailed to pacify Pakistani fears of Indian encirclement.

- At a broader level, the U.S. cannot afford to repeat the mistake of withdrawing completely from Pakistan as it did after the Afghanistan jihad in the 1980s. The U.S. should work to instill confidence in the permanency of U.S.-Pakistan cooperation and it should move on a multi-faceted track rather than being narrowly focused on the terrorism agenda. The ultimate objective on both sides should be to generate mutually beneficial interests, with Pakistan gaining from U.S. economic and military aid, and America finding a stable, reliable partner in a moderate Pakistan.

- The U.S. should also increase its own presence to portray a favorable image of its culture to Pakistanis. While American information libraries and cultural centers operated in Pakistan prior to the breakdown in relations in 1990—the renowned Lincoln libraries in a handful of major universities are pertinent examples—the majority of youth in Pakistan have had no exposure to American culture whatsoever.[57] A program to open public libraries and information centers across Pakistan should be instituted. These centers should be encouraged to reach out not only to the elite, but also to the ordinary youth.

[57] See Moeed Yusuf and Anit Mukherjee, "Counterinsurgency in Pakistan: Learning from India," National Security Outlook, *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research,* September 2007.

Conclusion

Pakistan's slide towards radicalization is not a foregone conclusion. In fact, a positive change in the current environment could produce a scenario highly amenable to progress. That said, proactive and well-placed policy responses are required to undermine the present risks posed by poor educational quality, the stratified nature of the education system, and disparate economic opportunities, and further exacerbated by constricted migration options, a negative role of the state, and misplaced U.S. policies.

The U.S. is most suitably placed to support positive developments in Pakistan. To be sure, ensuring Pakistan's move in this direction is no longer an option; it is a necessity. With 160 million people, a geographical location that will remain pivotal to U.S. anti-terrorism interests for the foreseeable future, a significant, albeit thus far underutilized, role of Pakistan as an opening to both Iran and the Sunni bloc—the need for such a partner has increased multifold given Washington's plummeting popularity among Muslims—and not to mention, nuclear weapons, Pakistan's decline could be catastrophic.

Recent developments in the Pakistan-U.S. relationship do not bode well for a permanent multifaceted partnership. The stern U.S. diplomatic signals in response to peace overtures by the newly elected democratic government in Pakistan and now unilateral cross-border strikes from Afghanistan are creating a bilateral rift. Both sides need to be careful not to allow concerns on the War on Terror front to hijack their broader relationship. Indeed, the underlying premise of this paper is that the real worry from Pakistan is not immediate; instead, it is the gradual move of the youth towards radicalization over the long run that needs to be checked. Should attention be limited to the 'here and now' and were the U.S. to hold its larger interest hostage to Pakistan's role in the counter-insurgency effort, the ultimate outcome may well be counterproductive not only for the two principal stakeholders, but even for the world at large.

Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a major research program housed within the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The project conducts high-quality public policy research, and convenes policy makers and opinion leaders on the major issues surrounding the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project seeks to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on developments in Muslim countries and communities, and the nature of their relationship with the United States. Together with the affiliated Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, it sponsors a range of events, initiatives, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States, for much needed discussion and dialogue;
- A Visiting Fellows program, for scholars and journalists from the Muslim world to spend time researching and writing at Brookings in order to inform U.S. policy makers on key issues facing Muslim states and communities;
- A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the United States and the Muslim world;
- An Arts and Culture Initiative, which seeks to develop a better understanding of how arts and cultural leaders and organizations can increase understanding between the United States and the global Muslim community;
- A Science and Technology Initiative, which examines the role cooperative science and technology programs involving the United States and the Muslim world can play in responding to regional development and education needs, as well as fostering positive relations;
- A "Bridging the Divide" Initiative which explores the role of Muslim communities in the West;
- A Brookings Institution Press Book Series, which aims to synthesize the project's findings for public dissemination.

The underlying goal of the Project is to continue the Brookings Institution's original mandate to serve as a bridge between scholarship and public policy. It seeks to bring new knowledge to the attention of decision-makers and opinion-leaders, as well as afford scholars, analysts, and the public a better insight into policy issues. The Project is supported through the generosity of a range of sponsors including the Government of the State of Qatar, The Ford Foundation, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, and the Institute for Social Policy Understanding. Partners include American University, the USC Center for Public Diplomacy, Unity Productions Foundation, Americans for Informed Democracy, America Abroad Media, and The Gallup Organization.

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The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director of Research. Joining them is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Tamara Cofman Wittes, a specialist on political reform in the Arab world who directs the Project on Middle East Democracy and Development; Bruce Riedel, who served as a senior advisor to three Presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA, a specialist on counterterrorism; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Hady Amr, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; and Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Brookings Vice President Carlos Pascual.

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