

Book Reviews

South Asia

Teresita C. Schaffer

Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West

Benazir Bhutto. London: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

£17.99/\$27.95. 328 pp.

PROOF

Benazir Bhutto wrote this legacy book just before she returned to Pakistan in October 2007, and completed the final edits the day before her tragic assassination two months later.

Reconciliation lays out, with almost desperate passion, Bhutto's vision of Islam, marked by judicious reason, compassion, gentleness, and above all toleration for the world's diversity. In what she terms 'the battle within Islam', she comes down resolutely on the side that favours democracy, moderation and finding common cause with the West. She bolsters this argument with a lengthy discussion of the historical and religious meanings of 'jihad', which she believes should properly be defined as 'struggling in the path of God'. Tracing the history of Islamic thought, she stresses that Islamic thinkers and rulers were ahead of their times in their early sensitivity to women's rights and potential. One chapter is devoted to Islam and democracy, with a series of brief descriptions of how different Islamic countries have dealt with their people's democratic strivings.

Bhutto devotes a full chapter to 'the case of Pakistan'. Not surprisingly, she is at pains to demonstrate that she and her Pakistan People's Party had the right answers all along, and that they were wronged by Pakistan's military and by misguided US policies. She blames Pakistan's intelligence services, the Inter-Services Intelligence, for the murder of her brother (her husband or over-zealous supporters have also been accused of this crime). Much of this material will be familiar to those who follow current events in Pakistan. It is a country

where history is a pageant of saints and demons, and this account runs true to form.

Bhutto's final chapter asks whether the clash of civilisations is inevitable. After setting forth her question, bolstered by extensive quotations from Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, she takes sharp exception to what she terms 'the self-fulfilling prophecy of fear'. She argues that the West can prevent the clash of civilisations by helping Muslim states create 'building blocks of democracy' and become more moderate and less extreme.

This is a sad book on many levels. Bhutto's argument offers a message of hope both for modernisers in the Muslim world and for Westerners who believe that the world will be a better place if the Muslim countries develop peacefully and democratically. She musters an impressive number of Muslim intellectuals in support of her arguments. But this kind of argument, and this particular array of experts, are unlikely to sway the minds of those who have spearheaded today's violent Islamic movements. Winning those hearts and minds will require the support of people whose ethos and identity have been formed in more traditionally Islamic settings than was the case with Benazir.

In the end she was killed, in all likelihood by assassins who saw her as an obstacle to their vision of Islam. Whatever flaws she had during her two terms as prime minister of Pakistan, her death left the country much worse off, and her vision of Islamic reconciliation with the West harder to attain.

Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia

Ahmed Rashid. New York: Viking, 2008. £25.00/\$27.95. 544 pp.

Ahmed Rashid has been chronicling the agonies of Afghanistan, the Taliban, and the adjacent areas of Central Asia for a couple of decades, both as a correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and as the author of two gripping best-sellers, *Taliban* and *Jihad*.

This latest book begins and ends with a plea for a radical and democratic transformation in Afghanistan and the surrounding countries. 'Initially', he writes on the book's first page, 'it seemed that 9/11 would ensure that the world addressed the social stagnation and state failure in South and Central Asia.' The failure to live up to this expectation, he argues, is the big strategic failure after 11 September 2001.

Rashid takes the reader behind the scenes in Washington, Islamabad, the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, many parts of Afghanistan, and more briefly in several Central Asian countries. His research included extensive interviews

with some of the key decision-makers in the countries he is writing about. The main thread of his story begins with the 11 September attacks and with the high-level contacts between the United States and Pakistan, and extends to mid 2008, by which time Pakistan and Afghanistan were at odds, the United States had become deeply suspicious of Pakistan's intelligence services, and nation-building efforts in Afghanistan and Central Asia appeared to have stalled.

It is a story with few if any heroes, a few villains (including Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf), and a long list of inept dupes, including most of the key US decision-makers. Rashid traces the mixed motives that have long plagued Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan. His account of the inadequacies of the reconstruction effort is particularly telling. He criticises both the international community's financial contribution – \$57 per capita, compared to \$679 per capita in Bosnia – and the implementation, with heavy reliance on tribal warlords who were not trying to build a country. He is especially – and justifiably – critical of inconsistent US policies on narcotics in Afghanistan, which he argues were hamstrung by the conflicting demands of intelligence relationships in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The most original part of the book is Rashid's discussion of the tribal dynamics of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border areas, together with the way Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence sought to manipulate them to keep the United States in its corner. Rashid's on-the-ground reporting evoked the finest aspects of his two earlier books. I found myself wishing he had spent more time on this unique perspective, and less on re-telling distressing but familiar stories such as how the United States embarked on the disastrous policy of 'harsh interrogation methods'.

