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Book Review: Ian Talbot (2015) 'Pakistan: A New History', London: C. Hurst and Co.

Pakistan: A New History

Ian Talbot

London: C. Hurst and Co.

ISBN 978-1-84904-370-0, £14.99 (paperback),

Reviewed by Dr Jennifer Ferreira, Coventry University

In *Pakistan: A New History*, Ian Talbot presented a comprehensive text which advances our understanding of the complex development of Pakistan, building on his previous influential works on the topic (Talbot, 2006, 2009). This recent monograph provides a critical assessment of the policies and activities of the Pakistani governments, in chronological order, considering their trials and tribulations in detail. Talbot acknowledges that while in many chapters the focus is on repeated failures such as the collapse of stable governance and the drop in positive political and economic development, the overall message is that the country retains potential for a positive future with the right governance and participation.

In earlier works Talbot (2009) concluded further polarisation and instability could only be avoided if there was genuine political participation of previously marginalised groups, including women, minorities and the rural and urban poor. This would allow Pakistan to begin to tackle the immense economic, social and environmental challenges it would face over the next century. Talbot highlights in this volume that in many ways the situation has not progressed as much as one would hope, and that many of the problems previously discussed still exist.

Talbot seeks to look beyond the news headlines about Pakistan to instead analyse major turning points and trends since its creation, including: increasing entrenchment of the army in Pakistan's politics and economy, issues surrounding the role of Islam in public life; tensions between centralised and local identities; democratic challenges; and the impact of geopolitical influences on internal development. For Talbot many of failures in Pakistan of governance and development were not only a failure of any particular individual or institution, but a function of immense complexities Pakistan faces, deeply rooted in history. Maintaining optimism, Talbot highlights therefore that opportunities remain for reform of institutions in Pakistan which would allow it to bring about economic and political stability that so many of its citizens want it to achieve. In doing so he questions the extent to which the resulting features of Pakistan are a function of its domestic history and its external dimensions, but also a function of the various transformations related to attempts at structural reform, democratic consolidation, expansion of middle class and civil society, entrenched inequality, ethnic divisions and sectarianism, lack of cohesion, population increase and urbanisation, as well as issues of education.

With these issues in mind, the book focuses on five key areas of Pakistan's development: legacies of the colonial era and the impact of Partition; historical inheritances; the skewing of civil-military relationship allowing the army immense influence in foreign and security policy; the internal and external dimension and Pakistan's development; centre-province tensions; foreign relations (in particular with India, the US, and China) and the role of Islam in Pakistan's public life. The chapters of this book move through Pakistan's history chronologically, analysing key historical events and issues, whilst also making the reader aware of the longer term challenges that face Pakistan relating as a consequence of its history, economic, environmental and demographic development features.

The Chapter 1 begins with a brief overview of contemporary scholarship on Pakistan, and considers elements of Pakistan's geographies on its development, its physical environment which is home to a rapidly growing population, and the challenges this poses. This is combined with an examination of the impact of social structures on Pakistan's development. Crucially Talbot concludes that 'security concerns have shaped its development, because in many respects it is a borderland state with a historical colonial legacy' of contested boundaries (p. 44), and 'inherited advantages and more

importantly disadvantages with respect to agricultural production, communications, education and personal rights have complicated post-independence nation-building' (p.44).

Chapter 2 covers the first decade of Pakistan's development (1947-1958), considering its political trajectory in its earliest years, when the foundations were laid for its future struggles; arguing that 'Pakistan's political inheritances, together with the emergence of the Kashmir dispute, undermined its democratic development' (p.47), leading to a lack of democratic consolidation. Here Talbot shows how politics and administration remaining from the colonial era continued to have an impact after the British had left, the impact of the painful Partition process, and the impact of a shift from the reliance of the state from politicians to the army.

Chapter 3 focuses on the rule of the military leader Ayub Khan (1958-1969) and his responses to the state's developmental issues, in particular efforts to strengthen presidential authority, the role of the army in politics and policy, and the role of militant Islamic groups. Talbot analyses Ayub's impact on Pakistan's authoritarian traditions of governance, and explores how the army expanded its activities into Pakistan. Talbot refers the Ayub era as a 'hinge period' and a 'transitional era' of growing inequality, but also one where the leader was unable to resolve the role of Islam in broader public life (p.91).

Chapter 4 explores the period under the rule of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who 'sought to transform Pakistan' (p.112) after 1971, examining the failures of this era to address socio-economic problems, despite attempts to address the longer term problems of state construction and identity formation. Talbot highlights a series of failures from inability to restructure civil military relations, to tensions between centre and provinces; but also that the failures were 'not however inevitable' (p.112) and represented 'a tragedy for the Pakistan nation which witnessed a second missed chance for democratization (p.113).

