Good evening everyone. My name is Ian Moncaster from the presidency of the World Affairs Council. As many of you know, Pakistan is the sixth largest country in the world and it certainly commands our strategic military interests. And it sits at some of the hearts of the intersections of some of the world’s major religious, cultural, political conflicts. As we start to think about that we hear a great deal of conversation about the US, Pakistani political relationship. But really countries are made up of people and so how do we start to have a conversation about the fabric of life in Pakistan and what it really means?

The mission of the World Affairs Council is to provide opportunities for everyone in greater Seattle to be a more global citizen. Whether it’s through our international visitor program, global classroom which is a part of the World Affairs Council that extends the mission of the council to K-12 classrooms or it’s these kinds of public programs, our goal is to give you direct access to conversations on some of the most critical issues of our times.

Tonight I’m very pleased to welcome to this conversation Pamela Constable who is going to provide a first-hand perspective of daily life in Pakistan while touching on the issues of inequality, corruption, and the division within the country through discussing her most recent book Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War with Itself. She is going to speak from extensive in country experience on the realities of inequalities and corruption within Pakistani society. The division of competing versions of Islam in that country. And as you know we are sponsored in part this evening by the Ahmadiyya Students Association here at the University of Washington. And the impact of these realities on the average Pakistani citizen. We do all of our programs in partnership and we are very pleased this evening to thank our co-sponsor the University of Washington School of Law who has helped us with this venue as well as our co-presenters, the Ahmadiyya and Muslim Students Association, the communications department here at the University of Washington, the national bureau of Asian research, the Pakistan Association of greater Seattle, The Pakistani Students Association here at the University, the South Asia Center at the University of Washington and the University Bookstore.

As we do with all of our events, this will be tweeted live. We use these social media tools as a way to extend the conversation past what is going on in this room So for those of you who are on Twitter, the hash tag is PConstableWAC. PConstableWAC, you can find that in your program. You can also find the organizational tags in that program. On another logistical note, each of you as you came in this evening you were given a small white card. As the conversation goes on this evening and you’ve got questions, write them down. A volunteer will come by and collect them at the end. It’s key that the question be concise and legible. If I can’t read it I can’t get it into the conversation so it’s really important that I get these questions in.

With that a quick introduction of our speaker. As you can see from the program, Pamela is a deputy foreign editor at the Washington Post. For over two years, she was the paper’s Kabul bureau chief and prior to that she was the paper’s South Asia bureau chief based in New Delhi covering Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In addition to this book, she’s also the author of Fragments of Grace: My Search for Meaning in the Strife of South Asia along with chapters and articles in a variety of other magazines. Please join me in welcoming Pamela to the podium this
evening.

**Pamela Constable**

Thank you Ian. I’m delighted to be back in Seattle, I was just looking at my notes from my last talk that I just gave last week in Washington. We had a big hurricane, torrential flooding and rain there so in my little introduction it says, thank you all for coming in spite of the rainy weather. I thought that’s perfect, here I am in Seattle I might as well use the same introduction. Although I love the rain. I’m thinking of retiring here someday. So again, happy to be back here. Happy to have some old friends in the audience and happy to be speaking with some new ones. And I very much am in line with Ian’s thinking. I would very much like this to be a conversation rather than a lecture or even a lecture with questions attached. I’m much more interested in hearing what you want to talk about and what interests you and what you’d like to know about than just simply spouting what I have learned in my years working in Pakistan and the region. I have spent the last three years working almost full time in Pakistan and Afghanistan. And I took more than a year just to spend time traveling around Pakistan to really be able to spend more time in some of the communities and with some of the issues than. You know as a journalist, you have to rush from event to event and you have to produce things very quickly. I felt strongly that Pakistan was a country that we simply didn’t know enough about in the West and we were seeing it only as a country of events. Many of them quite worrisome and even cataclysmic. So what I set out to do was to take a deeper look and to try and give Western English speaking readers a broad brush, a portrait of a country that we all need to know more about although not always for happy reasons. It’s a country, as Ian said, that is right at the heart of some of the most serious concerns and conflicts facing the world today including poverty, including Islamic radicalism, including nuclear proliferation. Pakistan has them all. It’s a country that I’ve very much enjoyed spending time in. I’ve made a lot of friends there, had some very good experiences. But it’s a country that has almost every problem you can name, so I set out to try to explain...I’m going to read to you just a little bit from the introduction so that you get a sense of what I'm trying to do and what I’m not trying to do. This is not a book about foreign policy, it’s not a book about terrorism or the war on terror it’s a book about a country.

‘This is an attempt to explain to Western readers what Pakistani society is like today. What matters to Pakistanis, how they live and work, what frustrations they harbor, who they fear and admire, what forces shape their lives and opinions. It is an attempt to create a backdrop for a dangerous and fluid moment in the history of a troubled but important country to explain what is enduring in its life as a nation. it is an attempt to explain such puzzles as why Pakistanis have a love hate relationship with the US, why the army remains the nation’s most respected institution and why the feudal mindset still dominates politics. It explores why a country with such economic potential has failed to educate and employ a majority of its people. Why a nation founded with such high hopes a s a modern Muslim democracy has struggled so painfully to live up to them. In all of these issues lurks the same central question: Why is Pakistan with its huge military establishment, its democratic form of government and its tradition of moderate Muslim culture fails to curb both the growing violent threat and the popular appeal of radical Islam?’

