



## How Pakistan Works

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**Anatol Lieven:** Thank you so much Lyse. It is a great pleasure to see you again and a great pleasure to be here, at Chatham House.

This wasn't actually my original title. My original title was a dreadful literary mistake, perhaps one of the worst of that kind an Englishman can make. I mixed up two characters in *Alice in Wonderland* and was going to call it *Pakistan: Land of the Blue Caterpillar* and then I realised that what I meant was *Pakistan: Land of Humpty Dumpty*. This would give quite the wrong impression but the reason I wanted to use that title is, as you may remember, Humpty Dumpty, but not the caterpillar, when asked by Alice about the meaning of words, he said 'words mean whatever I say that they mean'. That is very true of some of the words used in Pakistan, frequently used about Pakistan, that I fear a

great number of people working on Pakistan don't actually realise that they don't mean the same in Pakistan as they mean here, or in other places.

What I'm going to say now, for those of you who have been to my talks in London before, and even to a degree in Washington, have heard previously, but I always say this to a British audience in particular, it is vitally important that we here in Britain understand what words in Pakistan mean and how Pakistan works, because Pakistan is a vital national interest of this country. It can not be emphasised strongly enough that it is by far the single most important country for Britain, as far as the War on Terror and the threat from terrorism and extremism is concerned. And that's not because of Pakistan itself so much as of course the fact that Pakistan is here in Britain and the consequences of that for British lives, the stability if British society could be, well has already been, somewhat dangerous and could become extremely dangerous.

Once again, I shall be repeating myself on this, therefore, we must keep firmly in mind that from our point of view, the point of view of the British State, it would be a lunatic's bargain to contribute to throwing away the stability of Pakistan for any other interest. By that I mean, above all of course, Afghanistan, for what may be an illusionary victory, an impossible victory in Afghanistan. We can lose in Afghanistan, I hope very much that we won't, but we can without disastrous consequences for Britain or British society. We can't lose Pakistan. We can't see it either slide into outright chaos or Islamic Revolution without the gravest consequences for us and I think that's a point that we must make in Washington again and again and again and back up, if necessary, with, to put it bluntly, real threat concerning our degree of commitment to American actions elsewhere.

I'll come back to some of the things which in the worst case, which I don't think by the way will happen, but in the worst case, the United States could do which could have really serious consequences for this country.

Now, I am going to reverse the usual order of talks like this which is first to talk about the contemporary political situation and then turn to underlying structures. The problem is if you start talking about the political situation you don't have time to talk about anything else. That's one problem. The other problem, of course, is that you could be proved wrong tomorrow whereas some deeper structures are likely to endure considerable time.

So, I will talk about the contemporary situation but I would like first to describe why in my view Pakistan does work, albeit not in a very good way and not as we would like it, but it is worth remembering in that context that pretty much regularly as clock work, every five years or so, somebody publishes a book, an essay or an article, it is very often the same person, actually resident here in London, entitled something like *Will Pakistan Survive or Can Pakistan Survive or Will Pakistan Last until next Summer?* And then, you know, five years later, it is the same thing, and five years after that and five years after that and five years after that and it is still there.

The only existential crisis that Pakistan has yet faced, I mean a crisis which indeed did destroy it as the state it was then was, of course, the Bangladesh War and its loss. But let's face it that was never a combination that was going to last, you know, it is just impossible for these two states separated by a hostile India.

As far as West Pakistan is concerned, given what it is made up of and given where it is, hasn't actually done so very badly in my view. It is still there. Why is it still there? And why is it, in my view, a good deal less endangered and a good deal less potentially catastrophic than much Western media reporting would suggest? Also, the Pakistani state is not less oppressive than we think it is, but it is oppressive in a very different way and for very different reasons. There have been, in my view, two agents of befuddlement in most of the analysis and reporting of Pakistan. The first is ideology and the second is class.

Now the first, of course, our commitment, the commitment of the Western media analysts to democracy is an excellent thing, it is the core of our values, the core of our systems, but, as I say, it doesn't necessarily mean the same thing in Pakistan or many other countries as well. It is not an excellent thing if we use this commitment to democracy for not thinking seriously about what the situation on the ground really consists of and, above all, thinking seriously about all the other things that we mean when we talk about democracy here but which are not necessarily present in a good many other countries in democracy as it is described or how it operates, speaking of Pakistan here but I also have experience of Russia. For example in the 1990s where the word democracy [was] thrown around with gay abundance and I also remember that for

a system which lacked, by far, the greater part of the elements which we consider to make up democracy.

