

TO LIVE
OR TO
PERISH
FOREVER

TWO TUMULTUOUS
YEARS IN PAKISTAN

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LAND OF THE PURE

THE COPS CAME FOR ME ON A COLD, RAINY NIGHT. FOUR OF THEM, HOODS pulled over their heads, stood in the driveway of my home in Islamabad.

“Are you Mr. Nicholas?” one asked.

I nodded.

The senior officer who did all the talking was tall, clean-shaven, and looked familiar; we had met a few weeks earlier at an antigovernment student protest.

“What’s the problem?” I asked, my tone sounding partly curious, and yet anxious. Why would the police come to my house three times in one afternoon? When they had stopped by the first two times, I had been out, and was alerted to their visits by our *chowkidar*, or guard.

Now it was raining hard. We stepped under a cloth awning that covered part of the driveway to get out of the rain. The sound of water rushing off the end of the awning and splashing loudly into puddles made it difficult for me to hear.

“I have orders to take you and your wife to the airport,” the officer said. “Your visas have been revoked.”

What?

The officer repeated himself and added, “You must leave Pakistan immediately.” He handed me a piece of paper. The document, printed on Ministry of Interior letterhead and covered with signatures from representatives of various police and intelligence units, stated in clear, concise language: my wife, Rikki, and I were being deported.

I looked up from the paper and stared at the officer, stunned but not wholly surprised. For a while, I had suspected that something was amiss. I knew, for instance, that my phone was being tapped. A friend had told me that whenever he called me, the conversation always began with three distinct beeps, the signature sound of a wiretap coming to life, and as of a couple weeks earlier, I had not been able to receive calls from the United States. Moreover, just a day earlier, an intelligence agent from the Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, showed up in the flesh. He relayed a message through our chowkidar that Rikki and I were “living in Pakistan illegally” — and that I was “writing against Pakistan.”

The cloak-and-dagger shenanigans and subtle intimidations related to a story I had written for the *New York Times Magazine* profiling a new, more radical generation of Pakistani Taliban. I had spent months traveling to regions under their control, and had even passed an afternoon inside a Taliban-run camp. I expected a certain amount of harassment from the intelligence goons, as they often paid courtesy visits to foreign journalists who had reported on sensitive subjects from sensitive areas. Fanatic rebels in the North-West Frontier Province certainly met this condition. Dealing with the agencies seemed to be as much a part of the job as securing a visa, arranging interviews, and actually writing the stories. But a visit from the police suggested something official — and far more serious — than the normal spook routine.

I asked the officer for a minute to consult with Rikki and ran upstairs with the deportation notice in hand. We had been living in Pakistan for nearly two years, renting a two-bedroom apartment in a large house owned by a Pakistani family. We considered Pakistan home. Rikki attended the International Islamic University, the first non-Muslim American to ever enroll. She also worked as the nutritionist at a five-star hotel in Islamabad, where her obese clients included cabinet ministers, prominent businessmen, and senior bureaucrats. Whatever problems she encountered at the university could usually be resolved with a simple phone call from one of

her clients at the hotel. So when I burst through the door, out of breath, ranting about how the police were prepared to bundle us off to the airport in the next hour, Rikki promptly yet calmly replied, “Have you called Majed?”

Majed, whose real name I can’t disclose, was probably Rikki’s largest client. During their first session, Majed told Rikki that he could reduce the amount of food he ate, but that he would have trouble cutting back on the four or five scotches he drank every night while playing bridge with his buddies. I assumed his bridge partners comprised an influential bunch; Majed, who was himself related to the prime minister at the time, had been in and out of government for years. He had told Rikki to call him at any hour, that no favor was too large. “Call him,” she now urged.

“Majed? Hi, it’s Nicholas. Sorry to bother you tonight, but I have a small problem. There are four police officers standing in my driveway right now, and they say that our visas have been canceled and they going to kick us out of the country.”

“Huh?” he replied, sounding slightly preoccupied. I rehashed the details. He related the story, in Urdu, to someone else on his end. He came back on the line. “Listen, I am playing bridge with Tariq Aziz,” Majed said in a calm, unflappable tone. (At the time, Aziz was President Pervez Musharraf’s national security adviser.) “Why don’t you give the phone to the seniormost officer, and I’ll give the phone to Tariq. Don’t worry. He’ll take care of it.”