So that was the task I set out for myself and spent almost a year and a half trying to answer some of those questions. In the past couple of months I’ve done a lot of interviews and speaking about this book and a lot of radio interviews and TV interviews and almost inevitably the first question anybody asks me is, ‘Did the Pakistanis know that Osama Bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad, near the army academy?’ That’s what everyone wants to know. The short answer is I don’t have a clue, the excuse being that the book was done before that, but that’s a different issue. But I can make an educated guess. I think that somebody knew, I’m sure somebody knew. But I don’t think that the highest echelons of the Pakistani State were aware that Bin Laden was there and the reason I don’t think that is because they were so humiliated when he was found and he was actually
captured and killed by foreigners that Pakistan’s great sovereignty was violated to go in and catch the world’s most dangerous fugitive. To have him who had long since being any sort of asset, had long become a liability to the Pakistani establishment, sitting there in such a sensitive place was a huge blow to the army that he was taken out that way. And I’ve even said that I think this has shaken Pakistan’s army more than anything that’s even happened since the loss of Bangladesh. I think we can’t overestimate the damage this has done. So going backwards for that reason, I have a feeling they didn’t know. Now Pakistan is a place in which you have many sources of power, many people you would call state actors, semi-state actors, non-state actors, all kinds of people roaming around there I’m sure somebody knew.

But what I really want to talk about and something that I think tells you a lot more about Pakistan than whatever happened to Osama Bin Laden, was another killing. A killing which took place early this January in Islamabad, Pakistan. And that was the assassination of a man who was the governor of Punjab Provence. He was a very important senior liberal politician, very well known. His position was appointed, he was one of the most powerful people in the ruling party. The governor of the most important Provence in Pakistan. An outspoken liberal there aren’t many of those in Pakistan. He was assassinated. Shot twenty-six times by his own bodyguard. His bodyguard shot him and killed him on the impassioned belief that he was an infidel, that he was blasphemer, that he was an enemy of Islam. All of which, the man felt, because this official had been speaking out on behalf of proposed reforms to the Pakistani laws against blasphemy against Islam. It has the most harsh laws in the world against against blasphemy against Islam. If I stood up here and said, 'the prophet Mohamed was a son of a gun,' or if I said, 'Islam is a lousy religion,' I could be sentenced to death if I was a Muslim, if I wasn’t nobody would care. But if I was a Muslim and if I even as a joke or a private aside or a comment that was overheard, if I dropped a copy of the Koran by mistake on the floor, these are extreme cases, but it has happened people have been arrested for this, charged with a capital crime. Pakistan doesn’t usually execute them because it’s not a politically wise thing to do, but a lot of them get killed anyway by prison guards it’s a very murky situation.

There was a case in Punjab in which a woman, a peasant woman, a Christian was in a field picking berries with her co-berry pickers. An argument arose and sharp words were exchanged, possibly religious insults were exchanged, I don’t know. The woman was dragged off to a police station, a middle-aged mother of several children, dragged off to a police station, charged with blasphemy, taken to a court and sentenced to death. She has been in prison ever since. And one of the things that Governor Taseer had been saying in his speeches, was that this was not right and a review needed to be made of her case and was questioning whether she was being questionably treated, for this he was assassinated.

The reason I am telling you this story, is not because the man was killed it’s because of the reaction that followed the killing. Instead of condemning the murder, instead of speaking up and saying, 'wait a minute this is wrong'. In stead of standing up and saying, 'well we don’t approve of blasphemy, but murder is murder.' A very different thing happened. Thousands and thousands of people began flocking to the home of the murderer with flowers, with garlands, with praise calling him a hero of Islam saying he had defended their faith. Ordinary people, not radical people, not Taliban people just people were swept up in what I call this highly emotional identification with Islam, which worries me greatly. The thing that worries me the most about what happens in Pakistan is not terrorist bombings, it’s this slowly growing confluence between violence and this emotional defense of Islam by perfectly ordinary people. And the killing of Salman Taseer was an example of that and the reaction was an example of that. And the government which is a weak civilian institution backed off completely announced immediately that there would be no reforms to the blasphemy law, basically tried to appease the mob, tried to appease the extremists. There were
street demonstrations held, thousands, and thousands of people. I have on the cover of my book a photo I took at a street rally a week after this man was killed, thousands of people streaming down the street demonstrating in support of this murderer. It was really quite shocking. I kept asking people, ‘don’t think this is wrong, don’t you think murder is wrong?’ ‘Not when it’s defense of Islam.’ It’s very scary when that sort of thing starts to happen in a society and it does worry me a lot.

