

cover

this week's essential reading

{ 'Mankind's first giant leap' from the Prospero blog, economist.com

} A remarkable exhibition in London reminds us of the courage of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, 50 years after the Soviet cosmonaut's maiden flight

The great mystery

For all their claims to demystify Pakistan, the latest tranche of books about this 'crisis' state help us to know little and understand even less, writes Manan Ahmed

"Can you name the general who is in charge of Pakistan?" In November 1999, the question stymied the US presidential hopeful George W Bush. "The new Pakistani general, he's just been elected – not elected, this guy took over office. It appears this guy is going to bring stability to the country and I think that's good news for the subcontinent," he replied, blanking on the name. The oversight was quickly brushed away by an electorate generally uninterested in global foreign policy.

A few months later, in March 2000, President Bill Clinton landed in Islamabad for a brief five-hour visit and gave a televised address to the Pakistani people, wishing them a speedy return to democracy. However, the United States had by then held Pakistan under sanctions for nearly a decade – no aid had been extended during that period and, further, a refund of nearly \$700 million (Dh2.6bn), put down by Pakistan as payment for undelivered F16 fighter planes, had been consistently withheld by the US – and Clinton's words fell on unresponsive ears. The president could offer no incentive to the military regime.

The "chief executive" of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, who had



Bill Clinton is greeted by children in national dress at Islamabad International Airport. The president's Pakistan stopover in March 2000 did little to ease tensions between the two countries. Stephen Jaffe / AFP

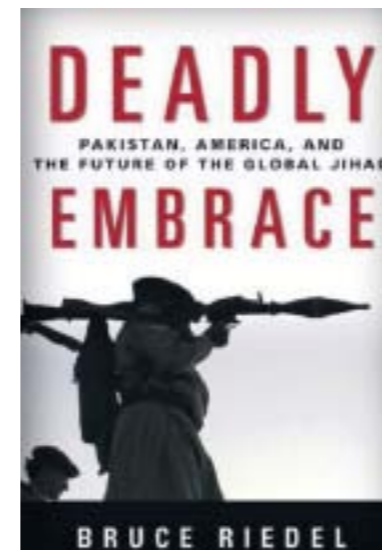
deposed Nawaz Sharif in a military coup, met Clinton, promised elections in another year and shrugged off the threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda as part of a "people's dynamic" that operated on tribal affiliations. In 2000, Pakistan was unknown. And what was known about it was severely restricted.

On September 12, 2001, the White House, now under Bush as Clinton's successor, reportedly informed Musharraf that Pakistan must either cooperate with the US against the threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda or "be bombed back to the Stone Age". This, of course, was the day after the destruction

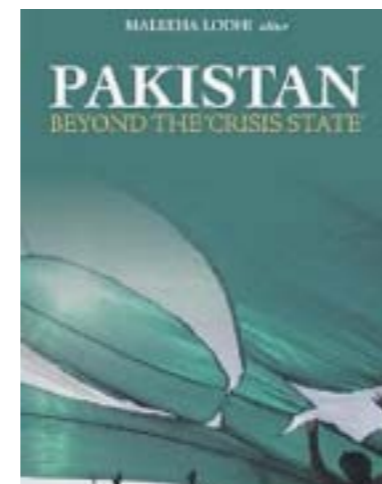
of the World Trade Center in New York, and Musharraf acquiesced and quickly became one of Bush's closest allies and a key global voice in the "war on terror". By 2008, the US had given Pakistan more than \$10bn in military aid alone, but the romance would soon sour.

When US forces killed Osama bin Laden in the city of Abbottabad in May this year, Pakistan was once again a recalcitrant ally (at best) and a serious obstacle for US and world security (at worst) and faced both congressional sanctions and the suspension of aid.

