DIALOGUE SERIES

Relations between the MUSLIM WORLD and the WEST

Pakistan's Image in the West

Discussion Paper

PILDAT
Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency

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Pakistan Institute of
Legislative Development
And Transparency

PILDAT is an independent, non-partisan and not-for-profit indigenous research and training institution with the mission to strengthen democracy and democratic institutions in Pakistan.

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ISBN: 978-969-558-081-3

Printed in Pakistan
First Published: April 2008

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Published by

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Pakistan's Image in the West

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FOREWORD

The Discussion Paper on Image of Pakistan in the West has been prepared by PILDAT as a backgrounder for the interlocutors of the Dialogue Series on Relations between the Muslim World and the West. Foreign Legislators of Pakistani origin from a number of countries are scheduled to take part in the dialogues.

The paper highlights some of the major issues confronting Pakistan that contribute to its image in the Western media and the society. Towards the end, the paper outlines a set of key questions on the issue that are proposed to be taken up during the course of the dialogue.

Acknowledgment

The Dialogue Series is conceived, planned and executed by PILDAT through the support provided by the **Global Opportunities Fund, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), UK**. The paper has been prepared under this programme. PILDAT gratefully acknowledges this support.

Disclaimer

The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations contained in this paper are not necessarily shared by Global Opportunities Fund, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), UK and the British High Commission, Islamabad. PILDAT and its team have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this paper and do not accept responsibility for any omission and error, as it is not deliberate.

Islamabad
April 2008

Pakistan's Image in the West

Background

In the early years after the emergence of Pakistan, the country was heralded in the West as a symbol of democratic progression in a largely autocratic Muslim world, the country boasted a moderate outlook and a seemingly successful union between religion and state, a much assimilated Muslim population in terms of the two major Shia-Sunni sects, and additionally, a high potential of economic growth at par with that of South-East Asian countries. This image was not different from reality.

Today, over 60 years after its creation, the country seems to have disproved many of the early positive projections, the moderate Pakistan of the past finds its identity torn between that of a frontline state in the international war on terror and of a safe haven breeding and shielding a new generation of militants. The image coupled with the revelations of the country's role in nuclear proliferation and a worsening internal security has pushed Pakistan towards a high ranking among the league of "failed states",[1] if surveys conducted by leading western think tanks are believed.

Irrespective of the existing ground realities in the country and their possible variation from this "projected" image of an unstable nation, the not-so-positive image of Pakistan seems to be gaining worldwide currency. Recent small scale studies by United States (US) foreign policy experts [2] reinforce the commonly held view in the Western world that Pakistan is most likely to become the next Al-Qaeda stronghold as well the likeliest to transfer nuclear technology on to terrorist groups during the next few years. These findings not only reflect the prevailing mindset and the inclinations of the academic and political circles in the US but at the same time speak volumes for the credibility and the image crisis Pakistani nation as a whole faces. A recently conducted survey by Gallup, USA, indicates that Pakistan ranks as the 6th most disliked country in the United States, after Iran, North Korea, Palestinian Authority, Iraq and Afghanistan.[3]

The widespread international media coverage of honour killings in Pakistan, the debate surrounding the controversial Hudood laws and the killings of foreign journalists in the country from amongst many other similar bleak stories, tend to overshadow the much touted economic and social progress Pakistan has made over the last decade. The negative perceptions, therefore, often arise from a *genuine* albeit selective coverage of the ground realities in the country.

Factors Shaping the Image

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001, perhaps no other country was subjected to such an overwhelming focus and scrutiny in its internal and external affairs as was Pakistan. A key player against the Soviet war in Afghanistan and a central mediator between the Taliban and the US pre-9/11, Pakistan was expected to back track on its foreign policy of negotiating with the Taliban as well as to wage an internal war on the same forces operating from within its borders. Despite a widely disapproving public opinion, and under the shadow of a rather option-limiting suggestion of being bombed to the "stone-age,"[4] Pakistan's ruling military establishment joined forces with its Western allies.

However, despite its ally status, Pakistan did and continues to receive criticism from political leaders, media and policy experts in the West. This lack of trust by the West is exacerbated by what is viewed as Pakistan's alleged role in nuclear proliferation efforts and risk of extremists' takeover of the nuclear assets. Chaotic political situation in the country throughout the previous years, and intra-state conflicts in the tribal areas as well as provincial regions further erode Pakistan's standing in the Western countries.