I want to start off by saying some of the good things. As I said in my introduction, and as Ian also said, this is a country with enormous potential. the reason we should care about Pakistan is not only because it has Al Qaeda and Taliban running around, not only because it has nuclear weapons, but it’s because it’s a huge country. Over a hundred and eighty million people, it’s soon going to be within twenty or thirty years the largest population Muslim in the world. It’s going to surpass Indonesia some time soon. It is a demographic time bomb. It’s running out of water it’s running out of electrical power sources. The cities are growing by leaps and bounds. The infrastructure can’t handle it, the economy is badly ailing. there are not enough jobs for people, there’s not enough jobs for people on any level. There’s not enough education. People feel stuck. I call it a fast moving society in which people feel stuck. People feel alienated from the state they feel like they can’t get justice. I have a whole chapter on justice in which I describe my experiences spending days and days and days sitting in district courts just listening and just watching to these cases unfold. the drama that people live through and the way cases are decided it’s a disgrace. This is a very formal, old justice system, with all the trappings, and the black robes, they wear wigs and the whole nine yards. But if you steal somebody’s cow and your family is more powerful than the other one and your family can call up a politician, you’ll never go to jail. Everything is decided on relative political clout, not on merit. so people feel that they don’t have access to justice. Ordinary people who are not politically connected feel that they really don’t have any outlet for their grievances. they don’t feel that political parties represent them. As I say in my chapter on political life in Pakistan, I say, ‘the ordinary Pakistani does not see a political party as an outlet for his hopes and aspirations and grievances, he sees Pakistani politics as a wrestling match between gods that he will never be able to be.’ It’s way, way above his access. Corruption is rampant at the top of the society so people don’t really have much to look up to. They feel like if you’re rich and powerful, you can get away with anything, if not, you’re stuck.

Now because people feel so frustrated where do they turn? They turn to their religion, it’s a natural thing to do. People do that all over the world. Nothing wrong with that. but the question is, what kind of religion are you turning to? what is the version that you’re turning to? as Ian said, or as we were saying earlier before I got here. Pakistan has a long tradition of moderate tolerant Islam. It’s a country where you never had suicide bombings, you never had terrorism. this is completely unheard of. When the cold war came and the Afghan Jihad started against the Soviets, everything changed and you began to get this infiltration of a different kind of Islam. Middle eastern, mostly in origin, what we would call fundamentalist or extreme versions of Islam that really began to infiltrate the society and change the way people thought. Thousands and thousands of seminaries in the most radical schools of Sunni Islam were set up, many of them with money from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf all over the country, mosques and seminaries. And they began spreading this notion of what we’re talking about is the Taliban style of Islam in which you have absolute segregation between men and women, in which you have draconian punishments for crimes, in which you aspire to a very pure and rigid notion of Islam. And in which Sharia Law governs the law and in which Jihad is not only seen as a struggle to perfect yourself but also in a military sense of the word, in a violent sense of the word that you can justify violence in the name of defending your religion.

What happened basically after the Afghan war ended, was you had all of these freedom fighters, all
these Mujaheddin, all these Mullahs, all these mosques just sitting around. But the war was over but they had no place to go so they started putting down their roots and in the intervening twenty years between now and then as Pakistan has continued to struggle with corruption, poor leadership, with poor leadership, with injustice, with all the problems of many many poor countries of the world. At the same time you had two things happening. You had this growing narrative which is being put out by political and religious leaders there and in other countries that the West is out to get us. That the West is out to destroy Islam, is about to destroy our way of life. It’s this hegemonic force that wants to bring vulgarity and libertinage to our societies, wants to let our women run wild, wants to steal our nuclear weapons. So the narrative that is painted by religious leaders and some political leaders there is they sort of draw this arc that starts in Palestine, and goes through Bosnia, and Kashmir, and Chechnya, etc, and then Iraq and Afghanistan and eventually leads to Pakistan. So they persuade people who are for the most part uneducated and devout that there is this huge threat from the West. Now I personally don’t think that there is a huge threat from the West, per se.

I think we’ve made a lot of mistakes in a lot of countries, but I don’t see it as a giant plot to take over Islam. It worries me greatly not only that this is being said by Mullahs that are trying to whip up their flock, but it’s also said by all sorts of political leaders in places like Pakistan. Whenever there is a terrorist bombing, and I have been to many many many of them. I’ve probably been to at least twenty or thirty scenes of recently committed bombings in Pakistan talking to victims, survivors, relatives of victims, store keepers, families, people who were just there and you ask them, ‘who could have done this?’ And they always say the same thing, ‘Oh well it couldn’t have been a Pakistani and it couldn’t have been a Muslim, because they wouldn’t do such a thing.’ Well it mostly is Pakistanis and it mostly is Muslims. It’s not India, it’s not Israel, it’s not the CIA blowing up a women’s market in Peshawar. But the incredible sense of collective denial that you hear in Pakistan comes from the top. You have leaders saying oh it was India, oh it was Israel, oh it was the CIA. They’re trying to deflect away they don’t want people to reflect on the sources of their real problems which are mostly internal. It is very easy to blame an enemy for something. It’s much harder to tackle things like unemployment, things like drought, things like injustice. Much, much more difficult to tackle those things and to face them head on. so that’s number one. Number two, India has remained, and again I think mistakenly, obsessed with this notion that India is out to destroy it and to take over it. and so as a result of this, it’s done two things, it’s created an extraordinarily exaggerated amount of power within the military intelligence establishment and number two it has very badly skewed federal spending, government spending away from social and economic development and social uplifting and towards defense. That has not changed, it is still the case that far more money is going into defense than into the things that Pakistan really needs, irrigation, export creation, jobs, jobs, jobs. It needs more high schools, it needs more colleges, it needs better health, it needs to slow down the population growth rate, it needs a million things. Defense always comes first. Now again, I think it’s a mistake, I don’t think India wants to take over Pakistan. India’s too busy making money getting rich and joining the global economy and leaving Pakistan in the dust for other reasons. Now they’ve been fighting this war over Kashmir for ever and ever and ever I certainly hope they solve it sometime but it’s not going to happen soon. but I think they are mistaken to allow that to be the reason why they’re not doing more to help their own people get ahead.

