

# MONITOR

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### **Pakistan – Challenges Facing America’s War Ally: Interview with Ambassador Tourqir Hussain**

*Interview by Pooja Gupta and Jonathan Seiden*



#### **AMBASSADOR TOURQIR HUSSAIN**

*Ambassador Tourqir Hussain is a former senior diplomat from Pakistan, having served as ambassador to three different countries: Japan (1998–2003), Spain (1993–95), and Brazil (1990–93). He has also held senior positions in the Pakistani Foreign Office, including that of additional foreign secretary heading the bureaus of the Middle East and of the Americas and Europe. From 1996 to 1998, he was diplomatic adviser to the prime minister. Ambassador Hussain has written over twenty op-ed pieces for American and Pakistani newspapers on South Asian security issues, the Kashmir dispute, US–Pakistan relations, political Islam, terrorism, and US relations with the Islamic world. Mr. Hussain now lives in the US. He was a Senior Fellow at the US Institute of Peace from 2004–5 and is currently a Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Globalization of the George Washington University and Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and the University of Virginia.*

**The Monitor (M):** After Musharraf stepped down as military chief, he described as the job as “a milestone in the transition of Pakistan to the complete essence of democracy.” What is your reaction to this statement? Do you agree or disagree?

**Ambassador Hussain (AH):** Actually, I disagree. It was a kind of controlled democracy. The real leadership was in the hands of the army and Musharraf was representing the army. He made all of the policy decisions and he co-opted some of the politicians. That has been the misfortune of Pakistan because there have always been small-time politicians who are willing to cooperate with the army in return for political power. However, [these politicians] are there for the show. The army calls the real shots.

If the politicians are in a position to outperform the military, then it will be a big boost for democracy. But if the politicians fail again, then people will remember Musharraf’s era and say perhaps there is no harm in the army coming back again. It all depends. In my view, this is the last chance the politicians have for their own good and for the good of Pakistan. They have let Pakistan [down] and they have been primarily responsible for creating political space for the army, firstly by failing and secondly by cooperating with the army.

As I see it, there is hardly any difference between the army rule and the politicians rule because they both belong to the same class. They have joined together to defend their class and their institutional interests at the expense of the Pakistani people. So, the Pakistani people have [gotten] a bum rap whether a politician has been ruling or the army is ruling. That’s why I believe real democracy is very vital to the empowerment of the people of

Pakistan. I mean real democracy that empowers people not those already empowered. I only pray that the politicians have learned the lesson and if they want to strengthen and institutionalize democracy they have to work for it and also outperform the army so that the army is not welcomed again.

**M:** The Pakistani government has been receiving billions of dollars of military assistance from the United States since 9/11. Do you think that this money has been used effectively to promote the interests of Pakistan and of the United States?

**AH:** Much of this money has gone [to] support the army. The amount the Pakistani economy receives is very, very small. In fact, there [was] a study that came [out] in August 2007 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (PCR Project) which says that out of the \$10 billion, the [amount directed to the economy] in the last five or six years has been limited to \$800 million. Eight hundred million dollars is nothing considering Pakistan’s problems. Pakistan needs not only economic and infrastructure development but also promotion of justice, industrialization that can help job creation, and economic activity. All this needs a different kind of approach. I’m not saying that money alone will matter. Perhaps you need a free-trade agreement, opening up the American market to Pakistani goods, special privileges and special benefits, or incentives for industry in backwards areas.

[In terms of the relationship,] I think the United States has benefited a lot. Many of the top leaders of Al-Qaeda have been captured in Pakistan. Without Pakistan’s help, these leaders would still be roaming around and would have been a much greater threat that Al-Qaeda is. Actually the hardcore Al-Qaeda, in my

view, has weakened quite a lot. The group we are fighting now is mostly Iraq and Afghanistan-based affiliates of Al-Qaeda and people that have drawn inspiration from Al-Qaeda philosophy. The hardcore Al-Qaeda has been hobbled and knocked out, in my view. Of course, does it mean Al-Qaeda threat is over? No, simply because we now have more franchises and many affiliates, that's the problem. As someone has said many "baby Al Qaedas."