Alas, Rashid's argument is undercut by his surprisingly naive political analysis. He says he expected the world to give priority to democracy-building. Despite the Bush administration's rhetoric, democracy and institution-building were never the leading edge of its policy in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld – one of the dupes, as portrayed in Rashid's account – was never interested in nation- or democracy-building, and his was the primary voice shaping US policy. I share Rashid's sorrow about the opportunities the world and the region have missed as a result, but would have welcomed a more clear-eyed analysis of how the United States was actually approaching the region. There is plenty of blame to go around for what has unquestionably been a failure of nation-building. The real problem, however, is not so much villainy as conflicting priorities, in a part of the world where outsiders have never been very successful in calling the shots.

Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within

Shuja Nawaz. New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2008.

£16.99/\$34.95. 700 pp.

Shuja Nawaz comes from an army family. His elder brother, Asif Nawaz Janjua, was Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff from 1991–93, and died in office under murky circumstances. Shuja himself worked as a journalist and then for many years for the International Monetary Fund. His book is thus the work of both an insider – not just in Pakistan but in the army – and an outsider. It is a valuable addition to the literature, and is particularly strong in its discussion of the role of the Pakistani military. In writing the book he had access to a remarkable array of documents and interviews from the Pakistani army.

Nawaz constructs his history of Pakistan as above all a history of its army. I believe this approach is appropriate. Nawaz is quite critical of the army, both in its civil and military roles. One sentence from the Introduction sums up his basic lament: 'Pakistan's existence has been marked by attempts to build a nation but without first building the institutional foundations that are needed to allow a stable federal entity to evolve in a democratic and pluralistic setting'. He acknowledges the army's professional pride and patriotic intent, but faults it for creating a 'culture of entitlement', a 'corporate structure and identity that appears to trump broader national interests'.

Nawaz asserts that while 'the army has generally performed well in its primary task of defending the country against external threats', overall, its record is spotty at best. Nawaz notes that the army's failure of political judgement and its ill-conceived military plans, in both 1971 and 1999, had devastating consequences for the nation. His accounts of the war in which Pakistan and Bangladesh separated and of the Kargil crisis, in which Pakistan tried to steal a march on India by sending troops into the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir, provide ample detail to back up this accusation.

Nawaz argues that the other major and, for the most part, baleful influence on Pakistan's history has been the United States. He complains that the United States has 'given its strategic and often short-term foreign policy interests preference' over sustaining democracy in Pakistan. At the same time, he argues that the volatile US–Pakistan relationship was 'between consenting adults', citing for example the statement in 1954 by then army chief Iskander Mirza that if the United States called on its new ally to honour its commitments to the common defence, 'Pakistan can limit her help to declarations in favor of the United Nations'. These statements have an uncomfortably contemporary ring. But his discussion of the US role is marred by some surprising errors of fact and by uneven use of documentary evidence.

The most original chapter in this book is the last, which describes, based on access to army documents, how Pakistan's army recruitment has changed, with the traditional military-recruitment districts of northern Punjab providing a dramatically smaller percentage of today's army, especially of the Other Ranks, than in Pakistan's first three decades of independence. This means that Pakistan's army 'reflects Pakistani society more than at any time in its history'. The overwhelming corporate culture of the military, however, will probably mute the impact of these changing recruitment patterns on the army's role.

The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan

C. Christine Fair. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008. \$14.95. 145 pp.

Christine Fair has produced a well-researched and carefully argued discussion that overturns much of the conventional wisdom about where madrassah education fits in to the recruitment and nurturing of extremist Islamic militancy in Pakistan. It is blessedly short (just over 100 pages) and should be required reading for anyone tempted to pontificate on this vexing subject.

Drawing on the literature about suicide bombing, quantitative studies on madrassahs and militant recruitment, and on her own field work, Fair concludes that while many students are exposed to some madrassah education, those who study full time in such schools represent a tiny minority, perhaps as low as 1%, of Pakistan's students. The largest concentration of madrassahs is in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. There is little difference in the economic profiles of madrassah students and those in state-run schools. Fair effectively rebuts the argument that these schools are recruiting centres for militants active in Kashmir. Studies of suicide bombers and other militant leaders suggest that their education is typically in non-religious institutions and up to the university level.