And a third thing that’s happened is that the American war on terror, the American war on Afghanistan has had a terrible blow back on Pakistan. It has mostly taken the form of these drone attacks, these unmanned missile strikes that go along up in the Northwest border and mostly in these tribal regions. But it’s also taken other forms too. the word they use these days is kinetic. we’re doing a lot of kinetic stuff in Pakistan now, a lot of spying goes on, a lot of missile attacks. It’s a much more aggressive military and intelligence activities going all along the Afghan border and then inside Pakistan. This infuriates the Pakistanis. This is incredibly controversial and sensitive across the country. I say in my chapter on drone attacks. I call the chapter Drones. Most of the
drone strikes you never hear, you never see. They happen in the middle of nowhere. There’s no TV cameras up there. They’re like these invisible things going on, but the impact on society is no less than if you dropped an atom bomb on Jenna Avenue in Karachi in the middle of rush hour. It’s that potent as a political tool to be used to say, aha, the Americans hate us, the Americans don’t respect our sovereignty, the Americans are trying to destroy us. It’s a real conundrum because the Obama administration which of course started out on a great footing setting a very different tone than the Bush administration. Didn’t invade Iraq, did continue to fight in Afghanistan at the invitation of the Afghan government, ended being the same government that radically intensified the drone strikes. Why? because the couldn’t trust the Pakistani government not to tell. So you’ve got this terrible vicious cycle. You’ve got an intelligent and military establishment that has been on the one hand very helpful going after Al Qaeda and international terrorists that are coming from other places and even Pakistanis that affiliated with Al Qaeda, and doing attacks even including the World Trade Center. But which has been unwilling to go after its own militant groups, its own radical dangerously violent groups which are now turning against the state. And this is the huge problem they face. That’s why I call this book Playing with Fire. I call it that for two reasons number one because the economic and political elite in Pakistan still believes that they can live pleasant lives and maintain a feudal mentality and it doesn’t matter if the poor are still down on their farms earning ten cents a day. And two because the military establishment has continued to believe until very, very recently that it can somehow manage to maintain, contain, control, manipulate and use and not be hurt by the fomenting of radical Islamic groups. Now these are groups that have always been used against other countries. These are groups that were used in Afghanistan. These were groups that were used in Kashmir. But now what’s happened, is that they’ve not only become more of a global menace, they’re starting to do enormous damage to Pakistan, to the state and I would argue to the religion of Islam. I don’t see it changing. I don’t see the kind of response that Pakistan needs to be making to this. They went into Swat, they got the Taliban out of Swat, but they they really haven’t gone farther than that. I don’t think they’ve really made up their minds that this is a real existential threat to their viability as a modernizing and moderate Muslim society in the modern world. I don’t think they’ve come to that conclusion yet. so I hope they do and I hope books like mine and reporting that’s being done there maybe they know it underneath but they haven’t really begun to act on it yet.

I want to talk a little bit more about the idea of who gets involved in these things. I talked about the people who were praising the killing of this governor and I want to go back for a minute to this chapter called Drones. I call the chapter Drones not only because of the drone attacks but I’m referring also to suicide bombers when I talk about drones. You put someone on automatic pilot and he or she’s willing to go out and kill him or herself in the name of religion. and I particularly focus on the case of Faizal Shazad. Because Faizal Shazad a upper middle class kid from a military family, his father was a senior, senior official in the Pakistani air force. He was not a particularly good student, but he was sent to the United States as many wealthy children are from Pakistan. He got an undergraduate degree, and then a graduate degree he was working in business administration. He had a job. He was living in Connecticut, he has a wife, they had bought a house, they were starting a family. He was having some financial problems he was having a few things go wrong with his life. But what really happened was he started going on the internet and got on some websites that were calling for radical Jihad and he started to get these ideas in his head. And what I say in the book is what’s really frightening about him is that this notion that he got, he sort of bought into that whole narrative of the West is our enemy, the West is trying to destroy Islam. A narrative that went exactly against the experience of his own life. He had the ideal...when I first started going to Pakistan in the late nineties, you went to the US embassy, there’s be thousands of people waiting in the parking lot for their interview to get a visa to go to the United States either to study or to go to work. It was the ideal that everybody was reaching for. And somehow that all changed. Somehow you had a young man who up until recently would have been the envy of his peers suddenly...
thinking that he should bomb Times Square. I’m trying to look at these cases. This is not a member of Al Qaeda, this is a privileged young man from what could arguably been called the most successful part of his country and yet somehow, he was persuaded by the Internet, by these Jihad websites, by going back to Pakistan and being recruited by radical groups, within two years changed from a business student in Connecticut to an extreme radical man who tried to bomb New York City. Again, this worries me greatly, this worries me more than Al Qaeda, this worries me more than these sort of abstract fears that we have of that kind of thinking taking over the world, because I see how easy it is for people to get caught up in it. I see people who have what I call this emotional attachment to their religion, there’s nothing wrong with that. What’s wrong with it is when it becomes, when it starts morphing into a justification for violence. That’s when it worries me greatly.