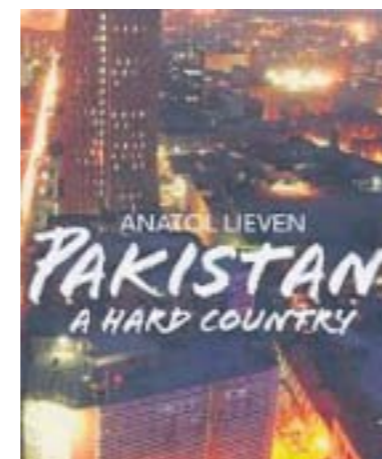
Pakistan is now the epicentre of the US war effort under the Obama administration. This is a war consisting largely of drone attacks – targeted assassinations of Taliban operatives, leaders and others. It is a technique that has yielded a number of high-value targets (such as Baitullah Mehsud in 2009), but has also resulted in significant civilian casualties (most recently last March, when a gathering of tribal notables was mistaken for a Taliban confab). The drone war has increasingly destabilised the nascent civilian state, even as the military establishment continues to behave in incongruous fashion. Since June, the city of Karachi



Deadly Embrace
Bruce Riedel
Brookings Institution
Dh101



Pakistan: Beyond the Crisis State
Maleeha Lodhi
C Hurst & Co
Dh101



Pakistan: A Hard Country
Anatol Lieven
Allen Lane
Dh179

has been engulfed in ethnically informed civil conflict, which in large measure reflects the presence of new refugee populations fleeing the western regions, where the majority of the drone attacks take place.



To the average Pakistani civilian, a helicopter may be useful for delivering aid in emergencies such as during last year's floods, but otherwise does not help tackle the country's three central problems: rampant population growth, a diminishing water supply and a curtailed democracy. They do, however, provide a solution for the military. Adrees Latif / Reuters



The coverage of these recent happenings – especially the killing of bin Laden – has revolved around questions of "knowing" and "understanding". Did the Pakistanis know about bin Laden? Will the Pakistanis understand that this is their own war? Can the Americans understand Pakistan? Should the Americans know more about Pakistan or has the remote-controlled drone war made such territorial knowledge largely passé?

There is anger in US discourse about Pakistan – an anger coupled with defiance. Many in the US Congress openly declare that Pakistan has betrayed them. The White House believes that if Pakistan cannot or will not move against those it sees as terrorists, then the US has every right to do so – unilat-

erally. In the meantime, war rages. Given the centrality of Pakistan to the war on terrorism and the fact that US troops have now been engaged in military operations in central Asia for a decade, it is worth asking if means of understanding the region have also progressed. After all, the economies of war contain within them vast segments for production of primary and secondary knowledge. The crucial question is whether there are any capacities for understanding as well.

The most frequently used clichés for Pakistan continue to invoke some degree of fundamental unknowability – sometimes this is expressed as a mystery, sometimes as unpredictability and often as anachronism. These clichés have dominated both the political and

cultural frameworks of understanding Pakistan. Bruce Riedel, in his recent book *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America and the Future of Global Jihad*, calls Pakistan "fickle" and "duplicitous" and notes that facts about Pakistan "are often far from clear and much about Pakistani behaviour remains a mystery". Riedel has more than 30 years of service with the CIA and the defence department for the Near East and south Asian desk. He is also the man to whom the newly elected Barack Obama turned to formulate his policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. Riedel's book provides one dominant perspective – mystery – of the past decade.

From the US policy angle, it is hard to see why Riedel finds Pakistan so mysterious. The relationship with the military – and,

indeed, the aid – determines both the limits and the landscape of this relationship. Riedel points out that when the aid was present and the US was supporting Pakistan, there was a lot of cooperation – from President Ayub Khan to General Zia ul Haq to Musharraf.

When the civilian regimes came, there was less political clarity, and no aid – from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Asif Ali Zardari. With that basic template, Riedel tells us about the various war-gaming scenarios that he has presented to the White House, the key one being the "Islamic Emirate of Pakistan", where a "Zia-like" general takes over and gives power – and control of nuclear assets – to jihadi organisations.

With a deft turn of phrase – a critical skill in war-gaming – the population of Pakistan is suddenly

transformed into Sunni jihadists ready to wreak havoc on distant shores. Riedel, with an undue fondness for describing the rooms in which he has chaired meetings about Pakistan, relies heavily on polls, on personal communications from esteemed political leaders and military officers.

In a telling anecdote, he breathlessly reports that one afternoon, Obama abruptly summoned him to the Oval Office to impress upon him the need for an "out of the box" solution to the problems of Pakistan. After consulting his closest colleague, Shuja Nawaz (a journalist and author), he told Obama that this solution might be helicopters, saying: "It may not be out of the box but it is the right answer."

Pakistan, continued on 6 →