Chapter 5 moves on to examine the legacy of general Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) acknowledging further negative legacies from its leaders despite it being a time in which Pakistan outperformed India in terms of economic growth. Unfortunately, 'uneven development and lack of human capital investment' meant it could not maintain this position, exacerbated by weak state institutions, and a series of 'Islamization' measures instigated. Despite Zia's 'quest for stability', the result was 'mounting sectarian violence and increased ethnic conflict' and increased inequality between cohorts of the population (p.140).

Chapter 6 covers the years 1988-99, a period Talbot terms a 'democratic interlude' where 'hopes that Pakistan would enter a new era with the beginnings of a modern party system' (p.143) did not come to fruition. It examines why democracy did not develop after Zia's death as Pakistan's politics remained embedded in struggles between Bhuttoist and Ziaist forces, and how 'leaders of this period made life more difficult for themselves' (p.144). Talbot argues that Pakistan's leaders were not able to replace the 'traditional patron-client approach to politics with strongly institutionalized party structure' (p.148) and that lessons from previous democratic failures had not been absorbed.

Chapter 7 examines the Musharraf regime from 1999 focusing on how the military government was unable to modernise society, governance or the economy, when Pakistan's utilization of Islamic proxies had 'derailed relations with its neighbours' (p.171), and that military rule increased ethnic tensions in smaller provinces. Talbot posits that 'rather than being the self-proclaimed saviour of the country, he had not begun to address the problems which had bedevilled' Pakistan since 1947 (p.171). In essence it was a period in which 'much had been promised but little was delivered' (p.199).

Chapter 8 moves forward to discuss the Zardari presidency recognising the continuing challenges emanating from the historical complexities of Pakistan, but also the developing contemporary challenges from lack of effective structural reforms to the impact of natural disasters. Chapter 9 then considers the times from the death of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad in May 2011, to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) march to Islamabad in 2014, a time with continued security problems,

economic slowdown, a challenging relationship with India, as well as fears as over democratic consolidation.

Finally, the epilogue reflects on the progress made in Pakistan, but more importantly outlines the remaining long term challenges it faces, and the prospects for the future. Importantly, Talbot highlights how many studies of Pakistan focus on the short term future, often out of necessity to deal with volatile scenarios. This work has shown how many of the issues have long complex histories, and therefore requires a longer term approach. Talbot points to issues of demographic challenges - overpopulation, food and water shortages, and rising youth unemployment. Talbot reiterates some of the Pakistan's failures citing both a 'commitment' gap and an 'implementation' gap which have ultimately led to missed opportunities and failure to achieve goals. Talbot does however turn to consider how Pakistan might address some of these challenges, through education, to equip Pakistan to face the contemporary challenges. More broadly Pakistan, according to Talbot needs connections between social justice, sustainability of growth, regional security and democratization to be address (p.251) alongside 'greater transparency in economic life' (p.252) and empowerment of citizens which Talbot views as crucial to avoid the expansion of military into political spheres.

In the epilogue Talbot highlights that policy-oriented works often refer to the 'problem' of Pakistan, whether this is the failure to instigate economic take off, or links with particular militant groups, or poor governance, rather than seeking to understand the country and its people in their term. This book provides an excellent overview of the history of Pakistan from its birth to modern times, considering with empathy both its failures and successes. The book highlights not only the major turning points in terms of changes of leadership, but considers underlying themes around the entrenchment of Pakistan's army in political and economic spheres, the role of Islam in public life, the tensions between centre and peripheral areas of the countries, and the impact of broader geopolitical tensions both internally and externally.

While Talbot focuses on the historical development of Pakistan, its focus remains largely on the political and economic spheres. Talbot points to the demographic and socio-economic challenges the country is likely to face in the future, with the potential to pose more serious threats than the security crises seen in previous decades. Here issues of the quality and delivery of education and the potential implications of this for wider societal development and social cohesion are introduced. In Talbot's previous work (Talbot, 2009), it was acknowledged that the future of Pakistan relies on the political participation of previously marginalised groups, but what is indicated in this volume is that the future of Pakistan relies on wider social cohesion within society, participation of women, and other marginalised groups in greater aspects of society, and to understand how this might happen more attention needs to be paid to their experiences throughout the tumultuous decades that Pakistan has faced, throughout volatile political and economic changes of the decades covered in this book.

Talbot, with meticulous detail discusses the various failings of Pakistan over previous decades, but repeatedly maintains that the country maintains a potential to move forward and that the failures were a result of a complex mix of history, politics, geo-politics and the actions of states and individuals, all of which need to be acknowledged in order for particular challenges to be overcome and establish economic and political sustainability. For anyone seeking to begin to understand Pakistan's past this book presents a comprehensive overview of developments, the progression of a country, its leaders, and its people, amidst challenges, turmoil and frequent hurdles presenting a positive outlook for the country. It provides a guide to begin to understand the complexity of a nation still developing its personality, and its place in the world, one which Talbot argues can be more positive. This book is timely and welcome addition to the scholarship of South Asian development taking into account the longer term historical complexities the country faces and the impact this has on its development and relations with other states around the world.

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