And I want to talk about one more issue and that is the issue of sectarianism and hatred. There have been sectarian issues throughout Pakistan’s history. There have been Sunni, Shia conflicts there’s a Christian minority there that’s always struggled, but it wasn’t really until recently that it began getting so bad as bad as it is now. And my argument is that when you starting fomenting hatred against the other, whether he’s a Shiite, or whether he’s a Christian, or whether he’s an Ahmadi, you’re fomenting hatred in general, it’s all part of the same problem. And what we’re seeing now in Pakistan, and I have a whole chapter on this problem. They’re starting to fire bomb Sufi shrines. I love Sufi shrines I’ve been to as many I could possibly go to in Pakistan because women aren’t usually allowed to go to mosques. So whenever I want to sort have a religious sort of scene, or feeling or time, I can walk into any Sufi shrine and nobody even blinks. They’re like these wonderful places, sort of free-for-alls, people go they have picnics, they sing, they dance, they pray, they eat, they talk to their ancestors. It’s just a lovely, lovely experience. There are these big, big pavilions. There is free food, there is a carnival atmosphere, often. But there is also a very contemplative and respectful atmosphere, very, very inclusive. Opposite of Wahabi Salafi Islam which is very exclusive, very insular. That’s why I like the Sufis not only because they’re mystical, but because they’re inclusive.

So I’ll just tell you one story of something that happened. And I think there may be some people in this room who know a lot more about it than I do. There was an incident in a working class neighborhood near Lahore which is one of my most favorite, most beautiful cities, a couple of years ago. It was a community that was mostly Sunni Muslim, but there was also a large communities of Ahmadis. Ahmadis are a minority Muslim sect which is officially reviled and ostracised by the Sunni majority and Sunnis believe that they’re not really Muslim and there’s this constant debate and discussion about it and they’re looked down upon by many Sunnis. But they had coexisted peacefully in this community as in many other communities for a very long time. They weren’t buddies, but they had more or less coexisted peacefully. In addition to which, some of the best educators in the community were ahmadis and there was a very good little school there. An elementary school that was run by and ahmadi educator, he’d been the principal there for many many years. So a couple of years ago a radical Mullah from the Northwest came to the community, set up a new mosque and started preaching that the Ahmadis were devils, that they ate babies, that they were non Muslim, and there’s a phrase that I can never say correctly in Urdu that means, ‘ought to be killed, deserve to die’. And they were spreading, and spreading, and spreading this poison. And so what happened was people started looking at their neighbors differently. Started crossing the street when they walked by, stopped greeting them. Started questioning whether they were Muslims, starting questioning whether they had a right to live in their own neighborhood. And finally inevitably, of course, it happened. And two young guys on motor bikes drove by and shot the school principal to death. Many of the Muslim leaders’ of that community’s children had gone to that school. Again, this is totally irrational, this is totally emotional. It’s emotion that I worry about more than anything else. It’s how you can start hating a neighbor you’ve known for thirty years. It happens in many places. It’s happened in many if not all of the holocausts that we’ve seen
throughout the world. And I fear that it’s starting to happen in Pakistan in all of these different ways. There have been a number of atrocities against Christians in the past few years and I’ve been to those communities as well. There’s been much more Sunni, Shia violence going on. I see it as all part of a piece. I’m worried about ordinary Pakistanis getting swept up into this sort of hyper-emotional identification especially with Sunni Islam which is such an easy leap into the arms of people who are truly evil and who truly do believe in violent global jihad.

I think I’m going to stop there I don’t know how long I’ve been talking, but I really do want to have a conversation with everybody here, answer you questions, or just take your comments. There’s a lot more to talk about but I’d rather just use the rest of the time to have more of a dialogue if that’s alright with you.

Ian Moncaster

Each of you received as you came in a small card if you can start filling those cards out, volunteers will collect them, they’ll be passed forward and we’ll get you into the conversation. My goal is to get as many of you into the conversation as I can.

You started out talking about obviously some very very hard topics and when I look at Britain for example which had some very hard economic times. One of the things that changed there, was there was a way in which Margaret Thatcher was able to allow people who lived in the row houses to effectively buy into the local economy, have a stake in the local business world and my question is related to where does economic development fit in here? Is there a way that were the economy to turn around, this would start to ameliorate?

