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Governance and Militancy in Pakistan's Chitral District¹

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Chitral, the northernmost district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province, lies at the extreme northwest of Pakistan. It shares a border with Afghanistan's Badakhshan, Nuristan, and Kunar Provinces to the north and west, with Gilgit-Baltistan region to the east, and with the Kohistan, Swat, and Dir Districts to the south.

Geography is at the root of many of Chitral's unique characteristics. Indeed, its geography and location play an important role in shaping its culture. The district consists of a series of valleys that vary in accessibility, but generally Chitral is not easily traveled. While this research was under way, every single road into Chitral was being disrupted by flooding, as were many of the roads linking the various valleys. And this event was not entirely unusual.

Chitralis pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and intercommunal harmony. Historically, villages have had to work together to create water channels, build roads, and clear passes for their own survival.² From a governance perspective, Chitral is relatively easy to control because of the limited number of entry and exit points. But this factor also makes it very difficult to provide adequate services.³ Although Chitral contains less than 2 percent of the population of KPK, it covers 20 percent of its surface area,⁴ much of which, as noted, is not reliably accessible.

From the late seventeenth century until 1969,⁵ Chitral was ruled primarily by the Khatoor dynasty. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the British attempted to use the area as a buffer against Russia. After the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, Chitral retained its status as a "princely state" (independent autocracy) until 1969, when its last ruler, or *mehtar*, Shuja ul-Mulk, handed over power to the government of Pakistan and Chitral became the northernmost district of what was then the North-West Frontier Province (now KPK). Since then, the ul-Mulk family has continued to be one of the strongest political forces in the district, although it has not consistently allied itself with any particular party. In the 1970s, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) surged in popularity after Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto sent fodder, or animal feed, to Chitral by helicopter during a particularly bad drought. The PPP remained the strongest political party through the 1990s, when Gen. Pervez Musharraf came to power. Musharraf paid more attention to Chitral than any Pakistani leader before or since. Among other things, he commissioned construction of the Lowari Tunnel in an attempt to connect Chitral more closely to the rest of Pakistan (it gave Chitral year-round access to supplies via Upper and Lower Dir). As a result, General Musharraf is extremely popular in Chitral, and it is widely believed there that he will return to Pakistani politics by running for the district's national assembly slot.⁶

From the perspective of stability in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, Chitral is an island of relative stability and peace surrounded by growing militancy and violence, both antigovernment and sectarian. Chitral's location is

¹ This background paper was prepared as part of a research project on subnational governance and militancy in Pakistan. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Ploughshares Fund, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The views expressed in this background are those of the author alone.

² Siraj ul-Mulk, owner, Hindu-Kush Heights Hotel, interview by author, Chitral, July 31, 2010.

³ Rahmatullah Wazir, Chitral District coordination officer, interview by author, Chitral, August 2, 2010.

⁴ Government of North-West Frontier Province, "Important District-Wise Socio-Economic Indicators of NWFP," Bureau of Statistics, Planning and Development Department, Peshwar, 2009.

⁵ For a detailed history of the region, see Karim Baig and Firuza Pastakia, *Chitral: A Study in Statecraft (1320–1969)* (Karachi: International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Pakistan, 2004), http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/chitral_a_study_in_statecraft.pdf.

⁶ Siraj ul-Mulk, interview, July 31, 2010.

strategically important; it has the longest border with Afghanistan of any district in the KPK and is the province's largest district.

During the mid- to late 1980s, the town of Garam Chashma in southern Chitral was a major staging point for the supply of weapons to the anti-Soviet mujahideen, but that role has not translated into a high level of militant activity today.⁷ However, since 2007 militancy has grown on Chitral's western and southern borders, and ongoing sectarian tension (with occasion violent outbursts) continues to plague Gilgit-Baltistan on its eastern border.⁸ Such incidents pose threats to Chitral's stability. However, Chitral's advantages in its geography, culture, history, and informal governance structures appear thus far to have immunized it against the worst of these threats.

