**CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN PAKISTAN**

1. **ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

One of the mainstays of any country around the world for economic development is its existing reserves of the natural resources and assets base. Pakistan has plenty of natural resources such as large reserves of oil and gas, great quantity of copper and ore deposits, in addition huge coal and salt pits, and gemstones. Likewise, it possesses sound manufacturing industries of textiles and clothing, steel fabricating, cotton ginning factories, sugarcane mills, sports goods and leather manufacturing etc.

Apart from these mineral resources and industries, Pakistan also has vast tracts of agriculture land. Out of total geographical area, about 27 percent is cultivated, and of this, 80 percent is irrigated. Pakistan has one of the most developed irrigation systems in the world, i.e. Indus Basin Irrigation System. We have rivers and sea. We have harbours to export and import goods. We are blessed with four seasons and a fit tropical weather in terms of farming and agriculture.

There is no doubt that Pakistan is a resource-rich country and possesses mineral fuels, manufactured goods and beverage and tobacco (13%). Moreover, the other resources include: food and live animals (11%), crude materials (11%), chemicals (11%), machinery (8%) and miscellaneous articles (8%). In addition, we have 175 billion tons of coal reserve. It is up to 618 billion barrels of crude oil. The natural gas reserves are also in abundance, it’s about 885.3 billion cubic meters.

Despite being blessed with fertile agriculture land, abundance of minerals and sound industrial base, our economic development is not progressing as it should.

The major challenges in achieving economic development are:

**Energy crisis**: The constant leading power cut-off challenge has troubled the economy. Since the year 2000 this curse has wreaked havoc on the overall economy. As admitted by Federal Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Muhammad Asif during a National Assembly session a few days ago that the power shortfall has exceeded up to 5,000MW. Until energy lingering crisis is not resolved the determined economic development is a far-off dream.

**Terrorism:** It is a huge stumbling-block for economic generation in Pakistan. Since 2002 we are a war-torn country. The State Bank of Pakistan report (2016) says that war on terrorism has cost $118 billion. According to Global Terrorism Index (2016), out of 163 countries, Pakistan stands 4th worst hit. This has long been a reason for Pakistan’s negative international image which has limited the foreign investment in the country.

**Wealth Concentration:** In Pakistan wealth is concentered among a few rich families. The rest of the population is dependent on them. Due to wealth concentration, around 35 percent people spend their lives under poverty line. According to Multidimensional Poverty Index (2016) 39 percent population of Pakistan lives in poverty, which means that 4 out of 10 people in Pakistan live in poverty.

**Corruption:** Since 1947, the ongoing corruption has steadily planted its roots. In current circumstances, it has become a highly political debate as even the prime ministers of the country are accused of it. The corruption has proven to be a menace for institutions. According to corruption perception index (CPI 2016) out of 175 countries Pakistan stands at 116.

**Youth unemployment:** We are blessed in having about 63 percent of youth population. Half of them are unemployed. According to Asian Development Bank (ADB) 50.7 percent of the population aged 15 years and above is employed. Of it, the female ratio is very less. The rest are struggling for survival. On an average, Pakistan needs to create 20 million job annually for young people alone.

**Lack in quality education:** Education is a key component for economic progress. Unfortunately, our current literacy is 60 percent, least in South Asian countries. About 25 million children in are out of school. More importantly, on grass root level, thousands of schools are lacking very basic facilities such of sanitation, water, electricity, boundary walls etc.

**Poor health facilities:** The public hospitals depict bleak pictures where we find lack of proper medicines, beds, equipment and etc. Due to absence of basic health facilities, 170 women die from pregnancy for every 100,000 births. For every 1,000 babies born, 66 die before their first birthday. In addition, approximately 44 percent children in Pakistan are stunted. Every day, due to malnutrition and poverty children are dying in Thar.

**Tax evasion:** Regressive tax system collects about 90 percent tax revenue from common men. Big corporations, landlords, businessmen, politicians do not pay their due share of taxes. They earn lot but pay less tax; on the other hand poor earn less but are taxed more. Each year billion rupees are evaded through tax havens established in foreign counties. The incidences of tax evasion have hampered Pakistan’s economic progress.

