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**Failing Pakistan's Hybrid
Model of Governance is a
Threat to Regional Peace**

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Abstract

The multi-layered structure of Pakistan's hybrid model of governance, wherein the extra-constitutional authorities of an entrenched security establishment, external patronage, and internal religious and feudal networks influence the nominally elected institutions and selected political leaders, impedes development, and regional peace. This paper examines how the concentration of power outside democratic institutions has ensured political instability, destroyed economic sustainability, encouraged radicalisation, and produced a polarised, fragmented society. It argues that the persistent use of proxy actors, selective constitutionalism, and securitised national narratives has produced internal fragmentation while exporting insecurity across South Asia. By analysing historical evolution, institutional dynamics, and contemporary challenges, the paper assesses the implications of Pakistan's governance trajectory for continued internal fragility, expanding regional security challenges, and implications for world peace.

Keywords: Regional Security, Military Establishment, Islamic Networks, Hybrid

Governance

Pakistan: A Hybrid Security State

Expert geopolitical commentators often directly attribute the challenges in Pakistan to the control of their Military (Deep State) in all realms of power structure. It is rather a simplistic prognosis of the disease Pakistan has become for itself and is afflicting the region. If analysed in depth and without the bias against the Pakistani military leadership, often blamed for the crisis and everything wrong, there emerges a stranglehold of a complex hybrid system of governance led by manipulative elites. This layered structural nature of state of Pakistan is the cause of exploitation of common citizens, spread of extremist and radical ideologies, establishment of a deeply embedded autonomous terror infrastructure, the clutch hold of military rule, widespread corruption, extreme poverty driving economic penury and absence of any credible and enduring political system.

Pakistan has steadily but surely grown into the most enduring examples of a hybrid security state. It is a state wherein constitutional authority, military dominance, religious mobilisation, feudal influence, and external patronage co-exists in an overlapping and yet contradictory framework of governance. This layered structure is intricate, self-fuelling yet

delicately balances the significant weakening of one layer ultimately giving way to the uncontrolled collapse of Pakistan.

It has punishing consequences for the people of Pakistan and a major threat for regional peace. Beggars, terrorists, radical thought and renting of military power are the primary means of the state export not only in the region but beyond.

Unfortunately, the country's hybrid model has become a "hangman's noose", where the continuation of such an arrangement is now seen as essential for Pakistan's survival as a state.

Fortunes of Geography Gifted by British and India Squandered

The advantages of geostrategic location of the artificial country that was literally gifted by the British to the Pakistani leadership in 1947 has been a squandered away. What could have been the greatest strength by virtue of its strategic location, has ironically been the cause of the gradual demise of Pakistan as a stable state.

Pakistan is located at one of the most consequential geopolitical spaces in the world. It occupies an historic junction through which number of civilisations and trade centres of South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia interacted. It borders India, China, Afghanistan, and Iran with direct access to the Arabian Sea and the energy routes of the Gulf.

Then leadership of emerging India accepted the demands of the Muslim elites and virtually gave no resistance to demands of new country that was based on the singularity of religion. They, in fact, allowed even those who had vociferously demanded for a state for themselves, to stay back in India.

In all the machinations, Indian leadership allowed the new Pakistani state a remarkable combination of natural, geographic, and civilizational advantages at its creation in 1947. Few newly independent states entered the modern era with such a favourable endowment of resources. They were given fertile lands, strategic location, and historical legacy. Stretching from the fertile plains of Punjab to the coastal belt of Sindh, from the mineral-rich mountains of Balochistan to the spectacular valleys of the north, Pakistan possessed many of the ingredients required for long-term prosperity and stability.

In fact, the Indus River system— one of the world's great river networks, formed the backbone of Pakistan's agricultural economy. Fed by glaciers and snowmelt from the Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush mountain ranges, these waters sustained millions of

people and supports extensive cultivation across the plains of Punjab and Sindh. The fertile alluvial soil deposited over centuries created some of the most productive agricultural lands in South Asia. Wheat, rice, cotton, sugarcane, and numerous other crops have historically flourished in these regions, making them among the most prosperous agricultural zones of the subcontinent. This Indus River System was the place where old civilizations rose over centuries before and made these lands one of the richest in the world.