Pamela Constable

Absolutely, absolutely. As I’ve said many times in talking about my work, Pakistan has enormous economic potential, it’s got good infrastructure, it’s got great highways, it’s got a huge factory sector, it’s got lots and lots of people willing to work, it’s got very good land, it’s got a huge administrative service, it has this large army, it’s got all the government intuitions, it’s a real place, it’s a real country. It’s a real state. The problem is, I mentioned, I don’t want to go over old ground, but the diversion of funds into military instead of social spending, number one. Number two the state is weak it’s had weak leadership. It’s not been able, because corruption is so enormous, you have this culture of nobody likes to pay taxes. It’s very hard for the government in Pakistan collect taxes because nobody believes they’re going to be used for services. So you get this vicious cycle of, this culture of scoff-lawism. The amount of revenue collected by the state is probably only twenty-five percent of what it should be. So that’s another problem. You’ve also had a problem of too many rapid successions and interventions in government, so you haven’t really had any individual government able to carry out economic policies in a rational, sustained way for a long period of time. They keep reinventing themselves all the time, so that’s another problem. And also they have a lot of difficulty with climate, with drought, they have a lot of desert areas. As I say they have big problems with water and irrigation. So there are a lot of reasons why they haven’t been able to develop as much as they should. They’ve got terrible problems with exports. They’ve got a big fight with the United States over textile exports. Textiles are the number one export in Pakistan. They need a lot of help with that. I was thinking, there was a guy. I can’t remember if he was killed very recently. There was an American in Pakistan a couple of months ago. I am sorry I do forget, he was either killed or kidnapped, but at any point, when I read his profile about him in the newspaper, he had spent the past seven years in Pakistan doing exactly the kind of things that people need to be doing there. Working on irrigation projects to improve irrigation for small farmers and working to prop up the textile export industry, exactly what Pakistan needs. And whoever, presumably some radical group decided that he’s the enemy of Pakistan. It just breaks my heart. I’m sorry for the
man, but I’m even more sorry for the thinking that went into killing him.

**Ian Moncaster**

This is a question from the audience. You’ve spoken a couple different times about the enormous economic potential and you’ve also talked about essentially the rule of law. And the rule of law makes it difficult for people to be able to see the future, and know that there’s going to be economic justice in the event of a conflict. Can you talk a little bit about the enormous potential, what could be there and the corollary of that is what are the biggest things that need to get put in place to allow that to happen? Rule of law is a big deal.

**Pamela Constable**

Rule of law absolutely. Again because corruption is so widespread and because people don’t trust the system, what happens is that everybody tries to find a way to go around it. Everybody becomes complicit in evading and avoiding and defying the law and so if something is wrong, you don’t go to the police because all they want is a bribe. You don’t go to the mayor because all he wants is a bribe. You go to your own personal political patron whether it’s your landlord, or your tribal leader, or you political representative, somebody that you can get to come down on your side. The system doesn’t function because it’s not trusted so therefore it stymies what you call a sort of dynamic and forward looking relationship. A lot of the money just doesn’t go anywhere, it gets siphoned off. Pakistan is fertile, it produces mangoes, it produces cotton, it’s got a very good textile industry that was set up, I’ve been in many of the mills, they have excellent machines. It produces all sorts of important things, medical instruments, volley balls, shoes, it’s got great industrial capacity, great agricultural capacity. It’s all there. Pakistan feeds itself, it exports wheat and sugar to poorer countries. It’s not a basket case. It’s stymied by poor leadership, political stagnation and the inability to follow through on policies that would really get their economy jump started in one direction or another.

**Ian Moncaster**

How much of their economy is based on domestic consumption and how much is based on export, any sense?

**Pamela Constable**

I’ve forgotten, you know, a hundred and eighty million people consume a lot of stuff, but it’s an export based economy. Exports of textiles and other things are absolutely critical for the economy.

**Ian Moncaster**

And what’s the role of remittances, from the Middle East back into Pakistan?

**Pamela Constable**

Remittances? Well, not only from the Middle East, but also from the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, my god, those are even bigger pockets of remittances, although there a lot of people working in the Gulf as well. That’s extremely important for Pakistan, I don’t know the percentage. It’s not only the remittances, it’s the black economy. These are untaxed, there’s lots of money flowing around, whether it’s remittances, whether it’s in formal economy but it’s not getting into the system. It’s not leading to the building of things. It may help you and it may help me but it’s not adding value to the economy.
Ian Moncaster

We have a question here that goes back to the question of lawyers. Where you in the country when the lawyers essentially went on strike?

Pamela Constable

Indeed, One of the highlights of my experience there was...

Ian Moncaster

Could you talk about the civil society’s taking to the streets, not the average population, you’re not talking about people here, you’re talking about highly educated lawyers taking to the streets because they’d had it.

Pamela Constable

Yeah, it was a very exciting time for everyone in Pakistan. It was a very exciting time. It started as a movement to get rid of President Musharraf who was a military ruler it started 2005,6,7 in there. A number of lawyers started demonstrating in the streets it was sort of this spontaneous pro-democracy that sprang up. They were all sort of self-conscious about it, they all wore their black suits and they would go marching in the streets and they were very dignified and it was rather quaint in a way until they started getting tear-gassed and getting beaten up with sticks. But then it just kept going and going and going and it really snow-balled into this extraordinary movement for not only the restoration of democracy but the restoration of the independent judiciary This was a very exciting, really very idealistic thing to happen in a very cynical country. I don’t think anybody thought it could happen. But you had this snow-balling series of demonstrations and protests in the streets and it really caught on nation-wide and it caught on internationally as well And eventually Musharraf was forced to step down and not only that, later on, they were able to bring back the supreme court chief justice in this complicated fight he was having over elections. And bringing back that chief justice, I mean I was there, it was just an extraordinary, it was almost like being in the Philippines when Marcos fell because you have millions of people in the streets flocking toward the capitol and going actually to the house where the chief justice was under house arrest and thousands of people going towards the capitol, it’s a long story to tell. When we all got there, here’s this myopic, rather taciturn sort of man sitting in his house and his entire lawn is full of people dancing and singing and playing the bagpipes and drumming drums and candles. It was fabulous. It was a real moment and people were hugging and kissing each other and saying, ‘now Pakistan finally has democracy.’ It didn’t last but it was a nice moment and he is still the chief justice and he is still shaking things up. And like all things it ended up having some complicated aftermath, but it was a wonderful moment.