**M: How significant is the threat from radical or extremist groups from within Pakistan itself?**

**AH:** It is a serious threat, but the threat is not so much in terms of their ability to take over the government but in terms of creating instability. Look at suicide bombings. If suicide bombings continue, they will affect the security environment of the country. If the security environment is affected, it will affect economic activity. If the economic activity is affected, it will discourage foreign investment and Pakistan will slowly become isolated.

Once they see that Pakistan is disturbed, Pakistan is unstable, or Pakistan is facing serious threats from extremists, people will be hesitant to invest. In that sense, it is a very serious threat.

I don't see any threat of radicals and extremists taking over [Pakistan's?] nuclear weapons. Pakistan has a strong institutional arrangement: a strong army, strong bureaucracy, a strong police system. The trouble is these institutions are acting on behalf of an elitist system which does not represent people's basic rights, human security, or aspirations for quality of life and justice. It is not that the system is oppressive. It is not fair and equitable. Somehow, if people can put pressure to hold the ruling elite accountable, the same institutions of state will start working for the people. We have a very developed civil service, a very developed media, and compared with many other countries even in the Middle East it is a very open society. Pakistan has a good potential to become a liberal democratic society. But Pakistanis have to work for it. And the present elections have given a good opportunity.

**M: Moving to the relationship between India and Pakistan, is Kashmir still the base of all Indo-Pakistan issues or does it run deeper?**

**AH:** Kashmir has not vanished from the agenda, although its intensity is less than before. The reason Kashmir has gone in the background is because of certain factors that have come into the foreground. One of the factors, the alpha factor, is American involvement in South Asia. American involvement in South Asia has never been greater. This is the first time the United States has been involved both in India and Pakistan, as well as Afghanistan. US involvement, even though it is not talked about much, has

been a major factor in the normalization of Indo-Pakistani relations, because both countries are now allies of the United States. Plus, to change a policy, you need not only support, but also incentives. Naturally, both countries are now in better position to give and take with the Western world. Part of that give and take is having good relations with each other because the Western world wants them to have good relations.

**M: You've talked about the importance of education in Pakistan and an educational overhaul. How does education reform begin and why do you see that as a step to the future of Pakistan?**

**AH:** First of all, I don't think Pakistan or the United States understand the gravity of the problem. Also, people are focusing too much on Madrasah. Madrasah are a secondary issue. The main problem is the state of public education. Even there, there is exaggeration when people say it has collapsed. It has not collapsed. It is dysfunctional, which means that the basic structure [exists]. You need to reform it, overhaul it, put money in it, improve infrastructure, increase the number of schools, improve teacher training, and the quality of training. It can be done. It should be the centerpiece of Pakistan's reform, not anything else.

**M: Finally, do you believe the most recent election will have a stabilizing effect on the country?**

**AH:** The elections were free and fair which is something very rare in Pakistan. And the two mainstream parties who have their vote back won fairly and squarely. They set a good precedent by joining [together] in a coalition which is also something very rare in Pakistan. And if this leads to reconciliation and collaboration in addressing the country's serious problems it will contribute to the stability of Pakistan.

Yet the prospects of Pakistan's democratization and stability also face uncertainty. The serious challenges Pakistan faces can only be resolved by a mature democracy and that will not come easily or quickly. Many roadblocks remain such as Pakistan's regressive social structure, the weakness of its institutional architecture, the ambitious army, and politicians whose past records do not inspire much confidence. And [there are] two other forces will be impacting on Pakistan's internal dynamics--the continued threat of extremism, and the shadow of US strategic interests in the region, especially the ongoing war on terrorism and problems with Iran.

Let us hope all major players act responsibly and in concert to address the challenges Pakistan presents. Otherwise they will all be losers. ●

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**- Ambassador Tourqir Hussain**