

A History of Pakistan and Its Origins

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY GILLIAN BEAUMONT

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"A prisoner of history which prevents it from realizing its great potential," "still mired in the trauma of a Partition which the country itself fervently desired," "a fruitless search for democracy," "a case of nationalism without a nation," a pivotal state whose fate "would significantly affect regional, even international stability"—these are some of the phrases the authors of *A History of Pakistan and Its Origins* have used to describe Pakistan. When one thinks of Pakistan's history, the following topics come to mind: the Partition of 1947; the four wars with India; the ominous specter of a nuclear war between the two countries over Kashmir; Pakistan's role as the frontline state in defeating the USSR in Afghanistan (1979–89); Pakistan's role once again as the frontline state in the US war on terrorism since September 11, 2001; the country's inability to avoid repeated military takeovers; deadly clashes between the country's two main Islamic sects of Sunnis and Shias; and lack of unity among Pakistan's major ethnic groups. Additionally, a third of the population now lives below the poverty threshold. It is a tribute to the book's nine authors that they have covered all of these topics and more in this comprehensive and engaging study.

Recognizing the region's number one problem, the chapter "Living with India" explains with rare candor the key reasons for the Kashmir conflict: "India's doublespeak on Junagadh and Kashmir, and its promise—which was never kept—to hold a referendum in Kashmir" (115). The author also faults the Radcliffe Commission for allocating most of the Muslim district of Gurdaspur to India "against the very logic of Partition" (116), thus giving India direct access to Kashmir.

Despite the bitter history, there is hope: the proposed gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India via Pakistan will bring the two countries together. Jaffrelot concludes by alluding to Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf's words: "I have faith in this country . . . of 140 million people; we are a nuclear power; we have geostrategic importance; we lie at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Nobody can ignore us; we cannot be sidelined" (315).

This book has remarkable potential for infusing Asian themes into academic curriculums. Pakistan has become pivotal to world peace since September 11, 2001, in its role as the frontline state against the war on terror. Students want to know about the country and its people. An additional element of this book's relevance is the wealth of information it gives on Islam—a topic of great interest and importance to our students. ■

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More information and applications are available at
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Or you may email Prof. Lewis at tlewis@holycross.edu.