The second agent of befuddlement is a natural bias towards English-speaking people in suits who invite us to nice dinner parties. If they're lawyers in suits even better, if they're attractive female lawyers in suits, well, they've hit the jackpot and it makes for much more pleasant dinner parties than my dinner party with some of the Islamist leaders in Islamabad when I was last there, which consisted of Kentucky Fried Chicken and Coca Cola but it doesn't necessarily give you an accurate picture either of Pakistan or indeed of what these people are actually about and what they're after.

Now in that context, I've been quite widely criticised, as you can well imagine, for describing Musharraf's semi-coup a few weeks ago as relatively genteel by Pakistani standards. I pointed out in this piece for the *[International] Herald Tribune* that no one was killed apart from a couple killed in ethnic clashes in Karachi, most people were placed under house arrest not actually in prison, nobody has been tortured as far as I know, and you know a certain amount of tear gas and baton charges and so on and so forth. It has been a game of manoeuvre with large amounts of blood, assassinations, killings and so forth and, of course, this coup or whatever you want to call it was carried out by Musharraf. It was in response to a move by the Supreme Court in this game of manoeuvre. Everybody is playing for advantage. They attempted to tip the game in one direction by, of course, threatening it seems to declare Musharraf's election illegal and so he tipped the game in the other direction by getting rid of the Supreme Court, but he didn't kick off the whole table. How far that was because the West stepped in, America and Britain in particular, and put pressure on him not to kick over the table, certainly that played an important part but it also true that that is not in general the way he has played things or indeed the way that elite politics in Pakistan is played.

Compared to other countries, countries in Africa especially, but countries in Asia too, most Pakistani coupes have been relatively genteel. An exception perhaps was of course Zia's coup and hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, but there were very personal reasons for that and Zia did not revenge himself very savagely on Bhutto's followers in general. Elite politics are relatively genteel, except when issues of family feuds or ethnic clashes come in.

What is not genteel, and this is what I mean by the oppression of the Pakistani State forces being different from what we think it is, is the day to day treatment of ordinary people, poor people, people who for whatever reason have no protection by the Pakistani Police for example, or by the Courts. It would not surprise me to learn, in fact I think it quite low, that every day in Pakistan at least one person is beaten to death in Police custody, not on the acts of the state or of the government, but because that's what the Police do either to extort money or frankly just for fun. You would certainly not want to be arrested as a woman by the Pakistani Police if you didn't have powerful protectors of one sort or another. Of course, these victims come from what Graeme Green called the torturable classes, whereas the lawyers, the elite come from the untorturable classes.

The other very interesting thing about the behaviours of the Police and the authorities towards ordinary people is that it is no different from most of India and that it has nothing to do with dictatorship or democracy. It has to do with political culture and inherited traditions of the state forces and, of course, local structures of economic and social power. A very interesting work is a book called *Maximum City* by Suketu Mehta about the Police and their behaviour in Bombay.

Recently, outside the sphere of military actions, either against Islamist militants in Pakistan or rebels of various kinds in India or, of course, the Civil War in Sri Lanka, the biggest instance of shooting into a protesting crowd was in West Bengal, in India, against farmers protesting against the seizure of their land for a factory, a very similar thing which you see happening again and again in China, although the difference is that the Chinese Police don't usually open fire. And this by the way was on this whole project and the initiation of a heavy crackdown, was on the orders of a left wing government in West Bengal. In other words the kind of things which anger a great many ordinary Pakistanis about their present situation and how they're treated and drive many of them into the arms of the Islamists are not affected one way or another by the question of who is actually in power in Islamabad.

As I always say when people ask can there be free and fair elections in Pakistan, I say *No* but the most important reason for that is to give an example, what would happen to

someone from the countryside who tries to set up an agricultural trade union and, of course, you need trade unions if you're going to have a secular social democratic movement which can compete with the Islamists for a reformist vote. Well, anyone who knows Pakistan knows very well what would happen. First he would be beaten up as a warning, then his wife and daughters would be raped as a warning, then he would be shot. The people doing that, giving orders, could just as well be local MPs from an ostensibly and progressive democratic party or a conservative establishment party. In many cases there is no difference between them, because as Lyse and I were talking about, many of our friends hopped from party to party with such frequency over the years that I have actually lost count of when they were where and so on.

