

***Reimagining Pakistan: Transforming a Dysfunctional Nuclear State.* Husain Haqqani, India: Harper Collins, 2018.**

Nazish Mahmood*

Going through the book, the first thought that struck a reader's mind was Husain Haqqani's desperate attempt to justify the label "leading dissident public intellectual" displayed so pompously on the jacket cover of the book. To validate his credentials, he sets the tone in the very introduction with his emphasis of Pakistan's image around the world as "dangerous, unstable, terrorist incubator, fragile and land of the intolerant" where individuals "pay the price of their leaders' magnificent mistakes," (p. ix). Exonerating the general public of the ills haunting the nation since its inception, he squarely blames leaders and civil-military elite for the predicament Pakistan finds itself in. The author primarily chooses few themes and tries to build his argument by highlighting contradictions inherent within each. They evolve around Pakistan's negative international image abroad, persistence and propagation of its ideology since inception, role of Islam and Islamist narrative in the Pakistani society and the institution of army, its dominance and perpetual control of politico-military narrative and activities. What is startling is how the author plays down all other factors apart from military instead of bridging the gap between prevalent pessimistic perception abroad and reality on ground.

He asserts at the very beginning "objective analyses cannot ignore the disconcerting highlights of Pakistan's seventy-year history," (p. ix) meaning thereby anyone who dares to disagree with his prejudiced reading of the sub-continental history, cannot find his place among the category of enlightened scholars whom he cherry-picks to support his version of the story. Though showing strong dislike for labelling of academics and journalists as 'pro-Pakistan' and 'anti-Pakistan' (p. 10) within the country, irony is he himself could not resist naming those painting Pakistan in positive sense as the pro-Pakistanis. The book actually is marred by such contradictions.

* *The reviewer is PhD in International Relation from National Defence University (NDU) Islamabad.*

He, times and again, mentions Pakistan's "narrative of persecution" and inability of most Pakistanis, including its elite, to confront "inconvenient truths [rather] be content with blaming others," (p. xiii). Certainly not rejecting this assertion out-right, one can still find his outrageous claims like Pakistan's "sponsorship of terrorist groups" and directly blaming it for Mumbai Terrorist attacks in 2008 (p. 2, 8 and 103) without quoting credible evidence problematic. What saps the strength out of the argument is his deliberate omission of the Indian terrorist activities, especially the Khulbhusan network, within Pakistan while he ceaselessly blames his country. His endorsement of Pakistan's image as a "crisis state" or even as a state perpetually on the brink of failure" (p. 4) compels him to vehemently reject narratives that contradict and counter his line of argument. His disapproval of the basis of the ideology of Pakistan then is evident in his further exploration of facts related with the partition of the Indian subcontinent and its attendant details.

Haqqani displays a personal bias in favour of the Indian partition argument. He gives credit to Gandhi's thinking that religious divisions were invoked and fuelled by British officials while "Jinnah was able to paint Gandhi as a Hindu chauvinist who would eliminate Muslim identity once the British quit India without dividing it," (p. 34). He even repeatedly asserts how the Indian franchise in 1945-46 was not fair enough to give Muslim League representation of all the Indian Muslims (p. 38-40). Coming from a person who has served as Pakistan's ambassador and adviser to three prime ministers, of Pakistan it seems rather perplexing that he has still not reconciled to the idea of Pakistan and insists to paint its birth as an "outcome of political divisions in British India" (p. 53).

He also has issues with Jinnah's statement where Jinnah explicitly wishes to put Pakistan's future away from theocracy. Notwithstanding the strength of the arguments presented within the chapter "Ideological Dysfunction," (Chapter 3), he again fails to acknowledge the enormity of task confronting the founding fathers and directly holds them responsible for the Islamic ideological bent society took in the following decades. According to his view, Islam was invoked by Jinnah to rally Muslims for demand for Pakistan and neither he nor his successors cared to explore alternate paths that could have stemmed rising tide of Islamic sentiment over the period of time. Resultantly the "new generation had grown with the post-partition Islamic sloganeering and ideological regimentation," (p. 97).

