

### **Stephen P. Cohen and Others, *The Future of Pakistan* (OUP, 2012)**

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Post 9/11, the regional strategic discourse in and on South Asia has been overwhelmed by Pakistan and Afghanistan. The past 10 years witnessed Pakistan's degeneration into a violent, terror-infested state with diminishing authority of the civilian set-up. Moreover, its role in abetting terrorism as an instrument of state policy became known and was acknowledged internationally. The prevailing situation in Pakistan is grave and the likely future scenarios dismaying. Against this backdrop, a motley group of experts, most of them area specialists on Pakistan, have come together to present a rather attractive assortment of essays portending future trends in Pakistan. The authors, consisting of experts from the United States (US), Europe, India, and Pakistan, belonging to diverse backgrounds, have placed their individual perspective within the overall framework of Pakistan's future. Stephen P. Cohen, an accredited expert on Pakistan, has edited the volume.

The book is a collection of essays prefiguring plausible future scenarios for Pakistan. The chapters comprise proceedings of a conference held in Bellagio in Italy in May 2010. The concept ideated from the concluding chapter of Stephen Cohen's iconic work, *The Idea of Pakistan*, published in 2004, which deliberated on the alternative future courses of Pakistan. *The Future of Pakistan* is a comprehensive coverage of domestic and international dynamics which impact the state of affairs in Pakistan and shape its behaviour. Bruce Riedel, writing the Preface, refers to Pakistan's insecurities vis-à-vis India and posits that betterment in bilateral ties between the two countries is key to Pakistan's future. Cohen writes the introductory chapter which briefly surveys developments in Pakistan since its inception in 1947, tracing its devolution into a violent, unstable country.

In this context, the book examines important variables afflicting India-Pakistan ties. It looks at how the nature of relationship between the two countries and inherent mutual distrust is likely to constrain efforts towards building enduring peace and stability. It also examines US-Pakistan ties which, in the recent past, have

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been shaky and unpredictable. William Milam, one of the contributors, describes the US–Pakistan relationship as an “arranged marriage” (p. 145). He argues that despite efforts, the relationship is far from being a trusted partnership. The bilateral relationship to be cultivated would require not only a stable commitment of resources but a “reservoir of patience” from the US (p. 145). At the same time, Milam accedes that the US has not had a good track record in managing aid where some amount of flexibility and pragmatism is required. Published in late 2011, the book briefly captures the Osama raid conducted by the US forces in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011. However, it does not comment substantially on the aftermath of the raid. Additionally, there is a section on the evolution of Pakistan–China relations and how it is expected to play out in conjunction with other variables to determine future contours for Pakistan.

Since India figures predominantly in Pakistan’s strategic landscape, a separate chapter, with a rather optimistic title, has been dedicated to India–Pakistan relations. Here, B. Raman, a noted Indian analyst, argues that “institutional interactions” (p. 181) need to be increased, and, if necessary, India could consider taking the initiative. This is because there are fewer notional insecurities vis-à-vis Pakistan in India’s mind. Raman also makes an important point that Pakistan probably realises that terrorism alone cannot give it security/strategic edge over India and, hence, it is extensively engaging with China, more particularly in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

The book comes across as a good mix of pessimism and cautious optimism. Most of the chapters adhere to the dire realities in the country where the entailing situation is far out of control with no quick-fix solutions. However, the majority of the contributors opine that there is still a chance for resurrection if Pakistan succeeds to manage at least some of the imposing problems. The crucial “if” explains the caution in their thinking. Pakistan has been on a delicate security balance, especially during the last couple of years. There was great deal of uncertainty amidst reports that the Taliban could take over the entire country and that Pakistan might implode, if not disintegrate. That Pakistan survived the recent crisis explains the optimism the book disseminates. There is consensus that external powers cannot do much for stabilising Pakistan; the effort has to come from within, especially from the country’s elite. The onus lies on few conscious choices the Pakistani elite can opt for, to make their country stable and secure, and friendlier towards its neighbours. Pakistan’s future, as the book envisages, ranges from extreme to moderate—while some think it is on the brink of collapse, others argue a case for its resilience and survival, or what is known as “muddling” through.

The volume collates a wide spectrum of political social issues in Pakistan and deals with economic dimensions in a limited way. It gives the contributors an opportunity to express their perception without having to conform with a central theme or argument. Hence, the authors have the advantage of saying precisely what they analyse, or make out, of a set of potential drivers. Stephen Cohen sums up these ideas in the Afterword, which includes surveying recent studies aimed at building future scenarios on Pakistan being conducted in the US and elsewhere.

In terms of adding value to the existing literature, the chapter delineating future role of the youth in Pakistan manages to register itself considerably. Pakistan is a young nation with one of largest populations of young people. This generation has witnessed more turmoil than was their due. Successive governments, be it civilian or military, have used the political set-up to serve selfish interests, giving least importance to the well-being of the common Pakistani. Pakistan, today, is at a crucial juncture politically, socially, economically, and strategically. Any viable solution to the multidimensional crises seems eluding. Hence, a study of a cross-section of Pakistan's youth, and its potentiality in determining its future, nonetheless offers a fresh perspective while charting future scenarios. Education lies at the core of several problems Pakistan is struggling with. Hence, Moeed Yusuf, the author, lays special focus on developing this sector.

Against a profusion of ideas published on Pakistan lately, it is difficult to judge the value of this book. The theme is relevant and timely, but has been over-debated in several forms and in different arenas. A substantial part of the volume accounts for rehashing older, rather known, issues and instances. Nonetheless, the set of ideas on Pakistan and the wide-ranging expertise this book combines, being endorsed by the most well-known expert on Pakistan, Stephen Cohen, adds credibility and value to it.

Pakistan's strategic behaviour is under heavy influence of an India-centric policy, but to believe that problems besetting Pakistan would cease if its relations with India improve represents a skewed approach. Pakistan has been at the crossroads of the US' security interests in the region, and most of the contemporary challenges it faces could be attributed to its partnership with the US. Such external dynamics, however, have a limited role to play as the myriad challenges Pakistan faces today can be attributed largely due to its own miscalculations.

It is given that edited volumes present a range of views which may not be cohesive. However, when a group of experts take up such a daunting job as to discuss

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Pakistan's future, which is contemporarily the most critical issue figuring in regional geopolitics, a degree of accord is desirable. In this regard, the book lacks a degree of coherence. Nonetheless, it is a good source of ready reference for scholars and researchers engaging in Pakistan studies. The book, however, appears to have limited scope for policymakers as it does not put forward specific recommendations or steps on how to secure Pakistan's future.

