

An Interview with Husain Haqqani



Muhammad Mustehsan

What does success in Afghanistan look like from a Pakistani perspective, and how might it be achieved?

HH: From Pakistan's perspective, a stable Afghanistan—with a government favorably disposed toward Pakistan and that contains the Taliban threat and does not allow it to spill over into Pakistan—would represent success. Without going into history, let me just say that

Pakistan's policy now is to help Afghanistan attain long-term stability and build national institutions, including the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. But at the same time, we are realistic enough to understand that Afghanistan's institutions of state will not emerge overnight; it takes decades to build an army; it takes a long time to build an ethos of a comprehensive and integrated civil service. So the first priority in Afghanistan ought to be to beat the insurgency, to contain the Taliban threat, and at the same time to make it possible for reconcilable elements in the insurgency to be brought into the political mainstream through a process of reconciliation. But Pakistan's own security is important to Pakistanis, and we certainly do not want Afghanistan to be used for intelligence or military operations aimed at undermining Pakistan's security.

Could a stable Afghanistan government include the Taliban?

HH: President [Hamid] Karzai has on many occasions said that he does not look upon the Taliban as a monolith. We in Pakistan have also had the experience of the Pakistani Taliban, and we recognize that the Taliban are not a monolithic organization. They are a loose association of likeminded people with different motives. In some cases, the agenda is much more inspired by the global jihad vision of al Qaeda, and

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in some cases it is local grievances that have turned the people into Taliban. So there are reconcilable and irreconcilable elements within the broad groupings known as the Taliban, and including some of them in a political process in Afghanistan is definitely a possibility. A lot of the Taliban happen to be Pashtun, and Pashtun inclusion in Afghanistan's government is significant and important just to be able to create national unity within the country. So I think that we need to make a distinction between reconcilable and irreconcilable elements among the Taliban and engage the reconcilable elements. Of course, it is up to Afghanistan to take the initiative on the Afghan side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. If the Afghans need any support—political, material, or diplomatic—Pakistan will be forthcoming in providing that support in the process of reconciliation within Afghanistan, but it will have to be an Afghan-led process.

Do you think that the current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy will defeat the irreconcilable Taliban?

HH: I'm not a military man, so I do not claim superior knowledge on the subject of military strategy, but I think that any counterinsurgency strategy needs to have a military component, a political component, and a socioeconomic component. We are seeing the emergence of a comprehensive strategy. There is a military plan now with the forthcoming surge. There is seemingly a political plan relating to the process of reconciliation and reintegration. And then hopefully there will be a sufficiently effective socioeconomic program so that people do not join insurgents in reaction to their own grievances that emanate from being dispossessed.

A major problem in Afghanistan remains resentment against the presence of foreign forces, so the United States will have to address that resentment as well at some point. There are those who are waging an insurgency because they want to take power in Afghanistan, but there are those who would not even become insurgents if there were no foreign presence there. And I think that is something that is being understood by American military leaders. Not only are we the major source of logistics support for NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] in Afghanistan, but also in recent months, we have been working together to make sure that there is a hammer and anvil strategy where, when Pakistan operates against Taliban on the Pakistani side of the border, there is some attempt on the Afghan side by NATO-ISAF forces to ensure that these people do not escape into Afghanistan, and vice versa. But I think that the weakness of the Afghan military remains a factor in putting the burden of counterinsurgency on the Afghan side almost entirely on NATO and ISAF forces.

Given what you have said about the resistance to a foreign presence in Afghanistan, do you think that Western aid, which is usually provided through Western civilians or nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], will be able to win “hearts and minds” in Afghanistan and in Pakistan?

HH: The question of Western aid always becomes a catch-22 question because your own legislators would like greater transparency and accountability in the use of money that is essentially being spent on behalf of your taxpayers. At the same time, if you have a large footprint of foreigners going around the countryside in

Afghanistan or the tribal parts of Pakistan, it is likely to create resentment. People turn around and say, “What do these people really want?” So conspiracy theories are easier to spread when there are a lot of foreigners present. Finding the balance is not easy, but I think that everybody would agree that people in Afghanistan, and for that matter in Pakistan, would like American assistance for our economic growth and for our development. The only question is under what terms should this aid flow and how can the Americans find ways of accountability and transparency that satisfy American taxpayers and legislators without causing offense on the ground by having too heavy an American civilian or NGO presence.