Public Opposition to the War on Terror

Over the last two years, the initially divided public opinion of Pakistanis on the US led War on Terror has arguably turned into a unanimous verdict against it.

1 "Failed States index", Freedom House, USA, 2006 and 2007, http://www.freedomhouse.org/
2 "Terrorism Survey" Freedom House, USA, 2007, http://www.freedomhouse.org/
3 "World Affairs Survey" Gallup, USA, 2008, http://www.gallup.org
4 "US 'threatened to bomb' Pakistan", BBC News, September 22, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5369198.stm

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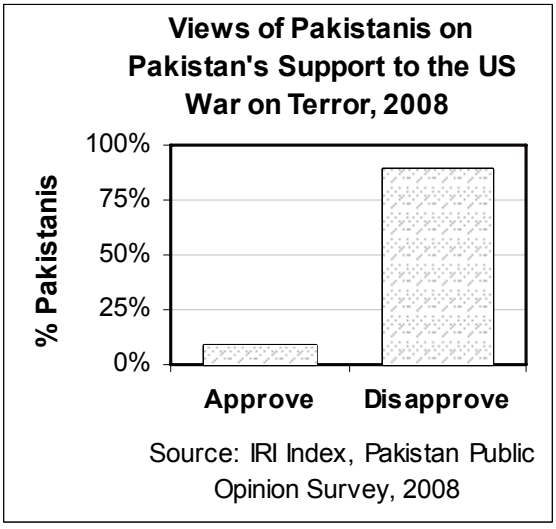
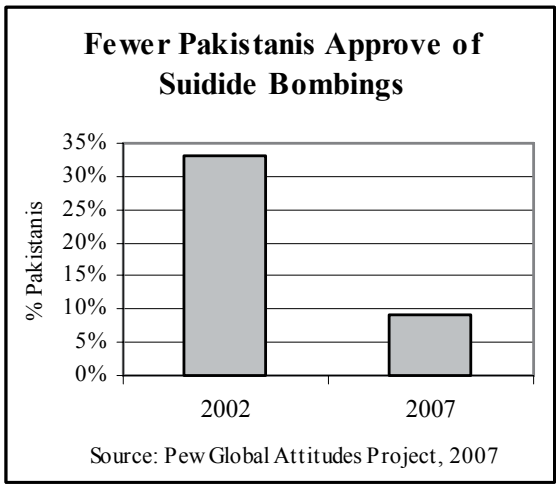
Whereas, in 2006 46% Pakistanis agreed with their Government's decision to support the US War on Terror, 89% disapproved of the war by early 2008[5].

Similarly, the same survey projects that a vast majority of Pakistanis at 64%, disapprove of Pakistan Army's operations against extremists in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These public opinion trends serve to reinforce Western perception of Pakistan[6] as a reluctant ally in the War on Terror, forced to participate in a domestically unpopular war.

But if anything, the lack of support to US-led war on terror does not automatically turn Pakistanis into terrorist-loving people as wrongly perceived in the Western public opinion. Interestingly, during the five year period between 2002 and 2007, the number of Pakistanis approving of violence and terrorist-related activities such as suicide bombings has decreased from 33% to 9%. This may be attributed to the increased violence in the shape of suicide attacks across the country. More than 1100 people died in 2007, and nearly 600 were killed during the first quarter of 2008 alone.[7] In fact, Pakistan's strategic positioning and alliance with the US is considered the chief reason for increased terrorist attacks in Pakistan.





Pakistanis have increasingly linked this wave of violence to the country's alliance with the US. And therefore, the emergence of political parties promising a policy think-over in Pakistan's support to the War on Terror, promising to open up the tribal areas to mainstream political discourse, and rejection of the main pro-Musharraf faction, in the General Election 2008 can arguably be termed as merely a manifestation of the public discontent with the performance and the stance taken by the last government.

The Credibility Crisis

As the Pakistan Army remains engaged in a war without a foreseeable end in the near future, questions have been raised in the Western world as to the competence and even the commitment of the same to combating terrorism. Leading opinion-makers in the US including newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal persistently quote inside sources in the United States military and intelligence agencies, claiming Pakistan's "paramilitary force… remains under-funded, poorly trained and overwhelmingly outgunned.[8]" The claims are corroborated (apparently) when conflicting news on the surrender of hundreds of army personnel keeps on emerging from the on-going military operation in the

5 "Failed States index", Freedom House, USA, 2006 and 2007, http://www.freedomhouse.org/

6 Craig Cohen and Derek Chollet, 2007. "When $10 Billion Is Not Enough Rethinking US Strategy Towards Pakistan", The Washington Quarterly, 30:2, pp 7-19

7 "Suicide attacks in 71 days this year", Dawn Newspaper, 12 March, 2008, www.dawn.com.pk

8 "Tying Pakistan's Fate To That of Musharraf", Wall Street Journal, November 2007, http://online.wsj.com/public/us

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tribal war-zone of Waziristan.