Ian Moncaster

But it didn’t last, but there were millions of people who were there supporting it. Can that be built upon in a political structure?

Pamela Constable

Yes, but it can only be built upon over time. One of the things that’s gone wrong since then, or rather that’s sort of failed to work is that the chief justice sort of took the whole thing upon himself. And he has been acting as an individual to try and change the whole court system, to try and right all the wrongs and he has taken on much too much. And the system has not really started to reform down at the low levels where it really needs to. He’s personally intervened in a lot of cases and
helped a lot of people, but it’s not a dictator ship, he’s not an emperor. He needs to spread around the justice. State justice in Pakistan needs to be improved, reformed and modernized so that people don’t turn to religious forms of justice.

Ian Moncaster

We have a series of questions here, some of them which are simply data points versus opinions, we’re going to push through a bunch of these on kind of a quick round. Relatively short answers and then we’ll get to some of the longer questions.

Osama Bin Laden, why did no one turn him in earlier for the twenty-five to fifteen million dollar bounty. Well I’m not sure anybody really knew where he was, he hadn’t been seen in a very long time, again. But the other thing to say about that is that Osama Bin Laden was a rather popular figure in Pakistan. He was seen as sort of an iconic, mystical leader. I went to many, many sermons on many Fridays in many mosques and people were talking about him and cursing the Americans for going after him. For a long time, he was a useful popular icon. As I said by the time they’d killed him, I think that had changed. He’d outlived that status. But for a very long time they didn’t want to touch him.

Ian Moncaster

Do you have any sense of how many deaths the so-called war on terror has brought to Pakistan?

Pamela Constable

Certainly many thousands. If you add up the drone attacks, if you add up the terrorist bombings, if you add up the military campaigns and operations in the Northwest tribal zones and in Swat, if you add up the many, many, many cases of attacks on civilians, on army, on police it’s certainly in the thousands, I would say approaching maybe ten thousand.

Audience 1

40,000

Pamela Constable

40,000?

Audience 1

40,000 plus

Ian Moncaster

We have a question around data with regard to Pakistani women attending mosques. Is this all Pakistani women, is it Sunis, is it Sufis, is it Shiites, is it Ahmadis, is it all? We’re looking for clarification.

Pamela Constable

It depends on looking at a particular group for example the more hard line groups that believe in the complete segregation of genders, the women would not be there at all. In many other cases, they are but they are in a different room or there is a curtain or there is a separate place where they worship
so they’re not in the exact same space and usually they are in a back room or a lesser room, they’re not actually seeing the preacher, they’re not actually hearing him as well. They are more sort of relegated to a lesser place. There’s really no place except for the shrines where men and women actually worship side by side.

Ian Moncaster

We have a series of questions about the US and Pakistan. And we’re going to try and pull a bunch of these together here. What do you see as the end result of the thousands of American advisers pouring into Afghanistan similar to what the US did in Honduras and Nicaragua?

Pamela Constable

Do you mean civilian or military?

Audience 2

Both

Ian Moncaster

Both

Pamela Constable

Well there are two different things. There’s economic and there’s military and both are controversial. There’s been this huge uproar in the past couple of years about who are they really, are they spies, are they CIA, are they working for Blackwater? Who are they really, are they really here to help us? There’s been a lot of controversy in the Pakistan Nationalistic Media accusing individuals of being spies when they’re not, in some cases they are. They’ve been identifications of people’s house, photos of their homes and addresses, actually saying that they are spies. There has been this huge uproar over a big military aid package from the US package because of serious corruption problems, the US wanted to send a large number of accountants and other administrators to keep track of the money and they expanded the embassy in part, the US embassy in Islamabad, in part to accommodate these people. But this was portrayed in the Nationalistic Media as a spy operation. They were marines and they were spies and they were building up a military fortress. So it’s been very complicated and messy and controversial but because of security problems, there’s a lot of restrictions of what people can do anyway in the field. In a way it’s almost backfired, you could say. And there is spying that goes on. There was this incident of this spy who was caught...

Ian Moncaster

American?

Pamela Constable

American spies in Pakistan. And there was this guy who was caught in Lahore who was spying. Again it got very murky and he killed two people who he said were following him. And then a third person also died in a sort of related accident. Then he was sent to jail. But because what he was doing was so sensitive, eventually the families of the victims basically got paid off and he was spirited back to America. It was very embarrassing and very awkward for everyone.

Ian Moncaster
How do you view that Pakistan, Pakistanis are misunderstood by policy makers in the US? Based on your experience, what advice would you give to policy makers in the US? And what’s missing in this equation of the US, Pakistan dialogue? So I guess the question is, does the US policy makers really understand what’s going on and what advice do you give them? Are you brought into those conversations based on your experience, formally or informally?