What is often overlooked is that, at cost of the new India, the leadership signed the Indus Waters Treaty, enabling Pakistan's early development. Not only Pakistan secured rights over the three most prominent western rivers viz. Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab, but also was provided financial contributions through the international framework to construct necessary infrastructure, including dams, barrages, and link canals. This enabled Pakistan to reorganise and expand its irrigation network after Partition.

Beyond agriculture, Pakistan also got natural resources. Large deposits of coal, copper, gold, natural gas, and various minerals are found across the country, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa. The northern regions contain substantial hydropower potential, while the Arabian Sea coastline offered access to maritime trade routes connecting the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

The geographical location was closely tied to a rich historical civilisational legacy of broader Indian subcontinent. The ancient centres of the Indus Valley Civilisation, including sites such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa, that were amongst humanity's earliest urban settlements were given to Pakistan. The region that absorbed and contributed to successive waves of cultural, religious, linguistic, and commercial development over millennia became hub of decay and religious intolerance. The centres around Lahore, Multan, and Hyderabad that were historically known worldwide for culture, learning, trade, and administration were inherited by Pakistan.

Taken together, the strong foundations for nation-building to Pakistan were given by Britishers for their strategic compulsions and out of sheer magnanimity by the leadership of India. Fertile lands, abundant water, strategic geography, mineral wealth, and a deep

civilisational inheritance offered opportunities that many developing countries could only aspire to possess.

Such a benevolent location should have transformed Pakistan into a prosperous commercial, industrial, and strategic hub linking continents and civilisations. Rather than investing into durable institutions, economic growth, and national cohesion, Pakistan's leadership pursued 'single-mindedly religion based strategic objectives', thus effectively squandered the considerable geographical advantages and hence, after nearly eight decades of existence, Pakistan became economically fragile, politically unstable, and strategically dependent. The cause of current state, however, can be traced to the origins of creation of Pakistan.

Origins of the Pakistani State: British Strategic Necessity and not Nationhood

While there was a clamour for a separate state based on religion by the Muslim elites of the United Provinces, the demand gained traction through British instigation once the time of independence, not by choice but of compulsion, came closer. As is proved by historical records, that the constituents of the current Pakistan were unwilling to be part of such an artificial construct. Sindhis, Balochs, Pashtuns and others in frontier provinces were forcibly stitched together. Few of the Muslim elites, most stayed back, who wanted a separate state were forced to move to the western part because of strategic compulsions of the British. Pakistan, thus, was the outcome of geopolitical engineering rather than a product of organic nation-building.

The British Empire, while departing the subcontinent, wanted to retain a buffer space between the communist Soviet Union and India whose leaders had shown clear socialist leanings much prior to Independence. It was to retain strategic leverage over the northwestern frontier region shaped historically by the "Great Game" against the Russian Empire. Therefore, the British ensured retention of Gilgit- Baltistan in Pakistan through direct control of the military operation led by a British Major.

Overtly, the creation of Pakistan, including East Pakistan, was projected as a response to the politics of communal identity. At another level, however, it also aligned with British strategic thinking that favoured a fragmented subcontinent which could be managed more easily than a unified continental-scale power capable of pursuing strategic autonomy. For the British Empire, the Indian subcontinent had long served as a resource-rich region that supplied

cheap labour and substantial military manpower. The prospect of relinquishing control was therefore accompanied not only by strategic compulsions, but also by resentment and lingering imperial attitudes. A divided and fractured subcontinent appeared, to several British leaders of the time, including Winston Churchill, as a more acceptable outcome than the emergence of a strong and independent civilisational state. Pakistan thus emerged from this convergence of communal politics, imperial strategy, and geopolitical calculation.

A State Set to Fail

A split and already fragmented Pakistan was set to fail due to the language and cultural issues that no religion could bind. The scale towards the fragility and failure of Pakistan was sowed much before partition as unwilling parties were by force or through deceit were bound together as country. Disparate, distinct and independent in culture, language, food and attitudes —there was no binding glue for Pakistan.

Resistance to this arrangement emerged from nearly every constituent segment of the Pakistani state. Much of it was either suppressed through force or temporarily managed by empowering local elites, feudal structures, and tribal leaders. Over time, these groups entrenched themselves further, leveraging their influence over their respective populations to bargain with, pressure, and at times virtually blackmail the fragile state. Instead of integrating the federation, the system deepened internal fragmentation with each passing decade.