Increasingly, the criticism of the Western analysts has been founded on the deals brokered by the Pakistani government with the militants in the tribal areas and have often bluntly linked increased violence in Afghanistan to a "Pakistani weakness, if not outright complicity, with militants in the Pashtun border areas."[9]

The Nuclear Threat

Furthermore, revelations surrounding the involvement of Pakistan's top nuclear scientist in an underground nuclear network and his passing on of classified information to countries including Iran, Libya and North Korea added to the debate and doubts concerning the safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets and the threat of nuclear proliferation posed by the country.

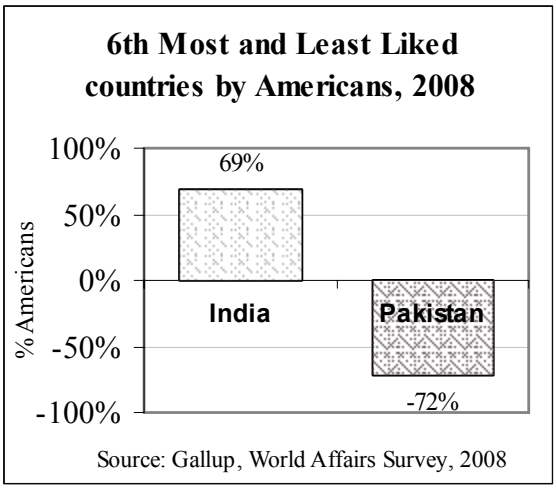
Although, the coverage of Western media and the approach of Western think-tanks tended to overlook the covert role of the US intelligence agencies and their prior knowledge of the network's operations in this entire

Most likely to become the next Al Qaeda Stronghold in the next Five Years

(US Foreign Policy Experts Votes)

Pakistan	35
Iraq	22
Somalia	11
Sudan	8
Afghanistan	7
Palestinian territories	5
United Kingdom	2
Lebanon	2
Algeria	1

Source: Foreign Policy.com by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005



Source: Gallup, World Affairs Survey, 2008

nuclear escapade,[10] the question arises, whether this astounding revelation of the country's top nuclear scientist admitting to covert activities will continue to shape Pakistan's image as a high-risk nuclear-armed state in future anti-nuclear proliferation campaigns?

Under these circumstances, it perhaps comes as no surprise that Pakistan ranks amongst the 6th least favoured nations by an average American citizen, with 72%[11] holding an unfavourable view of the country.

An overview of the post 9/11 conditions reflects how financial and military support received by Pakistan Army from the US government and its allies was based on the argument that in order to play an effective role in the global war on terror, Pakistan must have internal political stability which was only possible under a strong alliance with the Musharraf regime.[12] However, many leading academics and analysts of Pakistan's current affairs disagree with this assessment, arguing that instead of forging partnership with the mainstream Pakistani population, the US chose to distance itself, accepting the continuation of a pseudo-autocratic regime led by the then Army Chief, General Pervez Musharraf.

The woeful situation of democracy and fundamental rights in the country can be traced to the role western

9 Craig Cohen and Derek Chollet, 2007. "When $10 Billion Is Not Enough Rethinking US Strategy Towards Pakistan", The Washington Quarterly, 30:2, pp 7-19.

10 "CIA 'let atomic expert Khan go'", BBC News, August 9, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4135998.stm

11 "World Affairs Survey" Gallup, USA, 2008, http://www.gallup.org

12 "What To Do? A Global Strategy", The 9/11 Commission Report, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, USA, pp.369

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allies played by endorsing the military setup in Pakistan in order to achieve their own strategic interests. The overall discussion surrounding the issue is made worse, as concerns the image of the country in the West, by the political leaders in Pakistan who, unfortunately, utilise the prevalent prejudices in the West to ensure political support for themselves. The insistence of the US and its allies in supporting President Musharraf is based on the pretext that Pakistan does not have the ability to fight terrorism and neutralize extremist tendencies without a firm hand provided by the Pakistan Army. This stance remains in direct conflict with the country's public opinion, as 79% Pakistanis, of those interviewed in early 2008, believe Pakistan would be better off without President Musharraf in Office and 69% remain against military's role in politics in any shape or form.[13]