At the elite level by contrast, and this is what I mean about how Pakistan works, as long as certain rules are followed dog does not eat dog. There are, of course, endless political feuds and family feuds. The only politician that was actually killed the last time I was there was killed as part of a family feud, not by the agency of the state or Islamist terrorism.

This reflects what I said earlier, a very interesting contrast in Pakistan between the extreme surface volatility of politics which tends to dominate our reporting of Pakistan and the remarkable underlying stability. The most underlying example of that, Lyse and I were both saying that we feel like we were out there in the late 1980s and it is still the same people, except of course for the Army, because the Army has an orderly meritocratic, bureaucratic structure where people arrive and then leave, often for comfortable directorships or whatever. The Army cast changes but everybody else is the same to a considerable extent, well certainly the people at the very top.

The fact that the individuals are the same, well, in the case of Benazir Bhutto, of course, it reflects above all the fact that her Party is a dynastic Party rather than a mass democratic Party, but above all what this reflects is that the Pakistani elite have to a very considerable extent the same class interests and the same class culture.

I was recently reading a very brilliant PhD thesis by a man called Steven Lyon called *Power and Patronage in Pakistan*, University of Kent. It's actually not about Pakistan in general, but about the particular clan, the Gujars of Atuk, but by looking at Atuk District

and how it works at the ground level, he brings out his fascinating insights into the way in which every level of Pakistani politics is dominated by patronage. The distribution of patronage and protection by and between local political clans, usually based upon traditional ethnic, social or religious groups of one sort or another, in a way which is extremely reminiscent of England sometime between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, these clans alternate in power, exchange members between themselves, change sides according to advantage and distribute goodies, and equally important, protection to their followers in return for votes and support and, where necessary, armed support. And I say protection, again very reminiscent of England up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you need someone with power to protect you, in part, from the predatory local authorities, the Police and so forth and so on.

This gives Pakistani politics, basic political structures some of their extraordinary stability. It contributes enormously to the fact that there is at present, I'm going to go out on a limb here, but I would say no risk, no risk of an Islamist Revolution in Pakistan. There is one possibility but it is as I will point out essentially for extraneous reasons rather than domestic ones.

To give one example, you would have thought that the Islamists ought to have made very considerable inroads into the Pakistani countryside given the living conditions of so many people, the oppressive nature of the local structures, but why aren't they? Well, the local land owners are about as likely to favour a local mullah preaching revolution and land reform as was an 18<sup>th</sup> century English land owner to appoint a Church of England cleric to his local living who was going to preach, well social revolution and land reform. It's often said that the core of Pakistan's problems is the domination of the so called feudal classes. Be careful what you wish for! People also help stand between Pakistan and the spread of radical Islamism.

On the other hand, of course, this system, the domination of these classes, is extremely bad, or at least has been in the past for economic development, social reform and progress and of course the development of an orderly and efficient state. It is very difficult to run an orderly and efficient state with a real programme of reform when you are constantly juggling jobs and awarding contracts on the basis of patronage in order to retain support. Of course this is something which as we have seen under Musharraf,

military governments have had to do almost as much as civilian ones, because they also need support from society.

One of the fascinating things about Pakistan is that no military government, whoever its head, has ever tried to kick this system over and create a party dominated by the military, going out to win votes in some kind of national and nationalist programme. Why has this not happened? There are three forces which might have shattered this system for good or ill and tried to carry out radical reform and two of them have been ingested completely by this system.

The first is the Army. In theory, one might have had a Kemalist programme, to give the name of Kemal Ataturk who Musharraf admires so much, a Kemalist programme of radical reform, led by the Army in the name of nationalism. Well one reason why one hasn't had that of course is that Pakistan is not a nation, unlike Turkey. Turkey is a somewhat ambiguous nation, but Pakistan isn't a nation at all. It is very difficult to run a nationalist agenda like that on the basis of a country so divided ethnically.

The second reason though is that although the Army is becoming more and more middle class, it is not drawn any more from the traditional landowning or aristocratic classes. The Army has become a great landowner in its own right. Ayesha Siddiqi, whom you may know of, has just written a book about this and other things, the way in which the Army has been given or allocated to itself enormous properties both in land and industry which tends to make people unrevolutionary. Great landowners don't usually call for radical land reform. This has not by the way led to a new class of personal great land owners, I mean these things are run in a corporate way by the Army, but it certainly has integrated or kept the high command of the army integrated into the elites in general.