Chitral has three major religious communities: Sunni Muslims, Ismaili Muslims, and the polytheistic religion of the Kalash.⁹ There is a remarkable level of interaction, cooperation, and mutual respect between the Sunnis and Ismailis, the two dominant religious groups in Chitral. Many villages and families are of mixed religion, and there is often joint participation (by Sunnis and Ismailis) at festivals, Eid celebrations, marriages, and funerals.¹⁰

Ismaili-dominant areas have elected Sunni *nazims* (local government officials) such as Sikandar ul-Mulk, who was the *tehsil nazim* for northern Chitral until devolution was dismantled in March 2010. Sunni-dominant areas have also elected Ismaili nazims in southern Chitral. In addition, some Ismailis have voted for, and even joined, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam a conservative Sunni political party, because of their common ground on social issues.¹¹

The Ismailis and Kalash interviewed claimed to respect the *khatib* (preacher) of the Shahi Masjid mosque; he is the highest-ranking member of the Sunni *ulema* (religious scholars) in Chitral (see Box 1). In addition, the frequency of intermarriage between Sunni and Ismaili families is higher in Chitral than in other parts of Pakistan.¹² Finally, there has been a surprising lack of any real sectarian violence in Chitral since 1982 compared with that in other regions that have a similar mix of religious affiliations.

Box 1. Interreligious Conflict Mediation: Khatib Khaliq-u-Zaman Kakakhel

Several years ago, a 14-year-old Kalash girl who lived in Rambur was kidnapped by her cousins, ethnic Kalash who had converted to Sunni Muslim. They took her to the city of Chitral and forced her to convert to Islam as well. Their plan was to marry her to a Sunni man so that she would not be able to return to her Kalash religion. While in Chitral, she was kept under *pardah* (veiled), and her relatives in Rambur were not told where she was. Several of her family members, very angry about the situation, drove down to Chitral city, vowing to take her back and get revenge. Before they were able to do so, however, the issue was brought before Khatib Khaliq-u-Zaman for arbitration. Because he is a conservative Sunni himself, both sides of the family assumed he would rule against the Kalash relatives. After all, once a person has converted to Islam, the punishment for recanting is very harsh. However, having heard the arguments on both sides, the khatib declared that the girl was not yet of age to make a decision to become a Muslim, and therefore her conversion was both illegal and nonbinding. He ruled that she should be given the opportunity to join her Sunni cousins after she turned 18, but not before then. He then ordered the kidnappers to hand the girl back to her family in Rambur, which they did. As a result of this decision, the khatib has become widely respected in the Kalash community.

Source: Author interview, Quaid-e-Azam, manager, Hindukush Heights Hotel, Chitral, Pakistan

⁷ Donatella Lorch, "Garam Chasma Journal: Mud, Faith and Flash of Mountain Warriors," *New York Times*, August 31, 1988.

⁸ "Violence in Gilgit," editorial, *Dawn*, August 28, 2010. <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/26037>.

⁹ Unfortunately, research for this case study was blocked in the Kalash valleys.

¹⁰ Yousef Khan, advocate and Mastuj resident, interview by author, Mastuj, August 7, 2010.

¹¹ Sikandar ul-Mulk, tehsil nazim, northern Chitral, interview by author, August 7, 2010; Miraj Khan, program manager, Aga Khan Development Foundation, interview by author, August 3, 2010.

¹² Yousef Khan, interview, August 7, 2010.

Informal Governance

In Chitral, various actors wield nongovernmental authority and provide services:

- *Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)*. The AKDN, by far the largest nongovernmental development agency in the district, provides many of the services one normally expects from a formal government. The network delivers health services, education, community development and local governance support, infrastructure support, and emergency relief services. The AKDN's first effort, the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), began working with communities in the northern, Ismaili-dominated villages in 1982. Today, the AKRSP's village organizations (VOs) operate in about 75 percent of the villages in the district. Local support organizations (LSOs), which are apex bodies made up of representatives from all VOs in a given union council, contribute significantly toward peace and stability efforts.
- *The ulema*. Composed of Sunni religious leaders, Chitral's *ulema*—an Islamic term referring collectively to religious scholars—include leaders of village mosques and regional religious leaders. They are led by a council of the ulema and the head of the Shahi Masjid mosque in the city of Chitral. The ulema have substantial influence over the majority-Sunni population and generally appear to have the respect (and in some cases admiration) of the other religious communities.
- *Jamaat Council*. Ismaili religious leaders form Jamaat Councils at the village and district levels, each headed by a president elected for a two-year term. The role of these councils is similar to that of the Sunni ulema, but they are federated up to the national and international levels and ultimately are led by the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader (imam) of the Ismaili sect. The Jamaat Councils also provide input directly to the AKDN, for which there is no parallel in the Sunni ulema.