The western regions of present-day Pakistan were administered through differentiated federal arrangements that preserved exceptional autonomy for tribal and provincial power centres, while the democratic mandate of East Pakistan was systematically denied and politically marginalised despite its demographic majority. This unequal political structure produced two enduring consequences: in the west, the steady rise of powerful tribal and regional actors who challenged central authority; and in the east, the eventual birth of a new nation called Bangladesh within 24 years of Independence.

From Modern Vision to Structural Contradictions: Rapid Degradation

The initial contradictions emerged on the creation of Pakistan itself. While Pakistan's founding leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah and few others articulated a relatively secular and modernist vision but the new state was effectively stitched together under the singular banner

of religion wherein disparate ethnic, linguistic, tribal, and regional identities were compelled to be bound with.

India had the benefit of an experienced and mature political leadership that had strategic vision and experience to negotiate with disparate elements during the independence movement. The inclusive thought process and a country bound by those willing to stay as a Nation, barring few minor exceptions who were quickly dealt with either rules that were enacted much before or in exceptional circumstances through force.

Pakistan, created on the premise of religious similarity, could not invest the energy towards developing institutional structures. Despite Jinnah's secular and modernist vision, structural flaws within the state emerged rapidly.

The institutional foundations of bureaucracy and even military, though led by the British officers, was weak. The ethnic fragmentation, down till the levels of tribals and smaller divisions, were magnified with no supervision and control in the earlier years.

The provincial integration was uneven and political structures were premised on feudal norms. The large land owners and those who had benefitted from the British rule became feudal lords— more brutal than British. The centrality and egos of political, military and bureaucratic hierarchy from West Pakistan, primarily the Punjabis, ensured sidelining of a more populous East Pakistan, that was much more closely knit due to common culture, language and ethnicity. The first physical partition was due to pulls and pressures of politically aware Bengalis who voted *en masse* for their leader to be the Prime Minister. A defining moment in Pakistan wherein religion was trumped by geography and cultural differences.

The military leadership, that was also led by few elites from the rich and feudal backgrounds eventually added security anxieties in the new inexperienced political leadership vis-à-vis India as the war for Jammu and Kashmir quickly broke out with two months of creation on ill advice of junior military officers. This became a rallying point for the Pakistani military to remain relevant and become the cause of the fragility of the country.

Even though religion was the clarion call for the partition, it failed to bind the country as a single entity. Hence, the principal elements of state power continued to invest into Islam as the principal instrument of state cohesion in the absence of any stronger unifying national identity.

Evolution of the Hybrid Governance Model

The elements that interacted in concert for creation of Pakistan and in the initial years took control for their survival and relevance became eventually the power broker to influence its destiny. The Pakistan's hybrid governance model did not emerge overnight in some sequential manner but evolved gradually through interaction between each other.

There were four principal power structures and each was embedded with certain feudal elites or leaders who had significant relevance in Pakistan—namely, military establishment, civilian political-feudal elites, religious-political & Islamist networks and external patrons and geopolitical sponsors. The most dangerous being the 'external patrons and geopolitical sponsors'— as they were instrumental in creation and thereafter maintained a death grip like hold ever since.

Unlike classical democratic systems with clearly separated and vertical institutions wherein the synergy is exercised for the interest of the State, Pakistan's system functions as an integrated but unequal power architecture. These are layered and do not operate independently. They overlap, compete, manipulate, and reinforce one another separately or together, depending on circumstances.

The most important distinction is that the formal constitutional authority and actual strategic authority are often different and changed based on circumstances and needs of each.

The Core Layer is the Military Establishment

It is well established and documented that the most dominant Pakistan's governance structure comprises of military establishment (Deep State of Pakistan). The Pakistan Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) take the lead and the rest are inconsequential.

In strategic literature, this ecosystem is often referred to as the 'Deep State', the Military Establishment and the Military-Jihadi Complex based on context and the reference points.

The key institutions are General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, the Corps Commanders, the ISI networks and the Military-linked economic conglomerates. While the power emanates from the GHQ to which the powerful coterie of Corps Commanders generally aligns but the leverage has been with the ISI that informs the Chief of the Army who is the ultimate power centre and has connections across the world and terror networks. The ISI,

though raised in 1948 became powerful when the first coup was orchestrated for Army Commander Ayub Khan. It gained worldwide notoriety after 1980s as part of the American led operations in Afghanistan.