The Islamic Identity

On an ideological front, Pakistan appears to have become a focal point of the negative attributes associated with Islam. Perhaps not surprisingly, 87% of Pakistani Muslims view themselves as Muslims first and then as Pakistani nationals, compared with similar religious affiliation of Christians in USA at 42% and in Europe at 24%.[14] This strong religious identity of Pakistan is considered fundamental to defining the country's image in the West and forms the basis for its association with Islamic militancy. In this context, this image of Pakistan in sponsoring Islamic militancy is corroborated by the research findings projecting high distrust of Islam in the West and its association with violence. Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project in 2007 reaffirms this commonly held view 75% of people surveyed in Western countries considered Islam to be the most violent religion in comparison to Judaism at 4.2% and Christianity at 4.4%.[15]

Furthermore, in the wake of the 7/7 bombings in the United Kingdom and emergence of linkages between the bombers and Pakistani *Madrassahs*, spotlight once again shifted to the dynamics of the *Madrassah* system in Pakistan. Despite the government of Pakistan's attempts to regularize the religious institutions in the country, questions have arisen about a section of these *Madrassahs* and their alleged linkages with extremist forces operating within the country.

The Political Abyss

The picture of Pakistan at the international level is further affected by the political chasm existing in the country. While the transition after General Election 2008 offers a new hope for political maturity by the newly-elected leaders, there is no denying the fact that the country has experienced painfully slow growth in establishing democratic traditions. Repeated military takeovers, ironically endorsed by the same 'democracy-advocating' Western allies, and additionally by the co-opted political parties in Pakistan, have contributed to lack of democracy in the country.

Under the previous government provincial versus federal rights have remained a source of contention, especially in Balochistan that has experienced an insurgency. The active military involvement in internal politics is considered the major reason for lack of democratic consolidation in the country. In addition, since 9/11, the internal conflict has spread to NWFP and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The strongholds of militants and extremist forces in the tribal areas have developed over decades, particularly strengthened during the Soviet War, and the isolation of

Most Violent Religion

Views of Western Respondents

Islam	75 %
Christianity	4.4 %
Judaism	4.2 %

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007
Countries include: Unites States, Great Britain, Netherlands, France, Canada, Russia, Germany, Poland and Spain

[13] "Pakistan Public Opinion Survey", International Republican Institute, USA, 2008, http://www.iri.org
[14] Pew Global Attitudes Survey Muslims in Europe, 2006, Pew Research Center, Washington D.C
[15] Pew Global Attitudes Survey Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics, 2005, Pew Research Center, Washington D.C

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these areas from mainstream political discourse is one of the many reasons for the recent extremist insurgency. The Parliament introduced in 2002 after the military coup of 1999 had been persistently derided in the local as well as the Western media. The Economist summed up the popularly held view with regard to the introduction of 'democracy' in Pakistan by the military as a "Punch and Judy democracy show, reminiscent of those put on by a succession of earlier uniformed and civilian puppeteers."[16] The suspension of the Constitution by General Musharraf and the imposition of 'emergency' in November 2007 prompted more backlash in the Western media with articles in popular newspapers referring to Pakistan as[17] "the most dangerous country in the world," "a failed state" with milder observations including "a country at war with itself" from amongst hundred of other similar bleak outlooks.

The "Extremists Take-over" Threat

During the past eight (8) years of the military rule in Pakistan, the idea that military and particularly General Pervez Musharraf remain indispensable to the US and to the war on terror, was successfully sold out to western audiences. The imminent threat of the extremist forces taking over Pakistan was not only used by the Pakistani establishment to gain legitimacy but was also accepted as a sound justification by its Western allies. The argument builds upon the premise that the success of religious parties in 2002 elections as a result of general public's disapproval of the US-led War on Terror is indicative of the possible threat of an 'extremist take-over.'

Many leading academics of Pakistan affairs find fault with this argument which draws a strong linkage between mainstream religious parties and the fundamentalist, extremist groups.[18] Many analysts find the possibility of extremists taking over the country through armed resistance subject to their ability to subvert the armed forces as far-fetched.[19] In this context, the admission of General Musharraf foreseeing transfer of Pakistan's nuclear weapons into 'wrong hands'[20] and the safety of the country being subject to military as in-charge, only serves to strengthen the first argument and raises questions about Pakistan's vulnerability to a nuclear catastrophe and also whether the country is ready for a complete democratic transition or not?

