

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Iftikhar Haider Malik.** *Pakistan after Musharraf: Democracy, Terror and the Building of a Nation.* London: New Holland, 2010. 208 pp. GBP 9.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84773-453-2.

**Reviewed by** Robert Nichols

**Published on** H-Asia (April, 2011)

**Commissioned by** Sumit Guha (The University of Texas at Austin)

## Pakistan Today

When the assassin of Salman Taseer, governor of the Punjab, who had been killed on January 4, 2011 was brought before a magistrate in Islamabad, Pakistan, dozens gathered outside the court supported the accused with rose petals and garlands. The crowd apparently included activist lawyers, many of whom perhaps had participated in the earlier lengthy movement to restore the Pakistan Supreme Court chief justice to his position after he had been dismissed by the former authoritarian leader Pervez Musharraf. In this accessible and current book, author Iftikhar Malik offers a historian's perspective on the many conflicted and competing issues important to an understanding of this response and responses to other contemporary events in a nation in crisis.

Successive chapters are written from a perspective that combines journalism, political science, and history. They trace the particularly Pakistani details of wider postcolonial themes of struggles between authoritarianism and democracy; political dynasties and broad representation; and secular visions and Islamist agendas (including disputed blasphemy laws claimed as the cause of Salman Taseer's murder). There is the rise of a middle class, one not necessarily unified in the pursuit of Western-oriented modernization, and ongoing critical external relations, especially with India, Afghanistan, the United States, and China.

The publisher and author, noted here as a South Asian politics expert, have created this useful volume

for a general reading audience, one that would include undergraduates, drawn by dramatic headlines to seek deeper understanding and analysis of the country and region. Scholar Iftikhar Malik has offered previous writings on the dilemmas of post-1947 Pakistan state-building and the tensions between differing national visions, including those framed in terms of constitutional modernity, Islamic politics, and regional or ethnic identities. In this new book he continues as a valuable guide to a national history of recurring periods marked by struggling democratic institutions and military interventionism, both simultaneously challenged and often informed by internal Islamist advocacy, and always in the context of unsettled foreign affairs.

This latest work tries to situate in the context of national and regional history the recent overwhelming cascade of dramatic political events. These include Musharraf's dismissal of the Supreme Court chief justice (March 2007), Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan from political exile (October 2007), Musharraf's declaration of a state of emergency (November 2007), Bhutto's assassination (December 27, 2007), the following national election (February 2008), Musharraf's resignation from the presidency (August 2008), Bhutto's widower, Asif Zardari, being sworn in as president (September 2008), the terrorist bombing of the Islamabad Marriott Hotel (September 2008), and the complex politics and violence that continued through 2009.

The author's fourth title since 2005, the current book begins with a prologue summarizing recent headlines and then an introduction that offers basic information about geography, provinces, religion, culture, language, and history. The brief historical survey covers the rise of the Indus valley civilization (3300-1200 BCE) to 1948 in five succinct pages, then to 2002 in five more pages. The volume at times reads as a bit of an encyclopedic attempt to mention and discuss all recent notable and interconnected personalities, organizations, and events. It concludes with an informative glossary of "Political Parties and Players" and a four-page bibliography.

As the book details and explores the interactions between political, military, religious, and economic interests within Pakistan, the author offers his observations about a society undergoing complex processes of stress and change. He suggests that national processes are slowly having a defusing effect on ethno-nationalist movements, and so, "A similar economic and professional integration of the urban NWFP into the mainstream Pakistani economy and state structures has also reduced ethnic separatism there. However, it has also escalated a tribal backlash against this imbalanced modernity" (p. 117). He notes, "the early traces of a middle class can be found amongst the smaller sections of society existing between the two extremes of rural landed gentry and landless peasantry," though this "is itself crisscrossed by varying levels of economic prosperity and

a multitude of ideological viewpoints" (p. 115). These emerging middle interests have rallied to party, regional, and religious agendas, using modern media and public mobilization. This includes religiously conservative urban, educated professionals seeking familiar goals of validation and social mobility.

The volume's closeness to current events is most clear in chapter 6, "Islamist Politics." In this chapter, the success of the February 2008 election is cited as evidence of renewed promise for a way forward. In defeating religious parties at the polls, "the mainstream parties regained the centre-stage, espousing global and secular solutions, preferring dialogue and democracy over violence and intolerance. These elections proved that democratic processes rather than coercion were the best antidote to religious militancy" (p. 139). In a concluding chapter, "Awaiting a Breakthrough," Malik writes that "the elections of 2008 demonstrated that Pakistanis are ready to make a new, democratic and forward-looking start, although," optimism is qualified with caution" (p. 142). Those looking for some insight into the latest political events and violence in Pakistan will find it here. No simple optimist, the author is fully aware of the challenges ahead. Still, his last sentence reflects a vision past immediate crises to a time when maturing national interests might recognize that "Democracy, dialogue and distributive justice are the keys to a bright future for Pakistan" (p. 170).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-asia>

**Citation:** Robert Nichols. Review of Malik, Iftikhar Haider, *Pakistan after Musharraf: Democracy, Terror and the Building of a Nation*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. April, 2011.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32452>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.