I handed the phone to the tall, clean-shaven officer and told him who was waiting on the other line. I thought about flashing a smug grin, but realized it might seem cocky — and a little premature.

The officer lifted the phone to his ear. He introduced himself. Aziz did the rest of the talking.

“Yes sir,” the officer said into the phone. “Yes sir... Yes sir... Yes sir... Yes sir...”

The officer returned my phone and apologized for the disturbance. Then he and his hooded colleagues turned, walked down the driveway, and disappeared into the dark, rainy night. I ran back up the metal stairs that led to our second-floor apartment and, having thrown open the door, announced: “Majed came through. Big time.”

Connections meant everything in Pakistan. If you knew the right people, things worked out. If you didn’t, you wound up on a one-way flight

to Dubai on a rainy Tuesday night. But connections were a double-edged sword, and knowing the wrong people could land you in more trouble than knowing the right people could get you out of. Besides folks like Majed, I also knew plenty of rebels in Baluchistan and Taliban fighters in the North-West Frontier Province, too. Majed's bridge partners, in other words, had saved us from packing our entire apartment into suitcases that night, but the deportation notice, covered with signatures from this-and-that intelligence agency, suggested that the state machinery had been set into motion against us. According to official government correspondence, we were living in Pakistan illegally. And wandering around without valid papers was foolhardy and stupid, if not outright dangerous.

We woke up the next morning to more rain. Low clouds spread across the verdant mountain ridge outside our windows.

I called Majed again. He had just gotten off the phone, trying to find more about our case.

"I can't do anything more," he said. "This is *way* above my head. We asked the police to leave you alone, but this is above them, too. You should really leave the country for a bit."

"Did anyone give any reason for why this is happening?"

"They said something about the Taliban, your trips to Baluchistan, and your coverage of the Red Mosque. But that's all I know," he said.

I hung up and bought the first two available seats on the next outbound flight. Forty-eight hours later, on the morning after my twenty-ninth birthday, we were soaring above the Hindu Kush Mountains — and out of Pakistan.

I WENT TO Pakistan in February 2006, hoping to learn something about this troubled, nuclear-armed country, and about myself. I wanted to become a journalist, but most newspapers were closing their foreign bureaus, not opening new ones. And with next to no formal experience, magazine editors weren't exactly lined up outside of my door, eager to dish out international assignments. In the rapidly changing landscape of American journalism, it seemed like the only way for an inexperienced hack like myself to try to make a name — and potentially a career — was by patching together fellowships and grant money, going somewhere newsworthy, and then praying for good luck.

The Institute of Current World Affairs was my ticket. ICWA, as it is

better known, is a foundation that sponsors two-year writing fellowships around the world. Their cash flowed from toilets. Back in the 1920s, Charles Crane, the eldest son of the plumbing magnate by the same name, invested \$1 million into a startup fund called the Crane-Rogers Foundation, later dubbed ICWA. The foundation survived the Great Depression and subsequent wars, and continued to send two or three people into the field every year. It operated almost like a venture capitalist fund; they sought applicants younger than thirty-five who showed an interest in foreign affairs and displayed sufficient room to grow. Seemed like a perfect fit. If there was one thing I had, it was plenty of room to grow.

In June 2006, the ICWA board selected me as a Phillips Talbot Fellow. Talbot, who turned ninety years old that same weekend, had spent the 1940s as an ICWA fellow in pre-Partition India. He began his career as a cub reporter at the *Chicago Daily News* in the late 1930s before being tapped for a fellowship. He went on to write several books, become an assistant secretary of state, the American ambassador to Greece, and the president of the Asia Society. I had big shoes to fill. Before I shipped off, Talbot and I had several conversations, and he told me stories from his own time in South Asia facing accusations of being a spy. While Indian Communists tagged him an imperialist agent of the United States, officers in the British Raj accused him of working to undermine their government based on Talbot's contacts with Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, and, to some extent, Indian Communists. This seemed to be a common theme for ICWA fellows abroad.

"The Institute of Current World Affairs?" people often asked me. "What is it? Some sort of CIA cover?" In the past, foreign governments had imprisoned even Fulbright fellows—who are relatively well known in international circles—on charges of espionage. An obscure foundation like ICWA, I would soon discover, raised even more suspicions.