These and other informal sector actors all claim to provide services of varying descriptions. The AKDN is by far the largest. In sectors such as health care and education, it rivals the government in the quantity of services provided, and it is frequently acknowledged to provide higher-quality services than the government in the various sectors in which it works.¹³ In some cases, the AKDN collaborates with the government, such as their public-private partnerships for health care centers. In other cases, it is a competitor; the Aga Khan schools are private and charge fees.

The AKDN is very effective at providing services in Chitral (the most frequent complaint heard in interviews about the AKDN is that it often charges for its services). Indeed, it has been widely recognized by donors such as the World Bank, which have carried out extensive evaluations of its programs over the last 30 years.¹⁴ However, there still are some barriers to the AKDN's effectiveness. The first constraint is dwindling donor resources—a growing problem because aid money is being directed toward more volatile regions such as Swat and the tribal areas. Second, the AKRSP's decision to work almost entirely through LSOs results in development projects that are more locally “owned” but possibly less effective in terms of the quality of service delivery. LSOs often do not have the same level of technical expertise as AKRSP staff. Finally, if the AKDN suffers more attacks like the one that killed two of its health services staff members in 2004, it will have to consider lowering its level of exposure. This does not yet appear likely, but it remains a possibility.

Meanwhile, the ulema and some of the local religious parties provide emergency services in Chitral and were actively involved in the flood response under way while the field research for this case study was being conducted. For the most part, these emergency services are ad hoc. It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the efforts, but representatives of both the ulema and the parties made a point of explaining that social services are central to their respective organizations. The ulema of Chitral have also established a scholarship fund for high-performing students

¹³ Sher Qayum Khan, executive district officer for health, interview by author, Chitral, August 2, 2010.

¹⁴ See, for example, World Bank, *The Next Ascent: An Evaluation of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2002).

and schools in the district.¹⁵ All of the funds for this and other activities are raised through local appeals at mosques. The ulema do not have any formal connection with the government, the AKDN, or any other relief or development efforts by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and they do not take money from donors.

Informal actors play an active role in conflict resolution within their various spheres of influence (e.g., the ulema within mosques, the LSOs and VOs in their communities, and the political parties among their constituents). Because these spheres overlap, the provincial government has initiated “peace committees” that include representatives of each of these groups, along with the relevant local government authorities. In some valleys of Chitral, the only official government presence may be a single police officer. When conflicts such as land disputes arise, the peace committees play the role of the court of first resort. If the issue is too acrimonious to be solved at that level, it is passed along to the government judicial system by registering the dispute with the police. Because of their representative nature, the peace committees are able to resolve most issues before they are taken up with any formal authority.¹⁶

In terms of providing security, it is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of LSOs and peace committees. Chitral civil society as a whole has been effective at keeping militants at bay and resolving sectarian and internal conflicts, but attribution of this success to the LSOs (versus the ulema or political parties) is difficult. The fact that violence in neighboring districts is generally connected to the madrassa–mosque–militant nexus suggests that the Chitrali ulema play a significant role in avoiding Taliban-style insurgency. Internal sectarian peacekeeping is probably attributable to local actors as well. One clear barrier to the greater effectiveness of this process, and a threat to its current success, is the lack of educational opportunities in Chitral. Despite the combined efforts of both the government and Aga Khan Education Services (AKES), there are simply not enough opportunities for poor young people in Chitral. As a result, many parents send their children to madrassas, where they receive a free education and room and board. Some madrassas instill in students a militant version of Islam. Therefore, on their return to their villages in Chitral these students sometimes try to encourage others to join the struggle against the Pakistani government or the Americans in Afghanistan. Because they are in the minority, this instigation rarely finds a willing audience. However, several interviewees said they were concerned about what will happen when these madrassa returnees reach a critical mass.¹⁷