Madrassah attendance does, however, correlate with other tendencies that ought to worry us. Madrassah students are less likely than their counterparts in non-religious schools to support equal rights for women and religious minorities. Even more worrisome is the association of madrassahs with sectarian violence. And despite the lack of evidence connecting most madrassahs with militancy, a handful of these schools do have such links. If the number is indeed small, closing down the offenders might be a viable option for the Pakistani government, but any such action would be fraught with political risk.

This is primarily a descriptive work, but Fair does conclude with some discussion of what a sensible education policy might look like. Her emphasis, properly, is on beefing up non-religious education, and especially making high-quality girls' education available, with good female teachers. My research a couple of decades ago in Bangladesh suggests that there is a market for girls' education, and that country's experience in the intervening years would indicate this is an achievable goal.

Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web

Ali Riaz. London: Routledge, 2008. £80.00/\$160.00. 172 pp.

For many years, Bangladesh was looked on as an inhospitable environment for Islamic extremism. The local Islamic culture is filled with pan-South Asian features, including rich poetic and musical traditions of the sort not usually associated with the kind of orthodoxy that normally spawns extremist movements. The country's largest Islamist party was stigmatised for decades because it opposed Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971. The two mainstream political parties, whose leaders have alternated in office for close to two decades, are also non-religious. But since at least the late 1990s, Islamic groups that seek to install an explicitly Islamic state that rejects many of the basic tenets of liberal democracy have been a prominent part of the political scene.

Ali Riaz's fine study contends that among the many reasons for this transformation, the most important is the relentless decline in governance in Bangladesh, what he terms 'the absence of the state', which has created a vacuum in law enforcement and the provision of basic services. This, in turn, has created a market for Islamist militant groups. His basic contention is that clandestine Islamist groups have little support, but are nonetheless a threat to Bangladeshi society and national security. Their access to weapons, largely through the Southeast Asian black market, makes them dangerous, the more so since none completely reject violence as a means of political change.

Riaz distinguishes among three types of militant groups. Two are participants, to a greater or lesser degree, in Bangladesh's political process; the best-known examples are the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islami Oikya Jote. Riaz argues that organisations of the third type, clandestine organisations, consider violence the only means to achieve their political goals. The best-known example here is the Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, the group that claimed responsibility for a series of coordinated bombings in all but one of Bangladesh's administrative districts in August 2005. His thumbnail sketches of the major groups at the end of the study is a very valuable research aid.

Riaz contends that periods of military influence in politics have expanded Islamist influence. He cites numerous instances in which local administrations have looked the other way when radical groups apparently took the law into their own hands. He also argues that the relations among the South Asian states encouraged the worst tendencies of the clandestine groups. A complex series of relationships among militant groups across Bangladesh's borders with India and Myanmar, as well as the 'proxy wars' between India and Pakistan, are cases in point. A government crackdown in 2006–07 resulted in thousands of arrests from militant groups. These were a blow to the clandestine militants, but did not put them out of business.

Riaz's prescription for creating a better atmosphere is twofold: encourage economic and social development, and remedy the glaring governance problems that afflict the major non-Islamist political parties so that the democratic system can function as it was meant to. Bangladesh's foreign friends can help finance development, but political housecleaning is a job the Bangladeshis need to do. Riaz correctly identifies the pathologies the parties need to address: 'patrimonialism', a sense of entitlement, the family lock on the two major parties, the difficulty (some would say impossibility) of bringing in fresh party leadership. He has the right idea. How to actually change these things, however, is a conundrum neither he nor anyone else has yet figured out.

PROOF

War, Conflict and the Military

H.R. McMaster

Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare

Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, eds. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008. £17.99/\$27.95. 304 pp.

Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare is one of the more recent additions to the burgeoning literature on the subject. The editors, Daniel Marston of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, and Carter Malkasian of the US Center for Naval Analysis, have pulled together a high-quality and very useful collection of essays from a diverse group of authors. The book will appeal to a wide range of readers, but will prove most useful to students of counter-insurgency and defence officials desiring easy access to comparative perspectives that might help illuminate the dimensions of contemporary conflicts.