The dual-hatted role of the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) of the Pakistan Armed Forces—who has the ultimate power by virtue of holding the office of the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) since May 2025—affirmed the centrality of the Pakistani military for some time. For some time, Field Marshal Asim Munir, with his 5-star rank, is sought after by the White House, bypassing the Prime Minister, hence, speaks volumes of the arrangements in the hybrid governance.

Moreover, the military's influence extends far beyond defence. They have a direct say in foreign policy, nuclear doctrine and in Pakistan's policy towards India and Afghanistan.

The Military also exercises complete control over the Judiciary. For instance, Asim Munir became the Chief of the Army Staff, just few days after his initial retirement, by superseding two senior Generals.

The media narratives are controlled by the all-powerful DG ISPR. The Pakistani military directly or through retired fraternity, controls all major economic activity including real estate. Today, in practice, few major strategic decisions in Pakistan occur without the military's concurrence.

Why Did Military Rose to be the Central Force?

Decades following the Second World War were defining for most countries who inherited artificial boundaries carved by the British and other colonial powers either maleficently or due to lack of knowledge of people and geography as they exited hastily from their vassal properties. The colonial powers, who ruled with centralised power structures were quickly and mostly replaced by monarchs, dictators and military who formed part of the elites that ruled as proxies before independence. It was far easier to control and administer the populations who belonged to different nations, had disparate cultures, language and way of life. Pakistan also fell into similar trap immediately.

The Pakistan Army had the first opportunity to manipulate the nascent political system. Though controlled and officered at senior levels by the British, Pakistan junior levels engineered a coup of sorts towards a significant part of geography in the north and north east—the new province of Jammu and Kashmir that was yet to decide its fate. A rebellion of sorts on

the basis of religion was orchestrated from within and an external aggression was launched through proxies of tribes brought in from different places and armed and led by Pakistani officers and junior ranks. A significant success of land grab, exploiting commonality of religion to attack an independent province, and eventually continue the same after accession to India. The security anxieties were sowed deep into the political establishment and people of Pakistan thereafter militarised most of the eastern borders with India.

The next and most disturbing opportunity for the Pakistani Army to gain power in the domestic institutional structures was provided by the political and bureaucratic elites themselves. There were three principal reasons viz. Pakistan's unstable political environment that was extremely divisive and corrupt; use of religion to bind the country; and the ease of doing business with Pakistan's Army by foreign forces.

Feudal elites dominated Pakistan's political environment that remained deeply unstable from early stages wherein corruption was rampant that ultimately weakened governance. As explained earlier, this was the case with all newly created independent states across the world but Pakistan's insecurity-driven identity accelerated militarisation, thus making the administrative institutions fragile.

On the other hand, the civilian politicians increasingly relied upon religion to hold together what was seen as an artificial state. The most powerful country of the time, the United States, found it easier to work with military structures than with fragmented civilian politics. Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization, thus integrating itself into the Western security system.

In this environment of the 1950s, military leaders such as Ayub Khan who projected themselves as modernisers, aligned with the progressive and industrialising West. Military rule, that first commenced in the late 1950s, gradually acquired legitimacy because the army appeared disciplined compared to corrupt politicians and the public increasingly began associating the army with order. The external, primarily western, powers also preferred stable military partners or dictatorial power centres.

Ayub Khan, who ruled directly for nearly 11 years from 1958 to 1969, initiated reforms and industrial modernisation efforts, strengthening the military's image for setting a future precedent. Even though the 1965 war with India weakened his legitimacy and temporarily

restored civilian politics, the acceptance of the centrality of the military was established firmly. A structural pattern emerged— whenever civilian politics weakened, the military re-emerged as an ultimate arbiter.

Each Period of Military Rule Deepens Stranglehold

Direct military rule of Pakistan has been there for 33 years out of its existence of nearly eight decades. The first was General Ayub Khan who ruled from 1958 to 1969 for a period of 11 years. Thereafter came General Yahya Khan from 1969 to 1971, General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 ruled for 11 years till his death in 1988. General Pervez Musharraf took over the country after a failed attempt by the sitting Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to dislodge him from the post of the Chief of the Army. Interestingly, most of them were promoted by political dispensation of the day overlooking senior Generals presuming the pliable nature. The same is the case of Field Marshal Asim Munir who rules Pakistan currently.

