

Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier

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Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War

By Victoria Schofield. London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris, 2010. xxxiii + 282 pp. £ 14.99. ISBN 978-1-84885-105-4.

The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier

By Imtiaz Gul. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 2010. xiv + 318 pp. £ 9.99. ISBN 978-1-846-14355-7.

All the major cities, political and economic centers, and the vast majority of Pakistan's 178 million inhabitants are concentrated in the plains. In contrast, the mountain areas in the northwest and northeast of the country only play a marginal economic role and host only 5% of the country's population; however, they have become infamous worldwide as regions of political struggles and violent conflicts, thus being responsible for Pakistan's questionable international image and difficult relations with its neighboring States. The Frontier Areas in the west of Pakistan play a key role in the Afghanistan conflict, being said to be the major recruiting and regrouping area of the Taliban and a refuge for Al-Qaeda and Islamic extremists, whereas disputed Kashmir is the pivot for a decades-long cold, and sometimes hot, war between Pakistan and India. Most of Pakistan's huge army is stationed in these 2 areas, and no other region of Pakistan, even of South Asia, stands as much in the political focus as these 2 mountainous areas.

Just after the violent birth of Pakistan and India in 1947, it was the mountainous territories of Jammu and Kashmir that became the reason and the battlefield for the first war between the 2 new states. Because the status of the former Princely State of

Jammu and Kashmir remained unsolved when British India was divided, India and Pakistan fought to incorporate it into their respective states. Several other violent conflicts have followed during the past decades and have made Kashmir a bloody and extremely expensive affair for both countries, cementing their mutual hostility. Disputed Kashmir became a metaphor and is still the major reason for the lack of political and economic cooperation between the 2 largest countries in South Asia.

With the updated edition of *Kashmir in Conflict*, the British writer and broadcaster Victoria Schofield, one of the most prominent experts in the field, offers a comprehensive and well-documented historical and political analysis of this conflict that goes back to the middle of the 19th century. On the basis of numerous historical sources, she introduces the reader to an area that is not only topographically but also linguistically and culturally divided into various valleys, traditions, and religions, and she explains its complex history, showing that the unresolved Kashmir dispute is primarily a postcolonial conflict. The events that led to the violent conflicts between India and Pakistan and the current militarization of the Kashmir Valley are demonstrated in detail by taking different and contrasting opinions into consideration. On the basis of numerous interviews, Schofield presents the political players involved, the directions and visions, and hopes and fears that have led to the present deadlocked situation, a real Gordian knot because none of the 3 options for Kashmir, independence, full integration into Pakistan, or full integration into India, seems likely to become reality within the near future.

Although the military presence in Kashmir is enormous and the Kashmir conflict is the major justification of Pakistan's huge army, affairs at the western border to

Afghanistan have been capturing the headlines over the past years. Only slowly, but steadily, have Pakistan's politicians and militaries come to realize that the conflict in the western frontier regions could be a more serious threat to the country's stability. The Pakistani journalist Imtiaz Gul offers a careful but pessimistic, not to say cynical, look at "Pakistan's lawless frontier," which has been labeled by US President Barack Obama as "the most dangerous place in the world." The 2430 kilometer border with Afghanistan, the so-called Durand Line, demarcated in 1893, divided Pashtoon tribes between British India and Afghanistan, and has always been viewed with resentment by those concerned. After Pakistan's independence, this line became a major source of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The narrow belt east of the line, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), although part of Pakistan, functions as a semiautonomous region, run under special laws already designed and implemented by the British. Consequently, the central governments have never held full power and control over these areas; a complicated logic of laws and rules has kept the influence of the central government outside. In short, this is a perfect place for preserving traditional ruling systems, for resistance, and for political and economic actions uncontrolled by governmental institutions. Yet the mountainous border region also remains one of the poorest areas, with high rates of illiteracy and child mortality. In great detail, Gul explores, region by region, the violent attacks, hostilities, insurgencies and failures, demonstrating how the major actors, Pakistan's national government, army and the strong intelligence service ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), have played their dangerous and bloody game in these areas without noticing that the players in their game were getting

beyond their control. The people of the FATA nowadays not only suffer from the struggles between Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and regular troops but also from numerous drone attacks by US troops as part of the so-called War against Terrorism by the international alliance.

Both cases, Kashmir and the FATA, demonstrate how peripheral mountain regions became hot spots of violent conflicts and playing

grounds for national or international power struggles, in which the local mountain populations are rarely the beneficiaries, more often the victims. For people interested in understanding the complicated net of international, national, and local political actors and their specific, mostly conflicting, interests and often incomprehensible political actions, the analyses by Schofield on Kashmir and Gul on

Pakistan's tribal areas are highly recommended.

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