I arrived in Pakistan by accident; my fellowship was intended for Iran. I had spent the previous summer studying Persian at Tehran University, and proposed a fellowship to the ICWA board that involved my reporting and writing about ethnic minorities (Kurds, Azeris, Baluchis, Arabs) there. But shortly after ICWA granted the fellowship, the people of Iran spoke, and chose Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as their new president. Ahmadinejad was a hard-liner whose vitriolic anti-American rhetoric

dwarfed even that of his predecessors, who had themselves made chanting “Death to America” a staple of public life. Overnight, the prospects of the Iranian government giving an American a two-year visa to drift around and write about the country’s ethnic problems seemed, well, pretty dim.

Five months after I first walked into Iran’s pseudo-embassy in Washington (the two countries severed diplomatic relations in 1979 and housed “interests sections” in other countries’ embassies), an official there finally leveled with me. “Nicholas, this is never going to happen,” he said. “Maybe you should think of going somewhere else.”

But where?

Afghanistan? Too much war. ICWA funded fellowships that featured hardship, poverty, and an occasional brush with conflict, but they shied away from sending fellows into war zones where a kidnapped American could fetch tens of thousands of dollars.

Central Asia? The ’Stans sounded intriguing, but I figured that getting drunk on fermented mare’s milk with two dozen of my closest Kyrgyz friends six nights a week might get really old, really fast.

What about Pakistan? If I had my demographic facts straight, they had some ethnic problems of their own, right? What if I just took my fellowship proposal for Iran, and replaced “Pakistan” with “Iran”? After some convincing, the director of ICWA signed off on my new destination.

A couple of months later, I stumbled into Pakistan.

I CRAMMED TO make up for lost time, first by attempting to call up every Pakistani in the D.C. capital area, and then reading anything I could find about Pakistan’s history, culture, people, and religion. I soon learned about Chaudhry Rahmat Ali, the man who coined the name “Pakistan.” Rahmat Ali belonged to the cast of characters — along with Mohammad Iqbal, the intellectual dubbed Pakistan’s “national poet,” and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a gaunt, sickly barrister — who helped to form Pakistan. Historians regarded Jinnah as the founding statesmen and Iqbal as the founding philosopher. Rahmat Ali, however, enjoyed less influence *inside* Pakistan (he was living in England during the Partition) and most accounts of Pakistan’s creation have confined him to a secondary role. “Official Pakistan,” wrote a columnist in *Dawn*, an English-language daily

newspaper, “has apparently treated Rahmat Ali as the lunatic uncle who has needed to be locked up secretly in the attic.”

Rahmat Ali’s fame stemmed from a 1933 pamphlet he penned titled “Now or Never; Are We to Live or Perish For Ever?” He opened the treatise:

“At this solemn hour in the history of India, when British and Indian statesmen are laying the foundations of a Federation Constitution for that land, we address this appeal to you, in the name of our common heritage, on behalf of our thirty million Muslim brethren who live in PAKSTAN —by which we mean the five Northern units of India, viz.: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (Afghan Province), Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan—for your sympathy and support in our grim and fateful struggle against political crucifixion and complete annihilation.

Thus, the name PAKSTAN made its debut. But it was more than just an acronym for the composite Muslim-majority provinces in northern India. In Urdu, “Pak” means “pure,” and thus “PAKSTAN” meant “Land of the Pure.”

Rahmat Ali might have coined the name, but he wasn’t the first to pitch the idea of combining Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sindh, and Baluchistan into a single political entity. Three years before Rahmat Ali’s pamphlet circulated, Iqbal, acknowledged as a towering intellect even in his own day, had proposed this imagined configuration, which was to fall under the umbrella of an All-India Federation. But Rahmat Ali wanted total independence from India. An upstart student radical, twenty years junior to Iqbal, Rahmat Ali noted, with due politeness and respect, that his demand was “basically different” from the one forwarded by the revered philosopher and poet. “There can be no peace and tranquility in the land if we, the Muslims, are duped into a Hindu-dominated Federation where we cannot be the masters of our own destiny and captains of our own souls,” Rahmat Ali wrote.