However, rule by proxy crosses to a period of indirect and direct rule to nearly 70%. The current minority government is at pleasure of Pakistan Army having been installed after removing the most popular leader, Imran Khan, who continues to languish in the jail. Imran Khan, survived full term as Prime Minister, as he supported the Pakistan military initially. However, when he perceived to be more powerful and independent of the Pakistani Army, the shift to jail was rapid and quick. The judiciary or the political strife that followed could not save him.

During democratic periods, the military has continued to engineer coalitions, influence elections, remove governments, controlled security portfolios and retained veto power over foreign policy.

However, the uncomfortable reality that needs to be also acknowledged is that, despite its authoritarian tendencies, the military remains the single most organised institution in Pakistan. Pakistanis themselves perceive it as the only force capable of preventing complete state collapse which is today as much true as has been during each stage of existence of Pakistan due to the artificial nature of the country.

The military's dominance will continue through coercion and a combination of fear, legitimacy, institutional capacity, and absence of credible alternatives.

The Civilian Political-Feudal Combine

The second layer of the hybrid governance structure is the civilian- political feudal combine. The very nature of this construct is corrupting and manipulative seeking legitimacy through the military and religious organisations rather than competence and the idea of serving people that elect them. There were periods of overwhelming majority but the political dispensations lost the opportunity to be able to cement their legitimacy.

It includes Parliament, Prime Minister, Political parties, Bureaucracy and Provincial governments. They are populated by the erstwhile feudal families whose grip on the population is through respective fiefdoms and not pan Pakistan. Therefore, feudalism remains deeply embedded within Pakistani politics. Large landholding elites continue to dominate provincial politics, particularly in Punjab and Sindh. Electoral politics therefore often functions through patronage rather than ideological mobilisation.

The major parties historically include Pakistan Muslim League (N), Pakistan People's Party and the new Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf between whom the power has rotated or shared. However, civilian authority remains constrained by military-defined red lines, especially concerning India, China, Afghanistan, Nuclear doctrine, Internal security and in relations with the United States and the Gulf.

Civilian governments exercise greater flexibility primarily in economic management, welfare programmes and administrative governance. Even these domains become constrained during crisis because the military establishment increasingly penetrates the economic and bureaucratic structures. Retired military officers occupy influential roles across regulatory institutions, economic authorities, infrastructure bodies and State corporations. This ensures confirmed post-retirement settlement thereby reducing the urge to militate against the Army.

Religious-Political and Islamist Networks

The third layer of the hybrid governance model of Pakistan is the ideological and mobilisation structure composed of religious parties, madrasa systems, sectarian organisations, clerical networks and jihad-oriented proxy groups.

Important organisations historically include Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed etc. These networks provide ideological legitimacy,

street mobilisation, anti-India narratives, recruitment ecosystems and strategic depth narratives. Both civilian and military establishments have historically cultivated, nurtured and exploited sections of these networks as ‘instruments of asymmetric warfare and regional influence’. They have also been used ruthlessly to suppress the views and political thoughts of the population.

A fringe element, their utility was first exploited during the partition movement, later on for operations in Jammu and Kashmir and eventually to deepen the concept of ‘Two- Nation Theory’ based on religion.

The most decisive transformation occurred under Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. They found funds, ready recruits, transnational relevance and power across Pakistan and the region during the Afghanistan intervention as the anti-Soviet jihad forces at the behest of Americans and Saudi Arabia and since then have become a major force that influence policy and popular mood.

As Islamist radicalisation accelerated in Pakistan, Madrasa networks expanded massively, Gulf funding transformed religious ecosystems, weapons and narcotics flooded society and foreign fighters entered Pakistan, hence, changing the social fabric of Pakistan permanently. As billions of dollars flowed through covert networks, the infrastructure of global jihadist geopolitics emerged and expanded substantially. The ISI, who served as the conduit during the period, became enormously empowered.