Formal Governance

Chitral is somewhat different from the rest of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in that it was still an independent princely state until quite recently. Until then, although it was under national rule from Islamabad, the mehtar was responsible for his own internal administration. In 1969 Chitral became the largest district in KPK, and, as such, its legal status and the legal rights of the local population are now the same as those in any other district in Pakistan.

Chitral elects by direct popular vote one member of the National Assembly (MNA) of the Pakistani parliament and two members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) of the KPK provincial parliament. These are the only elected officials currently in power in Chitral. Both the MNA and the MPAs spend much of their time outside of the district and do not have a direct role in its administration. However, because of their status and connections, they are often called upon to resolve disputes or use their influence to help solve problems.¹⁸

¹⁵ Khaliq-u-Zaman Kakakhel, head, Shahi Masjid mosque, Chitral, August 5, 2010.

¹⁶ Local police chief, Chitral district, interview by author, August 6, 2010.

¹⁷ Sher Agha, LSO manager, interview by author, Chitral, August 3, 2010; Karim Baig, assistant professor, Chitral College, interview by author, August 4, 2010.

¹⁸ Maulana Ghulam Mohammad, former member of the Provincial Assembly, Jamaat-e-Islami Party, interview by author, Chitral, August 3, 2010.

All other government officials are either appointed members of the bureaucracy or hired on contract for specialized roles. The senior administrative officer in Chitral is the district coordinating officer (DCO), who is usually a professional bureaucrat from Pakistan's District Management Group within the civil service. A DCO's rotation is usually two or three years. At the next level of administration are the district heads of the various line agencies and services. Some of these, such as the superintendent of police and the commandant of the Chitral Scouts (a paramilitary organization that is part of the Frontier Corps), are on two-year rotations, while others, such as the executive district officers for health and education, can be hired for a shorter or longer period in that specific role.

In 2001 General Musharraf introduced his devolution plan, which was intended to put control of administrative and development issues in the hands of elected officials: nazims at the district level, tehsil nazims at the subdistrict level, and the union council at the local level. This arrangement lasted for almost 10 years before being cast aside in March 2010. Although the concept won substantial support from the international donor community, it appears that it was never sufficiently supported by the government itself.¹⁹ Former nazims at all levels who were interviewed for this case study identified a wide range of problems with devolution that had made it nearly impossible to implement the concept well.²⁰ Chief among them was a lack of control over resources. The cause of this problem was twofold. First, because Chitral is exempt from most taxes, the nazims had little revenue to carry out any kind of development agenda once they were in power. Second, the funding that did come from the government (both provincial and federal) was often commandeered by bureaucrats such as the DCO. Under devolution, these officers were technically subordinate to the politicians, but this was rarely the case in practice. The bureaucrats were usually far more experienced in the workings of the government and able to wield power over their elected bosses. As a result, it appears that few local politicians genuinely mourn the end of devolution.²¹

Because of the repeal of devolution in the KPK, union council and subdistrict- and district-level government officials are no longer elected. Members of the Provincial Assembly and of the National Assembly are still elected along party lines, but they are representatives and are not directly involved in district administration or local governance.

The major political parties in Chitral are the PPP (led by the Bhutto family), the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam, or PML-Q, an offshoot of the PML-N, which split during President Musharraf's regime), the Awami National Party (ANP, the secular Pashtun-led party currently governing the KPK), and the Sunni Islamic parties: the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). The PPP has historically been the strongest and best-organized party in Chitral, but the religious parties gained ground substantially in the early 1990s. In 1992 the religious parties won both the MPA and MNA seats. From 1999 to 2006, the PML-Q became relatively powerful because of Musharraf's popularity in Chitral, but the religious parties with whom the PML-Q was allied continued to win seats. Until devolution was dismantled in March 2010, the district nazim was Maghfir Shah from Jamaat-e-Islami.