Most likely to transfer Nuclear Technology to Terrorists in the next Five Years

(US Foreign Policy Experts Votes)

Pakistan	74
North Korea	42
Russia	38
Iran	31
United States	5
Other	8

Source: Foreign Policy.com by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005

National Consensus and Unity

The on-going military operation in the tribal belt of the country has arguably served to alienate a large segment of the society (64% disapprove of the Army's involvement in the tribal belt).[21] The increased wave of suicide bombings on armed personnel and other security officials is, in many sections, considered to be a consequence of the position Government of Pakistan has taken in the global war on terror. The divisions in the society were further amplified by the hard stance of the government in dealing with Baloch nationalists. This nationalist sentiment was aggravated in the year 2006 when the 80 year old Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, a

16 James Astill, "Parliamentary Puppetry: The Messy Business of Pakistani Politics," Economist, July 814, 2006, http://economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7107902

17 Peter Preston, "A proud, but failing state", The Guardian UK, November, 2007 http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/nov/05/comment.pakistan

18 "Extremism How Real is the Threat?", Herald, September 2007

19 ibid

20 "US seeks to end Pakistan crisis", BBC News, November 17, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7099567.stm

21 "Pakistan Public Opinion Survey", International Republican Institute, USA, 2008, http://www.iri.org

prominent Baloch leader, was killed in a military operation.

The failure of the country in granting provincial autonomy to the provinces as espoused in the Constitution of 1973 has resulted in deep fragmentations between the provinces. These differences even obstruct the critical development of the water resources of the country both for agriculture and hydroelectric generation. The lack of national consensus and unity has been widely quoted in the Western media, contributing to a further negative image. Others have questioned the very idea of the 'Pakistani nation' and even the wisdom of partition of India in 1947 on the basis of present fragmentations present in the Pakistani society.

Representation of Customs and Traditions

Oft-reported cases of honour killings and forced marriages arising as a result of cultural practices and age-old customs, albeit prevalent only in some scattered rural areas and regions of Pakistan, play an important role when the status of human rights in the country is analysed. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reports that in 2006 alone, 271 females were *reported* victims of honour killing, an increase from 174 in 2005, similarly the *reported* female victims of *Karo Kari* stood at 329 up from 115 in 2005. These practices as well as perceived miscarriage of justice under the much-criticised Hudood laws of the country (later amended by the Parliament of Pakistan) have contributed little in promoting the positive image of Pakistan.

Whereas, several other countries face similar cultural issues, including neighbouring India, in which case such practices are treated largely as cultural phenomena by default, perhaps, the strong Islamic identity of Pakistan and perceived negative associations with Islam and women rights, plays a role in linking the two issues (honour killings and religious beliefs) in Pakistan's case.

Illegal Trade and Weak Law Enforcement

Mainly owing to its geographical proximity to Afghanistan which produces 82% [22] of the world opium, Pakistan has become a hub of illegal drug trafficking. In 2006, 33% [23] of Afghan opiates were traded through Pakistan. The UN Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) reports that in 2005, Pakistan made 20% of all opiate seizures in the world (ranked second after Iran), indicating a high level of illegal drug trafficking being carried out in the region making Pakistan a focus of the fight against drug trafficking.

Similarly, Pakistan ranks as a priority country in piracy indices. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reports that Pakistan produced 230 million discs in 2004 which cost US $2.7 billion to the copyrights holders. In 2003, the country was supplying 13 million discs to 46 countries every month.[24] Although, the efforts made by Pakistan to control piracy have been acknowledged by the IFPI in the 2006 Commercial Piracy Report, it remains marked as a 'special focus' country in counter-piracy efforts.

Lack of Initiatives

Pakistan, despite being in possession of an extraordinary land resource base and remnants from ancient civilizations predating even the famous Egyptian civilization has been unable to attract a significant tourist inflow throughout its history.