Haqqani's construction of narrative away from Islamist ideological obsession involves course-correction on Kashmir (that involves de-linking political and economic domains) and Afghanistan, stop viewing Pakistan as bastion of Islam, phasing out the invocation of religion as ideology in economic and education sectors and serious reflection on relations with India. These arguments are neither new nor reflect an innovative approach and unlike Haqqani's insistence, they are neither absent from public or policy discourse. Proponents and opponents of alternate paths are given ample space in Pakistan's print, electronic and social media. However, it would not be wrong to assert that public still seems more pre-disposed to status quo rather than radical alternative.

At the same time, we find a passing reference to rise of "Hindu nationalism" in India quoted within the Pakistani circles as "evidence of implacable hostility between Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India." He remarks such notions within Pakistan "predate the political rise of Hindutva during the 1990s," (p. 128-29). In the same tone, he downplays Hindu sentiment espoused by current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Instead Haqqani chooses to drag arguments about an insignificant media personality Syed Zaid Hamid and his propagation of Ghazwa-e-Hind (Battle of India). The disproportionate amount of space allotted to one jihadi concept within "Insecurity and Jihad" (Chapter 5) conveys the erroneous impression that the entire fabric of the Pakistani society espouses such hard-line sentiments or it could even be taken as credible evidence of Pakistan's "embrace of extremist ideologies." Though the existence of such sentiments in a segment of society are neither denied nor their role in propagating extremist mindset ignored.

His disdain for "hyper-nationalist standpoint" (p. 14) "ultra-patriotic Pakistani response" (p. 21) merits attention only for ridiculing or dismissing the prevalent perspective, which according to him is to be disposed of as it conforms to "one true version of history" (p. 14) and nothing more than a disinformation campaign aimed at a political objective. Our inability to reassess our predicament has rendered us nothing more than a resilient "international migraine" (p. 5) as per Haqqani. Thus, "the first step in reimagining Pakistan would be to abandon the narrow ideological paradigm of the Pakistani nationalism," (p. 61).

One institution that repeatedly surfaces throughout the book is the armed forces of Pakistan. Then Chapter 6 is exclusively devoted to the same under the heading “The Institution” to highlight the role they play in civil-military domain. Haqqani remains extremely critical of the dominance army and intelligence agency ISI enjoy over political and foreign policy matters. He equates it to a vicious circle “wherein fear of India (and other foreign enemies) enhances the army’s prestige, which in turn enables the army to dominate the state while also making sure external fears remain embedded in the Pakistani psyche,” (p. 166). Given four martial laws in Pakistan’s 70-year history and army’s constant meddling in civil set-up, such criticism remains abundant in the Pakistani public discourse. However, downgrading threat from India and disregard of evidence regarding India’s covert operations in Balochistan and equating it with paranoia just to undermine army is something that those usually critical of army’s political role would find difficult to approve.

The author finds Pakistan’s realisation of the importance of its strategic location as another obsession hindering its development as this leads to complacency and Pakistan is seem more prone to milking this advantage rather than paying attention to systemic reformation. Nobody would dare to disagree with drastic changes recommended for economic overhauling but linking the economic malfunctioning to the Pakistani preoccupation with its ideology and as a defence against real and imaginary threats, again seems problematic and over-selling of Haqqani’s narrative against ideology of Pakistan.

Overall the book fails to live up to the international acclaim showered from certain segments for his discriminatory presentation of facts. It not only lacks coherence, it is barely edited. The passages are marred by repetitive arguments and sweeping statements. The title seems misplaced, too, as the book appears less about reimagining Pakistan’s future and more of an indictment of its past, even present. In fact it says nothing about “reimagining” rather ignores it completely. It seems to be intended for the US and Indian audience and simply reinforces already prevailing biased narratives without the need for any meaningful analysis of Pakistan’s history or necessity. It would not be wrong to assert that book endorses that section of the Indian apologists who are willing to criticise Pakistan for not being the Indian ally, irrespective of whatever troubles India creates for Pakistan. It basically says nothing new that has not already been said by

critics within Pakistan and thereby, offers no indigenous solutions to ills prevailing that are not part of the mainstream discourse presently.