Militancy and Security in Chitral

"Hard" security (meaning armed personnel) is provided in Chitral by the government through the police force, border police, and the Chitral Scouts. NGOs, religious groups, and political organizations also contribute to security in two ways. First, they help resolve disputes between parties before those disputes spiral into wider conflicts. Second, village organizations, LSOs, and religious leaders all play a role in reporting, and in some cases physically evicting, individuals or groups that appear to have militant or antigovernment objectives. This effort has been largely led by the religious parties (JI and JUI) and by the ulema. Because the initial rallying point for antigovernment militant activity is often a mosque, the ulema and religious party leaders are the first to know about such activity (see Box 2). They

¹⁹ Sardar Hussein, former nazim, interview by author, Chitral, August 8, 2010.

²⁰ Sikandar ul-Mulk, former tehsil nazim, interview by author, North Chitral, August 7, 2010.

²¹ Sardar Hussein, interview, August 8, 2010.

respond by warning the instigators against disturbing the peace and in rare cases have reported troublemakers to the police. The government is not usually brought into this process, although it is part of the peace committees.

Box 2. Containing Conflict

In 1995 a local JUI leader and mullah was killed by an Ismaili in southern Chitral. Although the incident was the result of a family dispute and not ideologically motivated, word of the murder spread quickly through the bazaars in Chitral and sparked talk of impending sectarian violence. The AKRSP immediately closed its offices for a month under the assumption that there would be a substantial backlash against Ismailis and, by extension, AKDN institutions. However, before anyone else was killed, the JUI provincial leadership investigated the incident and publicly announced that the murder was not ideologically motivated. They made it clear to their constituents that if there was any backlash against Ismailis, there would be serious repercussions. As a result of this quick, decisive action by the JUI leadership, further violence was averted.

Source: Sardar Ayub, Chitral regional program manager, Aga Khan Rural Support Program, interview by author, August 2, 2010.

Chitral is remarkable for its extremely low levels of militancy, sectarian violence, and organized crime. However, there is no shortage of potential for all of these. As noted earlier, Chitral has the longest border with Afghanistan of any district or tribal area in Pakistan. Along the north and west, it borders Badakhshan, Nuristan, and Kunar Provinces, and along the south the Kohistan, Swat, and Dir Districts. Since 2001, each one of these areas has been characterized by growing antigovernment militant activity, but as of late 2010 very little of this activity had spilled over into Chitral. There has been ample speculation that al Qaeda and various Taliban elements have been active in the district, but the low levels of violence have made it difficult to confirm this speculation conclusively.²²

Even though Chitral was the scene of militant activity during the 1980s, that activity has not carried forward into the present nearly as much as it has in other parts of the KPK. In 1982 there was a brief outbreak of sectarian violence, and there have been occasional armed disputes over land ownership, but these conflicts have been resolved locally.²³ During the anti-Soviet campaign, Chitral was used more as a conduit for military goods and personnel than as a recruiting ground. In the late 1980s, the town of Garam Chashma in southern Chitral was used as a major hub for ferrying supplies of weapons and equipment into northern Afghanistan. When the Soviets withdrew in 1989, this hub was ostensibly closed down, but it was actually moved to a semisecret location farther up the valley. In 1990 the large munitions dump that was being used as a storehouse for weapons en route to Afghanistan caught fire, causing a series of explosions over three days, during which a number of Chitralis were injured. This mujahideen staging point was never rebuilt, although the Pakistani military and intelligence services continued to support militants in Afghanistan from Chitral. Meanwhile, the relationship between these external actors and the local Chitral Scouts became increasingly tense—the local forces viewed the national Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) activity as meddling by outsiders. The role of the Chitral Scouts as providers of security in Chitral may contribute greatly to the level of peace in the district today, because their loyalty is chiefly to the Chitrali people. Chitralis value local security rather than the Pakistan military or intelligence services, which continue to be involved with militants on both sides of the border.