A lack of proactive tourism initiative on part of various governments, as successfully accomplished by many other countries, may in part be blamed for the present state of tourism in the country and its isolation from rest of the world. At the same time, the western focus on the security issues in the country and the 'portrayal' of the country in general may also bear some responsibility. A recent observation by a BBC journalist sums up the situation, "suicide bombs, battles in tribal areas, and states of emergency tend to put off casual tourists. But the impression such events convey can often be

22 "World Drugs Report 2007", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna
23 ibid
24 "2005 Commercial Piracy Report", International Federation of Phonographic Industry, UK
25 Hugh Sykes, "How to take Holiday in Pakistan", BBC, November 12, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7090632.stm

misleading and unrepresentative of a country as a whole."[25]

Perhaps, a failure on part of Pakistan to promote and establish a strong entertainment industry has also affected its ability to project the culture and way of life in Pakistan, effectively. The audiences in the West remain dependent on their own media outlets for information on Pakistan and the Pakistani perspective is rarely 'heard'.

Role of Pakistani Diaspora

At an international scale, Muslim philanthropists have been engaged in bridging the communication divide between the Muslim world and the West through initiatives of sorts, examples of which include series of Doha Debates sponsored by Qatar Foundation for Education and numerous inter-faith exchange programmes in the United Kingdom as well as similar campaigns in other parts of the world.

Pakistanis and Pakistani Diaspora have similarly involved in working for an increased understanding between the West and Pakistan. One way of achieving this is to integrate within their adopted communities with success.

In this context, a recent study on the philanthropy trends of Pakistani Diaspora in the United States[26] sheds light on an interesting pattern of their spending. Of the nearly $250 million donated and spent on charity causes by the Pakistani Diaspora, $100 million is spent on causes unrelated to Pakistan, of which a large section is spent on religious causes within the United States and in Pakistan. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, 34% of Pakistani Diaspora interviewed for the survey indicated an increased spending on "causes that relate to being better and more active citizens within their American neighbourhoods and communities." This increasing trend highlights the concerns of Pakistani Diaspora in assimilating better within their communities and to become a part of their adopted homeland.

[26] Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy. 2005. "Philanthropy by Pakistani Diaspora in the US", PCP, Islamabad

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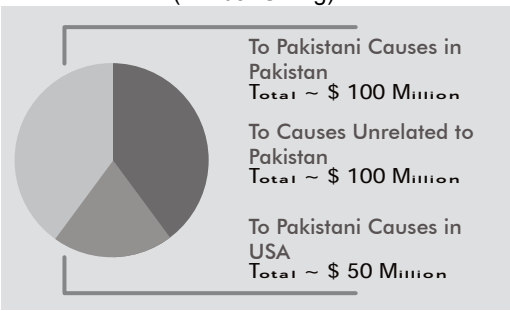
Pakistani Diaspora in the United States

(Annual Giving)



"Philanthropy by Pakistani Diaspora in the US", PCP 2005

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Key Questions for the Dialogue

As highlighted by the issues discussed above, the perception of Pakistan at the international level is derived from a host of internal and external factors that may or may not be under the control of the country's circle of influence.

In order to develop a better understanding of these underlying issues shaping the image of Pakistan in the world and to undertake effective measures to counter the associated negativity, if any, answers to the following questions need to be explored in full:

1. What is the image of Pakistan in the Western World?
2. Is it important for a country to have a positive image in the West?
3. Is it correct for a country to try to conform to the western standards and definition of 'positive image'?
4. To what extent is the perception of Pakistan as a country on the brink of chaos, disruption and ultimately failure, justifiable?
5. Is it just the image problem or it is the realities on the ground which constitutes the problem?
6. What can be the nature of strategies and interventions needed to mend this image? Should the same be planned sequentially or can they be undertaken in parallel?
7. Can the contradictory character of Pakistan's key allies in supporting a military setup in Pakistan, be a justification for Pakistan's present problems?
8. Do the Western audiences have a genuine interest in learning about and supporting the existing ground realities in Pakistan?
9. Has the international media made an honest effort to reflect the true picture of the Pakistani society on the whole?
10. What role can the PR and lobbying firms in the West play, as previously employed by the Government of Pakistan, in brushing up the image of the country? And is the use of such means justifiable?
11. What role the Pakistani Diaspora, which comprise the most effective means of immediate intervention in the West, play in building the image of Pakistan?
12. Have Pakistani Diaspora projected a true picture of Pakistani society? Do integration issues, particularly, forced marriages and honour killings damage it?
13. Is integration of Pakistani Diaspora in the West or lack of it an issue in the West affecting the image of Pakistan as a country?

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2. "CIA 'let atomic expert Khan go'", BBC News, August 9, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4135998.stm

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