As the geopolitical relevance increased externally, social cohesion deteriorated internally in Pakistan. The military-jihadi nexus became institutionalised, thus sidelining the political feudal bureaucratic fabric wherein the extremist ecosystems eventually acquired independent power at cost of the state control. Post Operation Sindoor, the Pakistan’s military leadership and the political establishment had to come out openly in support of the terrorist networks after their Headquarters were destroyed in the military strikes by India on early hours on 06 May 2025. The banners and rallies of all three layers of the hybrid governance of Pakistan were on display disregarding the world opinion as the US and UN designated terrorist joined space publicly.

External Patronage: The Fourth and Most Resilient Layer

Western Influence. Pakistan’s governance structure cannot be understood without examining external influence that has embed even before partition and its creation. Historically, Pakistan has depended heavily upon external patrons starting from initially Britain, later the United States followed by the Gulf monarchies and now increasingly China. Pakistan has been able to

balance out its relevance as a 'rentier state' with each of the external patrons whose interests are aligned diametrically opposite.

The British created Pakistan and carved out a significant land buffer in the North Western and North Eastern regions through deceit for their future strategic rationales. Therefore, a strong bond was established between the Pakistani ruling elite and the military with British who exacted a price of patronage.

As the British influence faded, the strategic thinking about the region was inherited by the United States who used a pliable Pakistan to gain entry into the region as India wanted to avoid any alliance or partnerships. During the Cold War, Pakistan served as a military staging ground, intelligence platform and an arena for anti-Soviet containment. Later, after 9/11, Pakistan again became central to American operations in Afghanistan with large scale of military equipments, ammunitions and training funds flowing in. American interests waxed and waned as per their strategic interests but the ruling elites of Pakistan remained engaged in more ways than one. The current engagement with Trump administration for private deals and also as a tool for negotiations with Iran post Operation Epic Fury has kept the interest alive. The servility shown by the Prime Minister and the Field Marshal by recommending Trump for Nobel Peace prize from public international platforms has made Pakistan a country of ridicule.

Gulf Monarchies. At the time of creation of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries were tribalistic in orientation and poor with minimal influence in the region or outside. However, with the arrival of petrodollar as a strategic influence in world engine of energy and economy, these monarchies and dictatorial regimes of the region were flushed with funds and desire to invest into the propagation of religion. They found Pakistan an easy and available partner that was looking to emerge as an important Islamic partner influencing the world geopolitics. Through funds and their numbers in various international organisations they influenced Pakistan through financial bailouts, oil support, religious financing, labour-market access and later on with security cooperation. Steadily, Pakistan became an important and frequently "rented out" military manpower and expertise to Gulf states.

China. China invested heavily in Pakistan as it saw it as a balancer in the region against India. Pakistan sensed an opportunity immediately after China defeated India in 1962 and gave away

significant portions of Indian territory under dispute as a goodwill gesture to thus establishing close strategic partnership.

Pakistan supported China as it rose to prominence in late 1990s as a significant economic and military power with an expanding manufacturing base, particularly that of military hardware, and the position it held in the United Nation's Security Council as the permanent member. As US discarded Pakistan and compelled their leadership to join the Global War on Terror (GWOT), Pakistan pivoted easily towards China in early 2000. Today, China has become Pakistan's most consequential strategic partner.

China also had a strategic interest in Pakistan. Through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan also provided an avenue to China for their westward expansion strategy. Pakistan was viewed as counterbalance to India, provided Arabian Sea access point and a strategic corridor with a foothold towards the Indian Ocean. The avenues through Pakistan provided options and avoided critical chokepoints in the Malacca Straits etc. These also gave the shortest route for the access from the western Chinese provinces.

The close relationship with Pakistan provides an easy access to their natural resources and minerals and also to that of Afghanistan's rare earths, lithium, and mineral wealth.

Pakistan has leveraged the combination of all the factors to leverage a position as a rentier state for China from where it gets its critical financial bailouts— nearly 85% of the military equipment and guidance and intelligence, and strategic balance in the region against India as well a guarantor at the international organisations.

Fragile but Not Failed

The hybrid governance model has led to describe the Pakistan of today as a fragile hybrid security state if not failed. It is not yet a failed state because it retains functioning armed forces, nuclear deterrence, administrative structures, territorial continuity and international recognition. But Pakistan continues to face simultaneous crisis across economy, governance, identity, social cohesion and politics.

The greatest paradox of Pakistan is that it is a militarily powerful and geopolitically relevant state and yet institutionally weak and economically vulnerable.