Rahmat Ali described the fate of Indian Muslims as having arrived at an apocalyptic intersection: “We are face to face with a first-rate tragedy, the like of which has not been seen in the long and eventful history of Islam.” What happened to the days when they were “custodians of the

glory of Islam in India and defenders of its frontiers”? he wondered. Rahmat Ali added, in closing, “We have a still greater future before us, if only our soul can be saved from the perpetual bondage of slavery forced in an All-India Federation. Let us make no mistake about it. The issue is now or never. Either we live or perish for ever.”

SINCE RAHMAT ALI issued his ultimatum — “to live or perish for ever” — this question has remained foremost in the minds of Pakistanis. Millions died during the communal riots that punctuated Pakistan’s violent birth pangs in late summer and early fall of 1947. Jinnah, the slender and sophisticated lawyer, succumbed to tuberculosis just thirteen months after founding the country. An assassination in 1951 felled the first prime minister. Civil war tore the country in half in 1971. Military coups staged in 1958, 1968, 1977, and 1999 all promised to “save the nation” from depraved and corrupt civilian leadership, while all eventually becoming depraved and corrupt military dictatorships. In 2007, pro-Taliban insurgents employed dozens of suicide bombers in a terror campaign that killed nearly one thousand people—including former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

But what else, besides chronic instability, defined Pakistan? Everything I read and heard from the leading roster of Pakistani experts sounded pretty stark: over a period of sixty years, the country had lunged from one crisis to the next, triggered by coups, countercoups, snap elections, and a whole smattering of contorted political configurations. Just keeping track of names and election years was enough to daunt even the most dedicated history buff; serving heads of state, at various points, called themselves prime minister, president, general, chief executive, governor-general, field marshal, and martial law administrator. From what I gathered, there were a few essential things to know about Pakistan: the army was perpetually in charge, the intelligence agencies were a brooding and ubiquitous force, the Islamists threatened to take over, ethnic problems portended more Balkanization, corruption plagued human interaction, and a modest arsenal of nuclear weapons all combined to make Pakistan the most dysfunctional — and most dangerous — country in the world.

And yet, I desperately wanted to understand not just theories about

Pakistan and how it operated, but Pakistanis and how they lived. I craved the tactile experience of Pakistan—anticipating the burning summer heat, the greasy, spicy food, the horrendous, maddening traffic—and the unexpected conversations with unlikely partners. These cravings led me to befriend, upon arriving, a radical cleric (who later became an enemy of the state and was killed), to pine for the smell of tear gas (because it assured me that I was sufficiently close to the action), and to sneak into a Taliban camp tucked in a valley near the Afghanistan border to witness a public lashing. (None of this required any special cunning or skill on my part; oftentimes, I would simply take public buses to places far from home and then start asking questions.) When I first arrived, I even sought out seedy hotels. In Karachi, I used to stay at a musty low-rise just because it seemed more *authentic*. After a bombing at the Karachi Marriott Hotel in March 2006, a Pakistani friend joked to me that my hotel might have been the safest in the city, owing to the fact that “al-Qaeda stays there when they’re in town.”

There were plenty of things that I would have never found in a book and would have to learn on my own. Like the hazards of *pan*, a chew made from betel leaf. In Karachi, many men—and some women—passed time by packing a wad into the side of their mouths, which they gnawed on like a cud, extracting a red juice that stained their teeth and lips. Every so often, when their mouths filled with juice, they spat. No one warned me about how bus passengers leaned their heads out of the window and, without looking, would spit a thick, arching trail of red, minty juice down below. Exposed pedestrians and passing motorcyclists told horror stories.

Pan presented a second dilemma for me—of being mistaken for blood. When I arrived in Pakistan, the country convulsed with riots and protests against the allegedly blasphemous cartoons published in several European newspapers, including one that depicted the Prophet Mohammad with a bomb stuffed in his turban. Islamists had poured into the streets, attacking anything they thought represented the decadent West. They burned banks and KFCs, along with hundreds of cars and motorcycles. Paramilitary Rangers parked their pickup trucks, equipped with machine guns, in front of every Pizza Hut and McDonald’s in Pakistan. After a day cooped up inside my hotel, I ventured out for a walk.

I had gone about a hundred yards when I noticed crimson-colored splotches on the sidewalk and roads. I assumed bloodied rioters, or perhaps dead chickens, left the splotches.

