REVIEWS

FRONTLINE PAKISTAN: THE STRUGGLE WITH MILITANT ISLAM
by Zahid Hussain
Columbia University Press,
232 pages, $24.95

Reviewed by SADANAND DHUME

EVEN FOR A nation not exactly synonymous with calm, Pakistan's turbulence over the past several months has been striking. The ham-handed sacking and subsequent reinstatement of the country's chief justice, a bloody showdown with armed militants in Islamabad's sprawling Red Mosque complex, and a spate of suicide bombings have all added to the impression that President Pervez Musharraf's eight-year rule is sputtering to its inevitable end. To add to his troubles, both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif—who between them played musical chairs with the prime ministership for much of the 1990s—are gearing up for elections later this year.

Meanwhile, six years after Gen. Musharraf ostensibly abandoned his Taliban allies and threw in his lot with Washington, the international community appears no closer to achieving its goals in the region. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri remain at large. A resurgent Taliban continues to use sanctuaries in Pakistan to attack NATO forces in Afghanistan and hamper Hamid Karzai's attempts to put his battered nation back on its feet. Despite billions of dollars in aid and debt relief, anti-Americanism in Pakistan remains rampant. According to a recent survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, fewer than two in 10 Pakistanis hold a favorable view of the United States.

Against this backdrop, two more or less opposite views have emerged on Gen. Musharraf and the struggle against militant Islam, or Islamism, the often violent drive to impose Shariah law on society and the state. Those chafing for change argue that only genuine democracy—absent since Gen. Musharraf's ascent to power in a bloodless coup—can tamp down public anger and produce a government with the legitimacy to crack down on violent local Islamists and their Taliban and al Qaeda allies. Their opponents counter that, like it or not, the army remains the only institution in Pakistan with the wherewithal to take on the Islamists. The solution lies not in abandoning Gen. Musharraf, but in pressuring him to live up to his countless assurances to modernize Pakistan's society and end terrorism emanating from its soil.

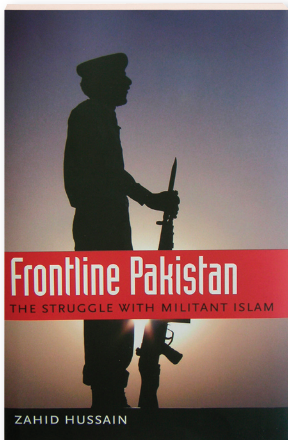
Those seeking a more nuanced view ought to pick up a copy of *Frontline Pakistan* by veteran Pakistani journalist Zahid Hussain. Mr. Hussain, who writes for The Wall Street Journal and the Times of London among others, traces Pakistan's present troubles to a series of blunders dating back to the 1970s. Since then both democrats and dictators have nurtured violent Islamism out of political expediency, misplaced piety or geopolitical ambition. One statistic sums up the scale of the problem. When Pakistan gained independence in 1947 it housed 137 madrassas. That number has since swelled to 13,000, between 10% and 15% of which are linked to sectarian militancy (Sunni vs. Shia) or international terrorism. The gov-

---

Mr. Dhume is a Bernard Schwartz fellow at the Asia Society in Washington, D.C.

ernment has failed to act against even the handful of madrassas that make up a kind of Ivy League of jihadism. In Mr. Hussain's sobering assessment, "Jihadists have as much if not more power over Pakistan society than Musharraf himself."

For Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and to a lesser degree for those with large, and in places restive, Muslim minorities such as India and Thailand, Pakistan presents several cautionary lessons. First, that Islamists must be opposed since appeasement only emboldens them. Second, that Islamists do not need to hold formal power, as in Iran or Saudi Arabia, to alter the nature of both society and the state. And finally, that if the West is to have any success in rolling back the Islamist tide it will have to pay less attention to promises made during White House visits, and more to the nitty-gritty of school curricula, public broadcasting and penal codes. He who controls the text books is at least as important as he who controls the tanks.



In Mr. Hussain's estimation, Pakistan's slide began during the prime ministership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the debonair, Scotch-swilling feudal from Sindh first elected in 1970. Believing that he could co-opt the then relatively marginal Islamists, Bhutto banned alcohol and gambling and shuttered night clubs. He replaced the traditional Sunday holiday with Friday and declared the tiny Ahmadiyya sect to be non-Muslim.