**Lack of good governance:** We lag good governance and pro-poor fiscal policies.

**What should be done to overcome the above challenges?**

Government should improve relations with neighbouring countries like India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

For economic information, communication and technology sectors among others should be given more preference and government should improve ICTs system. Because in forthcoming years, all the economies will be measured through technologies. India earns lots of money through its IT industry.

The employment zones for youth should be opened so as two-third of youth could contribute for the economy of Pakistan. They could use their potentials and skills for better Pakistan.

The alarming education system should be improved. The quality education from primary to university should be ensured. Proper school monitoring mechanism should be designed. New and upgraded curriculum need to be introduced. Instead of investing lot of budget on defence side, more budgets should be allocated for education.

Quality vocational training zones should be established in each district for youth as they could learn technical skills in different cadres and trades. Government should ensure those vocational zones that how they are operating and functioning. One of the primary ways of enhancing economy is to support entrepreneurship and to create new avenues for growth by guiding the youth.

Before everything else, the government ought to overcome the lingering energy crisis.

Pakistan should enhance export competitiveness by reducing cost of doing business. Pakistan should adopt strategic approach to increase its export in neighbouring markets and underline the need of holding single country.

As a result of overall economy dilemma, the common men and women in the country are facing economic deficiency and deprivation.

1. **SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

Although Pakistan is rich in resources but there are many problems faced by Pakistan since independence and has undergone a variety of crisis. These issues could easily be solved but due to the lack of attention from our government these problems are rising day by day. Given below are some of the major social problems faced by Pakistan, which are highly neglected by our government.

**1.Poverty:** survey shows that Poverty rate of Pakistan has increased 30% to 40% during the past ten years. It means that about 40% of Pakistani population lacks even the basic needs of life such as food, shelter etc.

**2.Illiteracy:** Unfortunately about half of the Pakistani population is illiterate and this rate is expected to increase a lot in future. Government should pay attention towards this issue because a country cannot progress without providing basic education to its people. Poor education rises negative perceptions.

**3. Health Issues:** Our country is facing severe health crisis. The rate of diseases among poor families is increasing noticeably. Government should pay a heed to this life threatening issue and build new hospitals and work for the betterment of the existing ones. The first step to resolve this issue is to create basic awareness of health and nutrition.

**4. Corruption:** Pakistan is suffering from a fatal problem known as Corruption. Instead of eliminating this problem our leaders itself are involved in it. We need to remove corruption from its root if we want our country to progress. Corruption should be investigated powerfully without favoritism. Pakistan rank is 117 out 180 countries in corruption.

**5. Life security:** Today in Pakistan, there is no security of our lives. We continuously live under the threat of getting killed in a blast or by a target killer. While leaving the house, people are not sure whether they will return safely or not. Our rulers should make our country secure for a common man so that he lives his life peacefully.

**6. Justice:** Unfortunately, Pakistan has a very poor judiciary system. It works on money. Wealthy people don’t get caught even after committing major crimes however the poor ones face punishments, not because of their crime but because of lack of money due to which they could not bribe the judiciary. Government should work on this because a country cannot survive without a fair judicial system.

**7. Human rights:** Major parts of our **country are rural**, where most people are illiterate. These people don’t know their rights. Especially women are deprived of their rights because of lack of awareness. Living in a country where not even basic rights are given to people sucks. Our rulers should make efforts to provide the basic human rights to all people.

**8. Unemployment:** **Unemployment** is another major **problem in Pakistan** which must be considered by the government. According to a survey about 6% of our population is unemployed. Unemployment gives rise to many other major problems such as illiteracy and poverty.

**9. Energy crisis:** Another major **problem in Pakistan is of load shedding**. This situation is due to lack of electricity. So instead of building roads and fly overs, government should first build new dams and turbines for the generation of electricity.

**10. Refugees:** A huge number of **Afghan refugees are staying in Pakistan**. They live in slums and have no jobs. This way they are increasing poverty and unemployment rate in our country. Government should provide these people with the opportunity to work and to involve in the betterment of the country. Also the government should evaluate its political implications.