The most visible and widely reported recent incident of militant activity in Chitral was the murder of two Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS) employees on December 27, 2004. In various reports, this incident was linked to two separate militant groups.²⁴ The first, Harkat-ul-Mujahaddin, operated in Afghanistan during the 1980s, but recently

²² Hassan Abbas, “Pakistan’s Chitral District: A Refuge for Al-Qaeda’s Top Leadership,” *Terrorism Focus* December 7, 2006.

²³ Sardar Ayub, Chitral regional program manager, Aga Khan Rural Support Program, interview by author, August 2, 2010.

²⁴ “Two Harkat Men Held in Chitral,” *Daily Times*, December 29, 2004, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_29-12-2004_pg7_8; and Abbas, “Pakistan’s Chitral District.”

has only been associated with attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir.²⁵ The second group associated with the attack was Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which recently carried out a series of attacks in Pakistan, but most of those were in Punjab Province.²⁶ It is not clear why either of these groups would launch only one attack in Chitral and then lie dormant or leave the district.

Other recent militant activity in Chitral has largely been the result of violence in neighboring territories spilling across the border. The kidnapping in 2009 of Athanasios Lerounis, a Greek volunteer social worker, was apparently the work of militant groups based in Nuristan,²⁷ who demanded a large amount of cash and the release of several Afghan Taliban commanders in return for his release. A group of local leaders from the Union Council Ayun in Chitral were able to negotiate with the captors, and Lerounis was freed in March and returned to Greece in April 2010. There are conflicting reports about whether any of the Taliban's demands were met.²⁸

In addition to these incidents, there were several reports of skirmishes between militant groups and police or paramilitary forces during August and September 2010 in southern Chitral. These incidents were difficult to verify, but were described as either Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants from the neighboring district of Dir, or Afghan Taliban from Kunar Province making cross-border raids.²⁹ Most recently, in August 2011, seven Frontier Corps posts in the Arund area of Chitral were attacked by militants believed to be based in Kunar and Nuristan, leaving 40 army, Chitral Scout, and Frontier Corps troops dead. It was the first major incident of militant activity in Chitral in its recent history.³⁰

At this point, there do not appear to be any militant groups in Chitral that even attempt to offer security (as some have, for example, in Swat),³¹ although several have made scattered attempts to disrupt it. It is possible that some militant organizations may attempt to provide emergency relief services in flood-hit areas of Chitral, as has happened in other flooded areas, but there is no evidence that this was happening during the 2010 floods.³²

What “antibodies” against militancy might Chitral have to protect it from the levels of violence experienced in neighboring areas of Pakistan? Chitralis almost universally point to various aspects of the local culture as key to the district's relative stability. They claim that their culture values tolerance and peacefulness in a way that is unusual in the rest of the KPK. The Chitralis interviewed gave varying responses to the question of what makes the Chitrali culture different, some more plausible than others:

- *The probable.* The Chitrali culture is uniquely tolerant, some Chitralis claimed, because of its mountainous geography, which forces communities to rely on each other despite their ethnic and religious differences.³³ This same historical isolation has caused people to be both self-reliant and suspicious of outsiders. Thus when people come across the border preaching “jihad,” many Chitralis see it as a threat. (Interestingly, many

²⁵ “Harkat-ul-Mujahideen,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/terrorist_outfits/harkatul_mujahideen.htm.

²⁶ “Lashkar-e-Jhangvi,” *New York Times*, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/l/lashkarejhangvi/index.html>.

²⁷ Zahirrudin, “Taliban Treats as Guest with Greek Kidnapped Volunteer” [*sic*], *Chitral Times*, January 12, 2010, <http://www.chitraltimes.com/english10/newseng19.htm>.

²⁸ Zia Ur Rehman, “The Militants Next Door,” *The News* (Pakistan), October 10, 2010.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Momin Iftikhar, “Pak-Afghan Cross Border Attacks,” *The Nation*, October 10, 2011, <http://nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Opinions/Columns/10-Oct-2011/PakAfghan-cross-border-attacks>.

³¹ Justine Fleischner, “Governance and Militancy in Pakistan's Swat Valley,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/governance-and-militancy-pakistans-swat-valley>.