I eventually returned to my hotel and spent the next three days convinced that Karachi was the bloodiest city in the world. Then, one afternoon, while descending a flight of stairs, I noticed that the same shade of red that I saw everywhere in the streets also stained the walls of the stairwell. I spun around quickly to face a Pakistani friend. “It’s *pan!*” I exclaimed, feeling a profound sense of relief. The streets, after all, were not paved with blood, and butchers didn’t just drag their headless chickens through the alleys. I was humbled. I had a lot to learn.

OVER THE COURSE of twenty-three months, I traversed Rahmat Ali’s “PAKSTAN,” with the exception of Kashmir, the “K” that never joined. But I did travel to Bangladesh, which Rahmat Ali proposed calling Bangistan and which acceded to Pakistan in 1947. (It seceded twenty-four years later.) My travels took me as far south as the coast of the Arabian Sea and as far north as the glaciers and towering peaks bordering China. I journeyed to the border of archrival India, west to the restive tribal areas, and everywhere in between. Pakistan covered a landmass larger than Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico combined. Diversity characterized its land and its 170 million people. A friend once quipped that there wasn’t just one Pakistan, but that each province represented its own, distinct Pakistan. This book is—in part—my humble attempt to explain the many identities and histories that exist throughout Pakistan.

The two years that I traveled through Pakistan were a particularly turbulent time. President Pervez Musharraf lost his mojo, and the Taliban gained theirs. Lawyers in black suits protested in the streets, and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated. “You are really seeing history in the making,” my grandfather once told me on the phone. “But what’s the problem with that place?” Everyone could see Pakistan making daily headlines with riots and bombs. But why? Why were the Islamists such a threat? Why did tensions between the country’s many ethnic groups never disappear, as Rahmat Ali and Jinnah and Iqbal had hoped? How did Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda henchmen make their home in the tribal areas, with so many people looking for them? And why, more than seventy years after Rahmat Ali first proposed the

question, did Pakistanis, on a daily basis, still face an existential dilemma: to live or perish forever? I tried to consider these questions during every journey and every interview. I hope any answers provided are of some use, for all of our understanding.

SINCE RETURNING, people have often asked me how I got around the country—how I accessed places, like Taliban camps, where no other foreigners hung out. After all, at more than six feet tall, with blond hair and fair skin, I couldn't exactly pass for a Pakistani. So I did what I could, wearing local clothes, adopting local customs, and learning Urdu. I had showed up in Pakistan speaking enough Urdu to start, but never quite finish, a conversation. Within a few months, however, I was reading Urdu newspapers, watching Urdu television, and traveling on public buses without a translator. Throughout my time in Pakistan I was amazed that—and never fully understood why—people were so inviting and generous with their time. Some felt compelled by cultural customs of hospitality. Others wanted to get a message out. Many, I suspected, were just intrigued by the presence of a tall, blond American who spoke Urdu and ambled about in a *shalwar kameez*, the ubiquitous baggy-pants-and-tunic outfit.

But Pakistani culture was about more than language or clothes. It thrived on connections and contacts, evinced by Majed's intervention on our behalf the night when the police showed up. Not all of my friends, however, were the kind that I would have brought home for Christmas. Considering that my father is a Marine general and my younger brother a Marine lieutenant, I can say with some confidence that Abdul Rashid Ghazi would not have been a welcome guest at the family dining room table. Ghazi, a pro-Taliban leader in Islamabad, ran Lal Masjid, or the Red Mosque, with his brother. In July 2007, the siblings gained international notoriety when they staged a rebellion in the center of the capital that lasted ten days and led to hundreds of deaths, including Ghazi's own. Yet I learned more from Ghazi, and he opened more doors for me, than perhaps any other single person.

My relationship with Ghazi dated back to the spring of 2006, when a Pakistani journalist who was well acquainted with the jihadis mused: "If the Taliban ever come to power in Pakistan, Ghazi could become the *amir*." (*Amir* is the Arabic word for commander.) His prediction stuck

with me; who wouldn't want to meet a future leader, right? Previously, the government had charged Ghazi with orchestrating a terrorist plot to bomb the Parliament, Army House, and U.S. embassy. After multiple suicide bomb attacks in London on July 7, 2005, Tony Blair pressured Musharraf to crack down on the militant madrassas in Pakistan. (One of the bombers had spent time in one just before the attack.) Musharraf ordered troops to barge into Ghazi's all-female madrassa one night. The raid turned into a fiasco, and the next day newspapers printed pictures of bloodied girls. Ghazi emerged as a leading figure in the underground, pro-Taliban movement coalescing in Pakistan.