The second force which promised to shatter this cosy system in the 1970 was the Pakistan's People Party, under Benazir Bhutto's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He did introduce certain radical reforms and the greatest land ownings were indeed broken up or were distributed among junior members of the same families in a collective way, but that very soon, literally in a matter of very few years, ran out of steam and indeed the PPP was taken over again by the same old political clans, of whom the Bhuttos, by the way, are still one of the greatest land owners in the whole of Pakistan.

The third is, of course, the Islamists. Now to some extent they have always been part of the establishment. That's particularly true if you look at the JEY in the frontier areas, in the Pashto areas, perhaps less so in the Jamaat army, although the Jamaat in particular still stress land reform as one of its main objectives.

But above all, and this is why I mention Steven Lyon's book or thesis, is that this isn't a case of getting rid of a small number of great feudal land owners, to shatter this nexus at ground level in Pakistan, because it is so close knit, so powerful, so much part of the fabric of the society, and would require monstrous violence. Land reform in these circumstances is not a pretty sight, in terms of the number of people who have to be killed in the process and nobody in Pakistan I have to say, thank God, is powerful enough to do that and there is also no general revolutionary national consciousness to back that up.

However one does have to say about the Islamists that a rather worrying trend is that some people who come very much from the establishment, like the brothers who led the movement at the Red Mosque, have recently swung in a much more radical direction and one can see circumstance in which that would spread.

However, when it comes to the Islamist threat it is very important not to exaggerate, since I feel so much that the Western media does. You must remember this isn't Iran in 1978. It is not Algeria in the early 1990s. The Islamists have never got more than 15% of the votes and that was, you know, at the last elections, in circumstances of really heightened Pashto awareness because of what was going on in Afghanistan. Now that they've had a few years in power in the North West Frontier Province, the general expectation, it could be wrong, but the general expectation is that they fail to fulfil most of those promises, you know to bring development and greater social justice and their vote will go down.

As far as both the vote for the mainstream Islamist Parties and the support for Islamist militancy, terrorism and so forth is concerned, this is by no means exclusively a very large Pashto phenomenon and very closely linked to what is happening in Afghanistan.

There is simply not the basis at present for an Islamist revolution across the whole country, except in one scenario. And that is that the Army, of course, splits and it then tries to carry out some form of Islamist revolution. Well, it won't happen simply as a result of things that go on within Pakistan. The Army is a very strong corporate institution.

One index of that, it is fascinating, look at the personal characters and the personal culture of the different military leaders of Pakistan over the years, let alone the chiefs of staff. It will be hard to find a more (inaudible) than Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf. You've got a British trained Punjabi aristocrat, Ayub Khan, Sandhurst, you know, the Indian equivalent of Eaton. Then, you have Yahya Khan, Pashto aristocrat, a much more exuberant personal character, but both of them, of course, extremely secular. Then you have Zia-ul-Haq, a lower middle-class Punjabi immigrant, sincerely religious with a religious agenda for the country. Then Musharraf, lower middle-class secular progressive whose mother was an official of the International Labour Organisation and three out of the four whisky drinking. All had totally different characters but loyal to the Pakistani Army first and foremost, products of and loyal to the Pakistani Army.

Secondly, concerning the Army, there are, for the reasons I've set out, great rewards for being disciplined and loyal, and not just rewards for generals. That's why this is more like the Chinese Army and quite unlike the Nigerian Army, the rewards do not just go to generals and they're not transferred to bank accounts in London. The generals get directorships, the majors get managerships, the sergeants and the corporals get jobs as foremen. Everybody is guaranteed health care, to the extent that that exists in Pakistan and so on and so forth. There are major incentives, therefore, for obeying order, for sticking together, for following high command, for not mutinying and, of course, major disincentives for doing the opposite.

The one scenario that I could see and I was told in Pakistan that it would crack, that you would actually have the Army splitting, a sort of African scenario, junior officers leading a mutiny, would be an American invasion of part of Pakistan, by which I don't mean America landing in Karachi or whatever.

Two scenarios which are talked about in Washington, but thank God, strongly opposed within the State Department and the Pentagon, one of which is this idea of a raid to capture Pakistan's nuclear weapon.