Bhutto promoted the pious, unctuous and ultimately treacherous Zia ul-Haq to head the army, and it was after Zia seized power in a coup in 1977 that the Islamization of Pakistan began in earnest. The general established Shariah courts, instituted government collection of *zakat* (an alms tax), stripped libraries of books deemed un-Islamic, and mandated compulsory prayer for civil servants and marks in their confidential reports for piety. *The Quranic Concept of War*—which argues that "terror struck in the hearts of the enemies is not only a means, it is the end in itself"—was made mandatory reading for army officers. Many of them subsequently rotated through Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, whose links to violent Islamism, while focused on Afghanistan and India, stretch from Chechnya to the southern Philippines.

Mr. Hussain describes the ISI's links with Masood Azhar, the militant leader sprung from an Indian jail in 1999 after the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft, with Omar Saeed Sheikh, the London School of Economics dropout implicated in the murder of The Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, and with Dawood Ibrahim, the Indian underworld don who lives in comfortable exile in Karachi after masterminding the 1993 bomb blasts in Mumbai that killed more than 250 people. He recounts public support for bin Laden by senior retired Pakistani generals Aslam Beg and Hamid Gul, who describe the Saudi billionaire as a "great Muslim warrior."

Perhaps most damningly, Mr. Hussain reveals how A.Q. Khan's freewheeling nuclear bazaar was anything but the rogue operation claimed by the Pakistani government. Libya had agreed to fund Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" as early as 1973, and Islamabad's nuclear cooperation with Iran dates back to the late 1980s. It was under Benazir Bhutto's democratically elected government in the early 1990s that Mr. Khan first began using military planes to ferry nuclear materials to North Korea.

In the end, however, it is Gen. Musharraf's vaunted "enlightened moderation" that draws the most trenchant criticism. Mr. Hussain acknowledges that despite its failure—deliberate or otherwise—to nab bin Laden, al-Zawahiri or the Taliban's Mullah Omar, Pakistan has handed over such al Qaeda stalwarts as 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the Yemeni plotter Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and the organization's alleged No. 3, the Libyan Abu Faraj al-Libbi. But these arrests, which Gen. Musharraf boasts in his autobiography earned Pakistan millions of dollars in bounties, have never been part of a sustained effort against extremism.

Groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, ostensibly banned, have simply changed their names and continued business as usual. Taking a page from Hamas and Hezbollah, they have reinvented themselves as social-welfare organizations. Militants rounded up under international pressure, such as those held after London's 7/7 bombings, are usually released quietly after a few weeks. The country's most powerful jihadist madrassas—Jamia Binoria in Karachi and Darul Uloom Haqqania near Peshawar to name just two—remain unmolested.

This is a brave and unflinchingly honest book that's a must-read for anyone interested in contemporary Pakistan. Unfortunately, Mr. Hussain fails to probe the deeper historical and cultural roots of Pakistan's present malaise. With hindsight, it's easy to see why a country created purely on the basis of Islam was always going to have trouble warding off Islamism. As Abul Ala Maududi, the Islamist ideologue and founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami (oddly absent from the pages of this book) asked: what was the point of creating a separate homeland for Muslims if not to implement Islamic law? It's a question successive generations of Pakistanis will continue to grapple with.

HONG KONG MEDIA LAW:
A GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS
AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS
by Doreen Weisenhaus
Hong Kong University Press,
372 pages, HK$225

Reviewed by DANNY GITTINGS

CHINA'S DUBIOUS DISTINCTION as the world's worst jailer of journalists is well known. For instance, Hong Kong reporter Xi Yang was imprisoned from 1994-97 simply for writing about Beijing's plans to raise interest rates. For those who believe things have improved since then, the fate of Straits Times correspondent Ching Cheong stands as sad evidence to the contrary. Convicted of revealing state secrets during a closed-door trial last year, after writing some innocuous articles for a Taiwanese think tank, the ailing journalist is currently serving a five-year sentence for spying.

They were just a couple of the victims of a legal system that allows, as Doreen Weisenhaus reminds us, everything from divorce statistics to local newspapers to be categorized as state secrets. And, in case that doesn't provide enough ammunition to jail journalists just trying to do their jobs, she adds the cautionary warning that, in China, any document can be retrospectively classified as secret.

So the first reaction on opening *Hong Kong Media Law*, which includes a chapter highlighting the risks of reporting from mainland China, is relief at how journalists in the British colony are still spared the nightmare of operating under what passes for "media law" in the rest of China.

But dig a little deeper into this practi-

Mr. Gittings, a former journalist in Hong Kong, is an assistant professor in law at the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education.