Other social problems are:

* child labour
* Child marriage
* The low status of women
* Gender inequality at work
* Dowry system
* Sanitation and cleanliness
* Religious conflicts
* Beggary

**Proposed Solutions**

There are many organisations and NGOs and even government institutes that are dealing with most of the problems mentioned above. Each social issue has its own cause and needs to be resolved on immediate grounds. Some pragmatic solutions to overcome these social issues are given below:

**Social** **Cures**

* Awareness by media
* Financial security
* Social justice
* Fulfilment of basic needs
* Providing food, cloth, shelter and education
* Reforming schools as well as madrasahs education
* Role of NGOs
* The positive role of scholars and educationists and women
* Development programs

**Economic Cures**

* Business-friendly tax culture
* The consistency of economic policies
* Maximum incentives to local and foreign investors
* Construction of dams
* Exploring natural resources
* Equal distribution of income
* Strict accountability on fund utilisation
* Technical and research-based education (more budget for education)
* Search for new markets
* Seeking peace to lower down defence budget

We have listed most of the social issues in the country along with proposed solutions. However, all of these problems and their solutions are directly and indirectly attached to the governance system that is very poor in the country. If we are really interested in solving all of these issues, then the country must have good governance system then these issues can easily be resolved.

1. **POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND RELATED ISSUES**

Political instability is defined as the process whereby the political life or atmosphere of a country or nation suddenly changes or fails. When the political situation of a state or region is not certain because it has a high possibility of changing or getting disturbed, then we say there is political instability in that state or region.

Political instability in any country or state occurs due to the discord between different institutions; lack of pluralistic norms and resentments among different apparatus of the society.

Pakistan, since its inception, has been consistently remained the pivot of political crisis. This political ordeal could be traced back in history when the embryonic state was dishevelled in the issue of forming a constitution and language controversies.

Pakistan which attained its independence in 1947 was confronted with the task of framing a constitution. According to renowned historian G.W.Chaudhary, framing constitution of Pakistan was a highly multifarious matter; delay in making it had endangered national unity and erupted a discord between the federation and federating units. Certain features of the country’s geography, population-distance of 1000 miles between West and East Pakistan and ethnicity respectively, which have no parallel in any country, had made the task even more difficult. A final draft was accepted in September 1945, at which the head of the state, Governor General Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the constitutional assembly on the ground that it had lost the confidence of the people.

The question of the character of the state had made this task even more problematic. The vast majority of the people of Pakistan were Muslims. Their aspirations to preserve the values of Islam were the main reason behind the partition of India. It may be said that implicit in the demand of an independent state was the demand for an Islamic state. Some speeches of important leaders who were striving for Pakistan lend themselves to this interpretation. The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, while introducing the objective resolution in the constituent assembly stated:

“Pakistan was founded because Muslims of this sub-continent wanted to build up their lives in accordance with the teachings and traditions of Islam because they wanted to demonstrate to the world that Islam provides a panacea to the many diseases which have crept into the life of humanity”.

It was generally agreed that the aim should be an Islamic state; there was no agreement as to the meaning of the term “Islamic State”. Soon conflict arose between the two factions: Ulema that wanted the country to become a complete Islamic state. Ulema’s were against the non-Muslims minorities. They had a perception that there should be no citizenship, no right to raise voice on making laws and no right to hold public offices for minorities.

On the other hand, Pakistan’s intelligentsias were in favor of a pluralistic state fostered on the norms of democracy wherein the citizens irrespective of their religion or dogma would enjoy equal rights. This scrimmage had remained with both factions which delayed a production of legal document on which the future of Pakistan was based.

Moreover, the issue of representation between Eastern and Western wings in the federal legislature played havoc with the dream of unity. That was the problem more than any other which delayed the framing of a constitution of newly born state.

East Pakistan was one-seventh of the whole in area but its population exceeded the total population of all the provinces and state in the West Pakistan. Both wings were different in the term of economy, culture and language. West Pakistan was predominately Muslim; East Pakistan had non-Muslim minority. To find a common parliament for a state whose territory and population were so uniquely distributed proved to be a complex task.