The second is a really major long-term ground incursion into the tribal areas of Pakistan to quote on quote 'crack down on Taliban'. Scenarios were set for me by people in Pakistan I generally respect but in that case you would have junior officers, battalion commanders going to their generals and saying my boys and I are off to fight the Americans. Promise you won't retaliate against us and we'll take off our uniforms or you can try and stop us and then we go as the Pakistani Army to fight the Americans.

Now that is a pretty apocalyptic scenario and, as I say, in Washington sensible people are well aware of that, but, you know, you have had some pretty wild statements from people like Barack Obama and you do have this phenomenon now of course, they seem to learn better when they come to power, the Democratic Party is using the whole issue of Pakistani support for the Taliban as a small club with which to beat the Bush Administration for allegedly being soft on Pakistan. And this is very useful for the Democrats in the foreign and security policy field because, of course, one tremendous disadvantage which they either suffer or perceive themselves as suffering, is this perception that they are weak on security. This is why Obama said this, you know if necessary to intervene in Pakistan, as it's a great way of showing he is tough and may oppose an attack on Iran but I'm prepared to get tough on Pakistan. I don't think they would do it, but as I say, if they start perceiving themselves as really losing in Afghanistan, well, the temptation to do something extreme will certainly rise in Washington.

Assuming that this doesn't happen and it's not going to happen in the next few months, by far the most likely scenario for Musharraf leaving power is, of course, that the Army will tell him to leave, or rather, as with Ayub Khan, will ask him relatively politely to leave. But at a certain point, you will get a delegation of senior generals, led by the new Chief of Staff and they will say 'General, with the utmost respect, we admire all you have done for Pakistan, but for the good of Pakistan, and above all, the good of the Army, you must see it is time for you to step down'. And I'm pretty sure that if that is said, Musharraf will step down as Ayub did in the past.

The way this moment has usually come in the past is when really serious trouble on the streets spreads to Northern Punjab, because that is when the High Command begins to confront the nightmare scenario that it is going to give orders to its Punjabi soldiers to open fire on the crown and the Punjabi soldiers are going to say 'No, Sir. These are my people'. And that's when the Army conducts a change of regime, because as it did in 1988 when Lyse and I were there, the Army managed the subsequent transition to civilian rule and control it in many ways and, of course, conduct it in such a way that the Army retains its property but also continues to dominate the state behind the scenes.

Very quickly, question marks as to what will happen, I was going to do this very quickly so I can't be proved completely wrong and phrase them as questions rather than as statements. Obviously, how much of the opposition will take part in the elections, how much will boycott? If they boycott, will they try to bring masses of people out on to the streets? If they don't maybe Musharraf can just shrug his shoulders and say 'boycott and I'll stay in power'. If they try to bring large numbers of people out on to the streets will they succeed? This is by no means certain given the record in power of both Benazir and Navaz and that's something they're both worried about. Will they be allowed to do so by their respective backers? What will Washington say to Benazir Bhutto about leading a movement of this kind in circumstances where Washington is so worried about Pakistani stability? Will Saudi Arabia allow another (inaudible) to do so, given that Saudi is the safety blanket so to speak? Will Benazir Bhutto be able to lead mass rallies and if she can't, will people follow her? Will she dare, given the very strong chance that if she does she will be killed or blown up, as almost happened in Karachi? If, God forbid, she is blown up what will happen then? If Musharraf is killed I don't think it will essentially change anything because he represents an institution and the Army will continue. If Bhutto disappears from the scene, things will look very different because then the PPP disintegrates as a Party. The entire Pakistani political kaleidoscope changes, then on the one hand the Army has far more opportunities to build coalitions as it wishes, on the other hand of course with PPP gone, the Islamists really are left as the only Opposition Party standing with any kind of social and economic agenda.

However, to finish, to some extent, leaving aside the real extent and threat of Islamist violence and the unrest and destabilisation that that brings with it, some of this political

business is just nappy phenomenon. The real important question for Pakistan is can the economy grow? Continue to grow, grow in ways in which the prosperity is distributed more widely in Pakistani society? If it can for a generation, Pakistani social and political structures will be radically transformed in ways in which with time will give a chance of establishing a greater degree of real democracy in this country. If Pakistan can not change in this way, then in the long run, not a great deal of what is dominating the headlines today will matter a great deal one way or another.