The United States over the past 10 years has developed a “whole-of-government” approach to complex operations. What is Pakistan’s strategy for meeting the challenge of its own radical element?

HH: Pakistan, of course, since the election of the democratic government in February 2008, has had a whole-of-government approach as well. Our military has been taking the lead in military operations. We have had successful operations in Swat and South Waziristan and have defeated the insurgents there—cleared a lot of territory. We continue to have the four-step policy of clear, hold, rebuild, and transfer. So the military goes in and clears, and it holds territory that would otherwise have been under Taliban influence. But at the same time, the rebuilding and the transfer require two things: rebuilding requires a lot of resources, but the transfer requires capacity-building. Civilian institutions do not have the capacity at this stage to take over all responsibilities and provide all elements of good governance

in formerly Taliban-infested areas. So we hope that we can, with the help of the international community, have an effective policy in which we can use the military to fight, but we can also use political and socioeconomic instruments to ensure that we do not have a recurrence or resurgence of the radicals whom we have already defeated.

So what is the correct approach to the Taliban in Pakistan? Is it the whole-of-government approach or a military answer for insurgency like in Sri Lanka or Algeria?

HH: There is no military answer to an insurgency that involves large numbers of people, many of whom have the support of their tribes or their fellow villagers based on religious sentiment. I think that we need to fight the hardcore and defeat them, but at the same time, we need to create a culture of hope where people realize that they can have a better life here and now and therefore do not need to listen to people who invite them to blow themselves up to be able to have a better life in the hereafter.

We must also understand the social underpinnings of insurgency: the lack of governance or opportunities and the absence of justice that people complain about. One-third of Pakistan’s population live below the poverty line and another one-third live just above. To make the argument that the fact that so many people do not have any opportunity for their future, do not have anything to look forward to, has nothing to do with their willingness to become radicals is to deny a significant contributing factor toward the insurgency. I think that there are hardcore ideologues who contribute to radicalism in Pakistan, but then there are a lot of people for whom this is about global injustice, this is about not having a job, this is about not having been to school

ever or having no chance of an education or an opportunity. So we really have to work on several dimensions and make sure that the 42 percent of school-aged children in Pakistan who *do not* go to school can somehow come into the schooling system—that we can actually give young Pakistanis hope that they can have a good life making shoes for Nike rather than improvised explosive devices for the Taliban.

Let's talk about justice for a minute. Some people see the Pakistani judiciary as heroic in upholding democracy and particularly in the movement to return to civilian government. Should the United States provide assistance to the Pakistani judiciary?

HH: We must understand that when people say that they are being denied justice, they're not talking about the constitutional arguments in superior courts. They're talking about the day-to-day running of civil and criminal cases, and there I think that Pakistan's judicial institutions need a lot of investment.

We have fewer judges at the lower levels than we need; our courts are clogged; and litigation usually, especially in civil disputes, proceeds at a slow pace. Similarly, the criminal justice system also suffers from inadequate funding. If we had a good law enforcement machinery, if our police had the kind of equipment and mobility that would help prevent crime, and then if the prosecutorial side of the criminal justice system was able to collect evidence and present it before a court in a timely manner, then we wouldn't have the spectacle of cases—criminal cases—pending for 10, 12, or 15 years.

Try seeing the thing from the perspective of somebody who has been charged, but wrongly so, and has not even been convicted but has had a case pending against him for many years.

It's a charge that is pending without the ability to clear the name or for that matter to have a sentence pronounced and then completing that sentence. It's like purgatory for a very long time.

So those are the issues that people are talking about when they say that we need a lot of support for our judicial system. It's not just the superior courts where constitutional and political issues are sometimes addressed; it's the lower courts at the smallest level—the judge for the district who sits in the district headquarters but hardly has any influence over some isolated village. That is where the support and investment are needed.