The constituent assembly made a number of proposals to solve the problem of representation but none of proposals could satisfy the demands of East and West Pakistan. Such as Basic Principles Committee which was set up by the constituent assembly to frame the federal structure of the government, released reports in 1950 and 1952 which increased tension between both wings.

Furthermore, one unit formula had lead towards serious conflict on both sides.Another issue was the distribution of powers between the federal and the provincial governments. Since 1935, the provinces which constitute Pakistan had enjoyed autonomy under the 1935 Government of India Act. So due to this practice, provincial spirit became deep rooted. But there was an agreement over federal form of government; it was need of that time because of the geographical differences between both wings.

A strong central government was an important feature to unite both wings at that time. But conflicts developed between central and provincial governments caused delay in framing a single constitution.

Language became another major hurdle in the formation of constitution. Pakistan was a multi-lingual state. The East spoke Bengali and in the West there were number of different languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushto and Balochi. Urdu however regarded as a common tongue of the region. Urdu was declared as a national language but East wing started agitations on that. They argued that Bengali should be the national language; thus proved to be a hurdle in framing constitution.

These historical reasons become the major cause of political instability in the form of praetorian’s intervention, political deinstitutionalization, displaced leadership, dynastical politics; crisis of identity, culture of militancy, secessionist hues, sectarian cleavages and many more.

**CAUSES**

There are so many things that contribute towards the destabilizing of the political atmosphere of a country or region. Ten of these factors are as follow:

* If the rights and freedoms of the people are not respected or are trampled upon, then it is very easy for instability to emerge.
* Corruption and mismanagement of the wealth of a country by the leaders. Corruption has over the years been shown to be one of the biggest factors responsible for political instability in many countries all over the world. The more corrupt a country is, the higher the likelihood of that country becoming unstable.
* Political instability occurs when elections are not free and fair. Many countries have suffered from political instability as a result of unfair elections characterized by rigging of votes and intimidations during elections. An election that is not free and fair is one of the major causes of political instability in many countries across the globe.
* Mass unemployment and poverty can easily trigger political instability in any country. When majority of the people in a country are impoverished and cannot find jobs to do, then they vent their anger on the government and that leads to instability in the country. Many countries have suffered from instability as a result of this.
* Suppression of opposition parties by the ruling government. When members of the opposition parties are deliberately targeted and prosecuted for no apparent reason, then this can easily give rise to instability in the country.
* Another cause of political instability in a country is when the government decides not to be open and transparent.
* When the citizens constantly live in fear because of a government that prevents them from freely expressing their views or opinions.
* Intolerance for the views and opinions of others can also lead to political instability.
* High level of prejudice in a country also leads to instability. Prejudice is the unreasonable hatred of people who are different from you. In many countries in Africa, ethnic prejudices have over the years led to some of the worst forms of instabilities in a country.
* Holding on to power for too long by heads of states is another major cause of political instability. A country can easily be plunged into political instability when the head of state decides not to step down from power when his or her time is up. So many countries in Africa and Asia have experienced political instabilities as a result of this. A good example of a country presently experiencing political instability as a result of this factor is Syria.

**Revival of Political Stability in Pakistan**

Following factors will affect for the revival of democracy and to overcome political instability in Pakistan.

* First of all, we have to reform the Judiciary to make it independent
* Establishment of free election commission
* Internal local party elections
* Free but legalized media
* Provinces division
* Give preference to local and provincial government
* Constitutions implementation in the country
* Fair and timed elections
* Protection of rights of civil liberties and minorities

The national political parties should embrace a new spirit of cooperation and constructive opposition, moving beyond old confrontational and self-defeating street action and walk-outs and boycott politics to involve in vigorous political debates free of destruction.

1. FOREIGN POLICY OF PAKISTAN AND CHALLENGES

Definition of Foreign Policy The foreign policy is to establish and develop relations with other countries to watch the national interests by taking appropriate steps at international level.