³² Stacey White, “The 2010 Flooding Disaster in Pakistan: An Opportunity for Governance Reform or another Layer of Dysfunction?” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2011, <http://csis.org/publication/2010-flooding-disaster-pakistan>; Robert Mackey, “Pakistan Vies with Islamists to Aid Flood Victims,” *New York Times* blog, August 2, 2010, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/pakistan-vies-with-islamists-to-aid-flood-victims/?ref=world>.

³³ For example, Yousef Khan, advocate and Mastuj resident, interview by author, August 7, 2010.

interviewees were equally nervous about the possibility that the United States might meddle in Chitral. A repeated belief was that other parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan would not be as militant or unstable if not for U.S. aggression.)

- *The possible.* Some Chitralis claimed that because Chitral has been ruled by a single family since the 1500s, there is a greater respect for the rule of law,³⁴ or that the cultural value placed on not marrying cousins in Chitral has led to more marriages between tribes and villages than within them.³⁵ As a result, people are less likely to feud with nearby villages because they have relatives there.
- *The unlikely.* A few Chitralis claimed that Pashtuns cause destruction wherever they go because they are descended from Jews, and so Chitral is more tolerant and peaceful because fewer Pashtuns live in the area than elsewhere in the KPK.

Whatever the reason, the Chitrali culture does seem to play a major role in the explanation of why political, religious, and other nongovernmental actors all seem to be able to work together so well. Whether someone is a Sunni or Ismaili or Kalash, and whether they align themselves with the PPP or the JI, the uniting factor is that they tend to identify themselves first as Chitrali.³⁶ From the Chitrali perspective, this is the most important reason for the lack of militancy and for the relative stability in the district. From a policy perspective, the cultural explanation is unfortunate, because it is difficult to create realistic recommendations that rely on replicating culture.

It may not be possible to separate language from culture, but the Chitrali language is worth noting. The fact that almost everyone in Chitral speaks the same language seems to play a major role in helping people get along. It also helps people identify outsiders quickly.³⁷ Although Pashto is spoken as a second language by many in southern Chitral, it is rarely used between Chitralis, which makes it difficult for anyone from outside the district to pretend he is from Chitral if he is not. In addition, the minor variations between accents of Chitralis from different valleys allow people to ascertain individuals' geographic identity quickly.³⁸

Conclusion

The culture, history, and geography of Chitral all combine to make the district uniquely peaceful. A high degree of economic interdependence over time has forced Chitralis to work together, despite ethnic and religious differences. As a result, Chitralis strongly value tolerance and compromise, which has allowed groups to resolve their differences through debate rather than bloodshed. In addition, Chitralis are exceptionally proud of this aspect of their culture, just as their Pashtun neighbors are proud of their warrior culture.

Chitral's isolation, small population, and interconnectedness between villages and families make the possibility of widespread sectarian violence less likely and make it very hard for foreigners to infiltrate the district. In Chitral, everyone knows everyone else's affairs.

The benign rule and enduring popularity of the royal family also plays a significant role in maintaining stability. The fact that the ul-Mulk family is religiously Sunni and politically powerful, but also liberal and tolerant has contributed toward a sense of cultural unity in Chitral. Because of this unity, Chitral is quite different from its neighboring princely states such as Swat, which have struggled with social cohesion because of rulers who were oppressive and divisive.

³⁴ For example, Faiyzi Inayat Ullah, assistant professor, Degree College, Chitral, interview by author, August 4, 2010.

³⁵ For example, Yousef Khan, interview, August 7, 2010.

³⁶ Siraj ul-Mulk, interview, July 31, 2010.

³⁷ Rahmatullah Wazir, interview, August 2, 2010.

³⁸ Siraj ul-Mulk, interview, July 31, 2010.

Chitral's active civil society clearly plays an important role in maintaining security in the district as well. The agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network along with other NGOs, religious actors, and political parties all work together exceptionally well to provide a wide variety of services that appear to dampen people's enthusiasm for the brand of revolution that is preached by militant groups in other parts of northwestern Pakistan.