If the United States wanted to develop a strategy to help Pakistan consolidate the rule of law, what would be the characteristics of that strategy?

HH: First of all, any strategy for the consolidation of rule of law in Pakistan would have to be led by Pakistanis, and any role that the United States has would have to be supportive of that Pakistani strategy. In recent years, there has been a tendency, especially among the aid community in the United States, to think that the solution to corrupt or ineffective government is to bypass government and work through nongovernmental organizations. In some areas, nongovernmental organizations work fine—reproductive health, gender issues. You allow certain women's groups, collectives, et cetera, to work, and you support them with money and resources. That's fine. But in matters such as building of rule of law or building a law enforcement machinery—if you bypass government then you really do not help build institutions of state. You have to work through the state. You have to work through the government.

I think what is needed in the case of Pakistan is an understanding of what it is that has prevented Pakistan from becoming a rule-of-law state. At the macro level, it has been the historic pattern of overthrowing of governments without constitutional process. That is being addressed by the force of public opinion, by cooperation among various political parties, and by the fact that we now have a consensus constitutional reform package going through Parliament. The other part of it is what I said, a micro level—and there I think the real issue is the lack of resources, the lack of technology, and in many cases, the lack of training. And those are the three things where American resources, technology, and training can help.

What does Pakistan look like to you in 10 years? What kind of country do you expect it to be?

HH: I will rephrase the question and say I would like to talk about what kind of country I would *like* Pakistan to be in 10 years. My vision of Pakistan is that of a country with universal access to education for our school-aged children, with a more advanced infrastructure—a nation that sits at the crossroads of opportunities rather than at the crossroads of conflict. After all, Pakistan is strategically located at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, China, and the Middle East. So far, we have always seen ourselves as sitting at the crossroads of the conflicts of these regions, but we can also transform it into a crossroads of opportunity for these regions.

Also, I would like to see a major economic leap forward in terms of becoming a nation that produces and exports much more than we do. Pakistan's agriculture, which used to grow at

an average rate of 5 percent per annum during the 1950s, is barely growing and contributing to national economic growth now. And I think that there is plenty of potential there with some land reform, with some policy reform, and with some improved inputs, including a revamp of our irrigation system. With these, we should be able to expand our agricultural growth. And then, the massive movement of populations from the rural areas to the urban areas needs to be better managed. Instead of huge slums in cities, we hopefully will be able to create smaller cities and towns that are self-contained. So that would be the vision for Pakistan that I would have 10 years from now.

And a key element would be peace with India, with resolution of our outstanding disputes, including Kashmir, and a much more stable relationship with Afghanistan in which Afghanistan and Pakistan are partners for stability.

But would Pakistan be a country whose national ideology or national character is oriented toward fundamentalist Islam or a pro-Western orientation?

HH: Pakistanis have time and again voted for democratic, modern, liberal political parties, and I think that trend will continue. Given the opportunity, Pakistanis would like to be part of the 21st century, and while we will always be an Islamic society, we would certainly want to be a modern, democratic, forward-looking, progressive state.

After 30 years of war, do you think that Afghanistan is going to achieve reintegration and consolidation? Will it require or should it have some kind of justice and reconciliation process or prosecution of people who committed crimes in the past?

HH: I think it's a question that should be asked of Afghan leaders. In most situations, it's better to settle and reconcile matters of the past instead of holding grudges, and I think that the Afghan leaders are best equipped to find their correct mechanism for bringing justice to their society, and justice in a manner in which it does not end up becoming or is not seen as settling of scores from the past. Afghanistan has gone through a lot of trauma. It began with the Soviet occupation, but it did not end with the Soviet withdrawal. And the world really neglected Afghanistan, and by extension Pakistan, in the subsequent years. I think it was a big mistake of the United States to walk away from our region after the Soviets left Afghanistan, and I think the international community now recognizes that. That said, all the trauma that the Afghans have gone through would not be resolved if the injustices of the past end up becoming the basis for settling of scores in the present. **PRISM**