Foreign policy is a government strategy to deal with other nation. Foreign policy or foreign relations refers to how a government deals with other countries. We also call it foreign affairs policy. Foreign policy includes such matters as trade and defence. Pakistan is situated in the south of the continent of Asia; it is a country of fertile land, mountains, rivers and beautiful valleys. It shares its eastern border with India, northern border with China, and western border with Afghanistan and Iran whereas to its south is the Arabian Sea.

**OBJECTIVES OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

When a country establishes relations with other countries, it has to abide by some fundamental principles and objectives. The policy of a state in this regard is called the foreign policy. Following are the objectives of the foreign policy of Pakistan:

1. **Territorial sovereignty and security:** The main objective of Pakistan’s foreign policy the security of its borders, freedom and sovereignty. When Pakistan emerged on the world map, it was necessary for it to make appropriate arrangements for the safety and security. Therefore, Pakistan always gave importance to the security in its relations with foreign countries. National security is always the fundamental objective in Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan respects the territorial sovereignty of other countries and expects the same from them. India conducted atomic blasts, not keeping in view the national safety of Pakistan. Pakistan, in return, also conducted atomic blasts. It was a show of strength which gave an evidence of Pakistan being an atomic power. Pakistan follows the United Nations Charter and is a part of the world's struggle against the use of force.
2. **Ideological objectives:** The ideology and foreign policy of Pakistan are linked together. Pakistan is an ideological nation with the Islamic base. The main objective of Pakistan's foreign policy is to protect the ideological borders of Pakistan. The stability of Pakistan is linked to the protection of Pakistan's ideology. It can protect its ideology only by establishing better relations with the Islamic countries. Therefore, Pakistan has always maintained good relations with them. In its every constitution, closer relations with the Islamic countries have always been stressed. Pakistan played an important role in setting up the organisations of the Islamic Conference and the Economic Cooperation. Wherever the Muslims faced some problems, Pakistan helped them as much as possible. Conflicts in Palestine, Cyprus, Bosnia, Kashmir, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are the burning issues of the Muslim world.
3. **Development in financial and economic trends:** For the defence of a country, economic aspect has remarkable effects on foreign policy of a country. Pakistan is a developing country and it wants to progress economically. Pakistan is wishing to have cordial relations with all those countries which can help Pakistan financially. Pakistan has made important changes in its foreign policy, keeping in view the recent economic trends. It has allowed free trade, free economy and privatization. The main reason for close contacts with the Western countries is economic aid which has made Pakistan closer to America and the Western World.
4. **Cultural enrichment:** Different cultural factors have always had an effect on Pakistan's foreign policy. The Pakistani nation also has the right to protect and show its culture like other countries. Its culture reflects the Islamic values like tolerance, respect for humanity, modesty, self-respect and courage. Pakistan wants to develop strong relations with those countries which give an opportunity to promote and preserve Pakistani culture. Cultural relations are further developing with Islamic states, and cultural troupes are exchanged among them. Pakistani dresses and other items are liked in other countries. This paves the way to strengthen relations with other states on cultural level.

**FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES TO PAKISTAN**

No country in the world can live in isolation, hence, in the independent world foreign policy holds a significance place. A country without Foreign policy is like a ship without radar which drifts aimlessly in the water. Pakistan is situated on a hot line where world supply line passed. Pakistan is the member of OIC and Non NATO alliance against terrorism. Pakistan is world’s 42nd largest GDP and 25th largest purchasing power of the world. To understand the country foreign policy, we need to start with the circumstance from the beginning. To formulate foreign policy, Pakistan faces such challenges which are as follow:

**Pakistan and India:** An adversary is sometimes more important than a friend. Moreover, the majority of Pakistan’s population lives in proximity to the border with India. It is also the only country with which Pakistan has fought wars and it targets Pakistan with its nuclear weaponry. For Pakistan, India is our only potential nuclear target. The costs for Pakistan of its relations with India exceed those of its relations with any other country. How to significantly reduce these costs without compromising Pakistan’s principled stand on major outstanding issues, especially the ‘core issue’ of Jammu and Kashmir, remains a principal challenge for our foreign policy. War of any kind is not an option for a Kashmir settlement. The United Nations (UN) resolutions must remain the basis of Pakistan’s Kashmir diplomacy although they cannot in reality deliver a settlement. In fact, there is no short-term solution for Jammu and Kashmir. The international community, including the UN and all major powers, will not force any Kashmir settlement upon India that is unacceptable to it. Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are also irrelevant to the search for a just Kashmir settlement. Pakistan cannot stay on a transformational economic growth path of an average of 8.9 per cent per annum over the next three decades in a state of tension and confrontation with India — a country seven times its size in population, economy and military strength. Accordingly, the search for a broader and long-term strategy for a Kashmir settlement is inevitable. Any settlement will ultimately entail a principled compromise and it must pass the test of acceptability to the people of Kashmir. Until that time, the United Nations resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir must be the basis of Pakistan’s stand if it is to remain a relevant party to a settlement process. This requires developing a strong working relationship with India, including a comprehensive and structured dialogue that addresses the core concerns of both countries. This must include the management of nuclear threats. On this basis, a whole range of revived and new confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) can provide a good start, beginning possibly with an invitation to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other heads of state or government from the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) to attend the prime minister’s inauguration. Such an approach will be vehemently opposed by the powers that be inside Pakistan. There is also no guarantee that India will immediately reciprocate Pakistan’s initiatives. Public opinion can be deliberately inflamed. Incidents can happen to thwart such initiatives. Caution, consultation and preparation will be essential to prevent them. Even more so will be leadership.

**Afghanistan**: While India is necessarily a longer-term challenge, Afghanistan represents a problem that should not even exist. Mutual trust can be easily built if Pakistan’s policies towards Afghanistan are wise, generous and sincere. There is no historical basis for animus and hostility. There is no reason for Pakistan’s Afghanistan policy to be ‘India-centric’. No Afghan will accept that. The Taliban can also never be a strategic asset for Pakistan if we are to meet the challenges and imperatives of the 21st century. Yes, the Americans need to leave Afghanistan and, yes, the Islamic State is a greater threat to regional stability than the Taliban but the Taliban need to morph into a credible interlocutor for credible peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan should participate in Afghan peace talks without holding a brief for the Taliban. Nor should Pakistan allow its territory to be used to influence the balance of power inside Afghanistan. That only opens the floodgates to Afghan resentment and Indian influence in Afghanistan. Our Afghanistan policy has been short-sighted and self-defeating. It has been formulated in the dark by people who know little about Afghan history and care less about the Afghan people. Imran Khan will have to ensure that no aspect of Pakistan’s foreign policy remains the preserve of faceless forces. Let Afghanistan choose its own friends; it will not choose against Pakistan unless Pakistan’s follies force it to, which has happened ever since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Within these parameters, specific issues, including transit trade, border management and refugees, can be easily addressed and a detailed strategy to develop substantial and wide-ranging bilateral ties can be devised. Historically inherited issues, such as the differences over the Durand Line, will lose their salience and eventually disappear.

**United States:** Pakistan also needs to keep in mind that the United States is a global neighbour and will remain the number one military, economic and technological power for the rest of this century. It cannot be a strategic partner of Pakistan because it prefers India. Along with India, it targets the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nevertheless, predictable, substantive and mutually satisfactory relations with the United States are a priority for Pakistan. The costs of gratuitously annoying it are considerable. Afghanistan, counterterrorism and Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal remain issues of concern for the United States. Without having to bend a knee, these are not insuperable obstacles for Pakistan especially if it rationalises its policies and refrains from playing games unrelated to its national interest. The US policy dictation does not have to be accepted. Nor should Pakistan dress up compliance in the guise of defiance to fool its own people. To have an honest bilateral relationship with the United States should be a sufficient foreign policy goal.

**China:** Retaining Chinese confidence in the viability of Pakistan as a strategic partner, however, is a challenge that should not be underestimated. Without good governance and a credible foreign policy, Pakistan will not meet this challenge. CPEC is a golden opportunity, not a magic wand or a free ride. China is shaping up to be the future of Asia. And Pakistan can be a critical part of this transformation provided Imran Khan overcomes critical impediments and lays the foundation for a New Pakistan.

