

Pakistan\222s Poisonous Underbelly
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Pakistan, like Saudi Arabia, is a country with which we have alliances despite our distaste for their cultures. We needed Pakistan during the Cold War, when Russia had neutered India (they were "non-aligned") and we could count on them not to be seduced by Marxism.

But Pakistan, unlike Saudi Arabia, aspires to be a modern state with the institutions that protect a supposed republic: free press, independent courts, and respectable elections. They have a modern military, originally trained by the British when Pakistan was still part of India.

They began their existence in 1947 as a secular state for a mostly Muslim population. Religion was not intended to govern Pakistan. However, Pakistan\222s secular identity, essential in preserving a modern democratic state, was missing one element: an educated voting population. The vast majority of the population is uneducated, poor, and hostile to every element of culture essential to modernity. The masses are fanatically Muslim, hostile to women, the press, the courts, and to most of their leaders, who are perceived as less pious "elites."

A small educated class tries to run the country, but they increasingly walk a tightrope. In neglecting to have an educational system (Pakistan has none), they have doomed themselves. The elites educate their children in private schools or abroad; the rest have only Muslim Madrassahs, brainwashing schools in which impoverished students memorize the Koran, despite not speaking Arabic. Their other training is how to be a suicide bomber or a militant for Islam. The hostility toward women has produced an unsustainable population explosion that adds to the country\222s rage and violence.

Pakistan appears in the world press mostly when there are suicide bombings in market places, guaranteed to slaughter women and children; or assassinations of government employees, police, officials, and leaders. Every so often, the international press follows cases in the law that can only come out of a country where pious idiocy can summon "rent-a-mobs" to attack modern law.

In 2010, Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman, was convicted of "blasphemy" by a Pakistani court, and sentenced to death by hanging. In June 2009, she dared to sip water from a bowl used by with a group of Muslim women with whom she had been harvesting berries. Islam does not practice caste prejudice, but Pakistan\222s culture inherited it from India. The outraged Muslims had her arrested for "blasphemy" (insulting Islam). She was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for blasphemy. The blasphemy law is new, one more attack on Pakistan ever being secular.

Because of the international uproar over this stupid sentence, Asia Bibi, a mother of five, sat on death row until now. Finally, the case went to the top court in Pakistan which found her innocent and released her. The fanatics went wild. The Chief Justice and the poor woman are both threatened with death and are in hiding. The mobs have blocked roads and protests are held in the cities, including threats to destroy the few remaining Christian churches in the country. They are outraged that this woman will not hang for the imaginary crime of "insulting the Prophet Mohammad."

Prime Minister Imran Khan, a popular cricket star, went on national TV promising to protect Pakistani Christians and he codemned those who made verbal attacks on Pakistan\222s institutions, including his government. "They are not serving Islam, but trying to increase their vote bank," Khan said of the clerics. "They are doing their politics."

Religious extremists have defended the blasphemy law and have attacked those who question it. Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab province, was shot and killed by one of his guards in 2011 for defending Bibi and criticizing the misuse of the law. The assassin was tried and hanged for the crime, but is now called a religious martyr, with a shrine for his new admirers.

Making international concern even worse, Pakistan is a nuclear power. Can the thin stratum of educated elites control the increasingly violent, ignorant, and monstrous mobs? Can representative governance in such a country survive "power to the people?" Can democracy survive terminal stupidity?

680 Words

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