Pakistan's economy reflects the classic contradiction of any security state wherein strong military capacity coexists with structural economic weakness. The key challenges are

low foreign exchange reserves, currency depreciation, IMF dependency, chronic fiscal deficits, weak export base and severe energy shortages. The public debt remains extremely high relative to state capacity.

In the context of social challenges, Pakistan has severe rising poverty, very high inflation, more than 25% youth unemployment, food insecurity and a structural weakness in educational infrastructure. There are over 25 million children out of school and the literacy rates remains around 60–65 percent. A large youth population, educated only in madrasas and in religious sectors, has no qualifications to be absorbed into the economic sector. Uneducated, unemployed and largely radicalised due to religion, the youth have become a destabilising force.

In the stressed-out internal fault lines, the persistent challenges include terrorism, sectarian violence, Baloch insurgency, Pashtun alienation and political polarisation. Unfortunately, all these faultlines are state sponsored and cemented.

Fragile Pakistan is Threat to Regional Peace

There are multiple reasons due to which Pakistan's failing hybrid governance structure threatens regional peace.

Firstly, strategic instability due to an overlap in governance between the military dominance, deeply embedded radical networks in the entire social framework and the weak civilian institutions create chronic unpredictability.

The second is the investment into the proxy warfare doctrine. As the sections of the security establishment historically viewed non-state actors as strategic assets and have continued to cement that relationship, it is extremely improbable to detach. While these institutional legacy leverages and continues to influence regional security, the consequences for the social fabric are permanently damaging.

Third, is the perception of the protection of nuclear umbrella. Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons within an internally fragile environment. Although, command structures remain professional, prolonged instability always increases strategic risk. The possibility of the radical military leadership seizing control or else the nuclear assets falling in the hands of terrorist remains high. The belief that nuclear capability will avoid conventional war, allows

the security establishment to take unnecessary risks in the region thereby disturbing the fragile peace and damaging overall prospects of growth for Pakistan and others.

The economic fragility remains another concern as an economic collapse in a nuclear-armed state of over 240 million people would have enormous regional consequences. The refugee flows, extremism, criminal networks and political destabilisation are already a major world concern, hence, an economic failure will be disastrous for the region and the world.

Lastly, is the issue of external competition. Pakistan has projected and exploited itself and the population as a rentier state. The deft balancing act of managing the competing powers in the region as a proxy state has made it a centre for US-China competition, Gulf-Iran rivalry and Afghanistan instability. This intensifies geopolitical pressure on an already fragile state.

Implications for India

For India, Pakistan has never been merely a neighbouring country. While it functioned as a geopolitical buffer, the country has become a proxy platform not only for the military terror religious fanatics combine, but also a pressure mechanism used by external powers, both state and non-state. India therefore faces a complex challenge wherein an unstable Pakistan creates security risks but a collapsed Pakistan could create uncontrollable consequences. The worst is that a stable Pakistan that may reduce regional volatility has always been more aggressive against India. For India, none of the situation has guaranteed peace.

Therefore, the challenge for India lies in balancing deterrence with strategic patience while avoiding entrapment in Pakistan's internal contradictions.

Conclusion

Pakistan's hybrid governance model has evolved over decades through the fusion of military dominance, feudal politics, religious mobilisation and external patronage. Each layer is interlinked and intertwined with relevance and importance switching based on the contextual compulsions of survival of the respective layer and the state.

For decades, this structure sustained the state through strategic rents, geopolitical utility, and coercive control. However, the same system has gradually hollowed out institutions, weakened democracy, radicalised society, and prevented long-term economic transformation.

Pakistan remains resilient in the short term because the army remains cohesive, external actors prevent collapse and the society retains endurance. The very cause of the fragility of

Pakistan are the reasons of its survival. This is the contradiction of Pakistan wherein resilience should not be confused with stability.

The country's greatest paradox remains unchanged and that is geopolitically important yet institutionally fragile.

Pakistan inherited one of the world's most valuable strategic geographies. Yet geography became less a blessing for its people and more a tool for perpetual external manipulation and elite survival. The hybrid governance structure that once enabled Pakistan to survive may now be the very structure preventing it from evolving into a stable modern state.

Until Pakistan transforms from a rentier-security state into a genuinely institutional developmental state, its hybrid governance model will continue generating instability not only for Pakistan itself but for the wider region.



About the Author

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