1. **FUTURE OUTLOOK OF PAKISTAN**

The contemporary issues of Pakistan are the institutional, economic, and cultural transformation if the Pakistan state is to survive future population pressures, with shortage of food, water, and power. In a worst- case scenario, Pakistan could within the next couple of decades have a population of around 220 million people, with a water shortage equivalent to over two-thirds of the present flow of the Indus, 6 million of its youth unemployed, and close on 30 million of its citizens out of school. Both an under-employed youth bulge and provincial conflicts over diminishing water resources could present even greater threats to Pakistan’s survival.

**THE DEMOGRAPHIC TIME BOMB AND YOUTH:** BULGE The phrase ‘demographic time bomb’ has been used to dramatize Pakistan’s expanding population problem. The present population is predicted to rise to 335 million by 2050, making Pakistan the fourth largest country in the world. Pakistan is ill-prepared to meet the challenges of one of the largest youth bulges in the world which is set to increase until the mid-2020s. Improvements in the provision and quality of education will enable Pakistan to benefit from the youth bulge, rather than suffer from its consequences.

**WATER AND ENERGY CRISIS:** Alongside a demographic time, bomb, Pakistan is facing possibly future shortfalls in energy and water supply. These are obviously linked with growing demands because of population increase, but are also impacted by climate change and failures of governance and management. Pakistan’s current energy crisis also doesn’t mean that its long-term prospects are necessarily as depressing as they may initially appear. The country possesses vast potential energy supplies; it contains as much future energy as is available from Saudi Arabia’s existing oil reserves. There is great potential also for extending hydroelectricity supply.

**THE NEED FOR NATIONAL CONSENSUS:** Pakistan’s different regime path from India has resulted in part from not just weak political institutionalization inherited from the freedom movement, but a lack of ideational strength. Aside from a vague commitment to Islam, the Pakistan movement was marked by ‘negative nationalism’ with no vision for the future. Certainly, Pakistan requires a sense of national purpose in the coming years if it is to achieve the uphill tasks of educating, feeding, employing, and providing social justice for a rapidly growing population. This requires coordination and cooperation on a vast scale in a country which has historically been marked by confrontation and short-term thinking. There has been no consistency of policy except resistance to Indian military domination. Pressure of events may nudge Pakistan’s leaders and its people in the direction of a national consensus, as was seen in the widespread commitment to tackle militancy in 2009 following the TTP’s excesses in Swat. The media explosion of recent years can perhaps play a role here, but this is not guaranteed.

**THE REQUIREMENT FOR IMPROVED GOVERNANCE:** The governance reforms must include the improvements in delivery of services, tax-rising capabilities, along with reform to key institutions including the bureaucracy, the military, the police, state-run corporations, political parties, and electoral processes. To these might be added greater transparency in economic life, especially with respect to the privatization of loss-making state enterprises. The direction of the changes would be to empower citizens at the expense of rent-seeking political elites, and increase the resources available for education and health provision.

The military intervention has undermined political development, national unity, and sustainable economic growth. Democratic consolidation will only become irreversible with civilian control over the army and with its expenditures becoming transparent and open for political debate. The reining in of the military influence can only occur within the context of the kind of national reappraisal of Pakistan’s future security environment.

**Conclusion:** Pakistan faces massive future problems arising from population and environmental pressures. They present potentially greater challenges to the state. It seems unlikely that Pakistan will be able to muddle through in the future, as it has done throughout much of its troubled history. During the next two decades, a major turnaround of national policy direction is required in order to avoid future catastrophe. The responsibility for this will lie with Pakistan’s leader and people, although external well-wishers can assist the process through financial and technical expertise. A future stable and sustainable Pakistan state will bring immense benefits to tis population. It will enable the South Asia region to fulfil its economic potential. Failure of a nuclear weapons state would have global as well as regional repercussions. Until Pakistan has moved towards economic sustainability and democratic consolidation, it will continue to be the focus of heightened international concern.