Recommendations

Chitral is a bright spot in a dim region; it is a multifaith district that has been able to maintain peace under increasingly difficult circumstances. However, Chitral is by no means immune to the forces that have caused unrest on its southern and western borders. Although they tend to be extremely proud of their peaceful, tolerant culture, many of the Chitralis interviewed admitted their nervousness about the future. Some felt it was only a matter of time until their district was affected by militancy as well.

To ensure that Chitral continues to flourish as an area of stability and peace, the government of Pakistan might consider taking the following steps in the district:

- *Invest in education.* The single most frequent complaint that Chitralis had about their district was that, despite the efforts of both the government and NGOs, quality education is still extremely difficult to access in Chitral. In numerous instances, interviewees pointed to disappointment with the education system as the reason a growing number of people were sending their children to madrassas.
- *Invest in civil society.* This is an area in which Chitral and the government have already achieved some success. But this work should be more widely recognized. The government can build on its achievements to date by continuing to support the existing successes such as the AKRSP LSOs and the government-sponsored peace committees.
- *Strengthen the role of the Chitral Scouts.* Because the Scouts are recruited locally, there is a sense that they are a fighting force that genuinely has the best interests of Chitralis at heart. During the research for this case study, many interviewees referred to exploits of the Scouts with obvious pride. By contrast, the Pakistani military and particularly the intelligence services were generally viewed as outsiders whose meddling has brought instability to the district. However, it is possible that this dichotomy is not so clear in reality, because the Chitral Scouts are actually led by officers of the Pakistan Army.
- *Promote Chitrali culture.* Chitralis are intensely proud of their culture and heritage, which is widely identified with peace, stability, and intersectorian harmony. In the words of one Chitrali, "Rather than fighting, we have always put our energy into music, dancing, and games like polo."³⁹ By actively supporting these traditions, the government can help to ensure that Chitralis continue to identify with their past and continue to work toward a future in which those values remain central.
- *Build more representation into the government at the district level.* In Chitral, as in all districts of the KPK, the district is managed almost entirely by bureaucrats who have a reputation for efficiency, but who are seen as outsiders who do not necessarily have the best interests of the Chitrali people at heart. Although few Chitralis want to return to the program of devolution that collapsed in March 2010, there is a widespread feeling that more Chitralis should be in charge of Chitral. Having at least one directly elected official at the district level (if not the tehsil and union council levels as well) with a clear mandate and reasonable budget allocation would give the local people a greater stake in the government.

The international community, and especially the United States, could help the government of Pakistan implement these recommendations by considering the following actions to be priorities for aid:

- *Support government efforts to strengthen education and civil society.* Providing young Chitralis with access to education, training, and venues for civic participation is essential. The Pakistani government will need

³⁹ Sardar Hussein, interview, August 8, 2010.

financial and technical support to implement this recommendation. However, it is important that programs are implemented through the government of Pakistan and established by local actors rather than by contractors.

- *Provide the Chitral Scouts with funding and training support.* As the paramilitary branch given the task of securing Chitral’s massive border (with both Afghanistan and neighboring districts of the KPK) and multiple passes, the Chitral Scouts have a daunting responsibility. They also appear to have the support of the Chitrali people and are widely credited as being a force that protects the population from outsiders rather than acting as a tool for external powers. If the international community is looking for a way to increase security without alienating the populations, building up the strength of the Scouts is likely to be a successful approach.
- *Support the government’s efforts to preserve and strengthen the Chitrali culture.* As described earlier, almost every single Chitrali interviewed for this report pointed to Chitral’s heritage and traditions as a key component of stability in the district. Programs that celebrate Chitrali culture for its own sake are likely to bring the district dividends of continued peace and stability.
- *Work with the government of Pakistan to build more representational government at the district level.* This effort would affect not only Chitral but all of Pakistan. There is clearly a hearty appetite for a greater level of control by local actors rather than bureaucrats. Although devolution was a failure, it seems likely that a less sweeping and more specific redesign of the local governance system would benefit both the government (by gaining it legitimacy) and the people (who would have some degree of control over their district officials by means of elections).

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