But to meet him I needed a reference first.

The intermediary would be Khalid Khawaja, a former intelligence officer, air force pilot, and self-described confidante of Osama bin Laden. On at least one previous occasion, involving the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, Khawaja had tried to facilitate an American journalist's meeting with Islamic militants. Following Pearl's kidnapping and murder, which Pearl's wife suspected Khawaja of being involved in, a tarnished reputation now preceded him. I met Khawaja for lunch one day at an upscale café in Islamabad. I notified several people beforehand, so that if I never returned, people would know whom I was last with. Khawaja showed up on time. He was wiry thin, with a long beard and intense, vibrating eyes.

"Why do you want to meet Ghazi?" he asked.

I said I wanted to understand more about his thinking, his vision for the future, and the Taliban.

"After Musharraf, whenever that may be, Pakistan will be like Iran was in 1979," Khawaja said. "The only difference will be that, after our revolution, there will be no U.S. embassy left."

Khawaja made me feel very uncomfortable, and I was eager to hurry through lunch and get to the point. "So, can you introduce me to Ghazi?"

He said he would try. Then he stared across the table into my eyes. "But if I tell you that Ghazi is not available, don't go trying to meet with him anyways behind my back. You understand?"

"Yes, of course."

"I told Daniel Pearl that Sheikh Gilani" — the jihadi ideologue Pearl was trying to meet when kidnapped — "was off-limits, and not to try meet-

ing him. But he still tried,” Khawaja said. He shrugged his shoulders, as if being kidnapped and killed was a logical, mild consequence of side-stepping him. I took the statement as a threat, went home, and waited for Khawaja to call. A week later, he did.

“Ghazi has agreed to see you.”

I FIGURED THAT if Khawaja paid deference to Ghazi, then Ghazi must be one radical dude. The first time I visited him at the Red Mosque, I told Rikki to send out a search party if I wasn't home in an hour. When I got there, I was led from a reception area through a narrow alley to Ghazi's residence. Two madrassa students, in their twenties, blocked the entrance to Ghazi's door. They were sharpening a sword, one gripping the handle while the other rubbed a stone up and down the blade.

My escort, another madrassa student, spoke up. “Ghazi is expecting him,” he said. The two parted. Ghazi opened the door. He looked a bit — of all people — like Jerry Garcia. He wore oval-shaped, wire-rimmed glasses, had a gray, fist-length beard, and sported curly hair that flipped wildly around his ears and neckline. Ghazi even had the former Grateful Dead front man's easy smile and chill demeanor.

“Are you going to use that sword on me?” I joked, hoping that Ghazi could appreciate humor. He laughed. Before long, we were talking about his meeting with Osama bin Laden in Kandahar, back in 1998. My mind flashed between Khawaja, Pearl, the sword, and Osama. My gaze drifted to the Kalashnikov propped against one wall, and the pistol lying on the pillow beside Ghazi. He noticed.

“Relax, my friend,” he said. “Jihad is a defensive system. You should sit here now and feel safe. Do you?” I swallowed a lump in my throat. “It would be different if you had come in, holding a weapon and making demands that: ‘I want to meet Ghazi.’ Then I would be a different man. But these are Islamic values. I have given you refuge. I have given you my word. You are in my protection.”

Of course, bestowing confidence in a guy who boasted of palling around with bin Laden in his heyday carried certain risks. But Ghazi was more articulate than any other Islamist I had met in Pakistan, and spoke — in English — as though he had nothing to hide. I found his candor and contacts invaluable. When I once asked him about his links with



Abdul Rashid Ghazi, in his office at the Red Mosque, in April 2007. PHOTO: NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

the dangerous jihadi organization—Harakat ul-Jihadi Islami—that spawned most of the others, he responded, “We know each other well. We have a good relationship. They love me. And I love them.”

Connections with someone like Ghazi could take you deep into a situation, or be able to get you out of one; dropping such a name in one place could save your life, and in another put it in further danger. But these were risks worth taking. Pakistanis had faced the dire option—“to live or perish for ever”—for decades. If I wanted to understand their country, I would have to do the same.