Pamela Constable

Right now I would say that it’s kind of hard to have any kind of conversation right now because the focus right now it’s all military. It’s all on terrorism, we got Osama, but the war in Afghanistan, and the war against terror is still very much dominating the American concern and preoccupation in Pakistan. It would be great if we could be having policy conversations about the water supply and about improving exports and maybe sort of trying to get a better relationship in trade. There are many many things that could and should be done but I’m afraid it all becomes subsumed by this greater concern and obsession with radical violent Islam and I think it’s sort of a monkey wrench in everything.

Ian Moncaster

We’ve got a series of questions here that tie back to the drones. Can you elaborate on your thoughts in terms of their impact. You talked previously about essentially the blowback on the American presence. Can you talk more about the drones and elaborate? I guess is what the question is.

Pamela Constable

Well the drone campaign started, it was rather small and intermittent. It was really not a serious problem, by which I mean it was not that known at the beginning and the number of strikes was very limited and the number of people killed was very limited. But now over the years, especially in the last three or four years, the drone campaign has become sort of probably the major American weapon in the war on terror in that region. Dozens and dozens and dozens of strikes, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people killed some of who were militant some of who were not, very hard to know the difference, you have this issue of people who live in villages and live in compounds and who’s a militant and who’s not.

Ian Moncaster

Can you make a distinction between Pakistan and Afghanistan are you referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan and when you say the region, the drone attacks?

Pamela Constable

The drone attacks are happening in Pakistan, they are not happening any place else. Other things are happening other places. But they’re coming from Afghanistan, from American bases in Afghanistan and elsewhere and they are very highly targeted against suspected militants who are either Al Qaeda, Taliban, or from other groups. And that’s been going on now for a number of years. But it’s much more than it used to be and they’ve been using this method more and more as the relationship between the Pakistan military intelligence establishment with the United States has fallen apart. The relationship is very bad now. Again, it’s a vicious cycle, the two establishments don’t trust each other, so weapons end up being used instead which makes it worse. I call the drone attacks a tactical success and a strategic disaster for the two countries.

Ian Moncaster
Do you think the use of these drones makes the global community safer? That’s a question from the audience.

**Pamela Constable**

I suppose it makes the world safer if they kill Baitullah Mehsud or Osama Bin Laden, but on the other hand as Pakistanis and Afghans always say, you kill one of them, you create a thousand more. How do you measure these things? You know that people are angry. If you look at all the poles, so many poles have been done in Pakistan asking people their opinions about things including opinions about the United States. You ask a Pakistani who is your country’s greatest enemy, they say the United States. They feel very very aggessed by us, rightly or wrongly.

**Ian Moncaster**

We’re going to switch this conversation to a series of questions related to Islam. I’m troubled that you put so much emphasis with Islam. Aren’t Pakistan’s problems much more complex: tension with India, economic, Kashmir, lack of education, culture and tradition?

**Pamela Constable**

Absolutely, as I said in the beginning, Pakistan has a wide variety of problems. I personally think that injustice is way up there...

**Ian Moncaster**

Injustice meaning?

**Pamela Constable**

In the list of things that people in Pakistan wish were better, I think justice is probably more important than a lot of the others. Everybody wishes there were better health, better education, people were desperate for jobs, I’ve talked about all these things, water, infrastructure. Many many many things are wrong. What I’ve found so many places people really feel they don’t have justice and that’s why they’re turning to religion than they have in the past I think because they think it offers a chance to have justice. Yes, Pakistan has lots of other problems, too. Pakistan has terrible ethnic divisions, and regional divisions, and linguistic divisions and sectarian divisions. It’s not a united country. It’s a country that has struggled from the very beginning to hold itself together. Ever since, the death of Jinnah. The founder of Pakistan died not long after the country was founded and it really never has had what you’d call adequate leadership since then. It’s really suffered greatly through these accidents of history.

**Ian Moncaster**

From the audience, do you think that the reasons why the democratic system have faltered are the same reasons we find in south America for example Nicaragua and Ecuador and then the corollary is that many say that Pakistan is always safer and better off when there is a military rule. What are you thoughts? The two sides of that.

**Pamela Constable**

those are both good questions to ask together because what I was about to say to the first one was well the reason that Pakistan does not develop strong civilian institutions is because the army keeps stepping in which has happened more in Bolivia than in Ecuador. But anyway, again, as I said
earlier, the fact that no individual administration in Pakistan has been able to complete its term without having somebody killed or being overthrown or have somebody step in or the army step in. It's been a very rocky and uneven political development. The institutions have remained weak, the parliament...The institutions exist but they’ve never really been allowed to function or to develop into a mature and stable system part of the reason is because the military remains so powerful it’s always in the wings. It is very highly regarded not only because it’s powerful, but because it’s efficient and because it’s much more merit-based than the civilian institutions are people really do respect the way that institution functions. I mean it’s hard to know what’s the chicken and what’s the egg because the army always says well the civilians are screwing up again so we’ll have to take over and then they take over and they make it worse, so...

Ian Moncaster

We’ve spoken a little bit about this maybe we can expand on it. Did you find any glimmers of hope in terms of by the institutions or the communities?

Pamela Constable

Absolutely, in fact I end my book on a very positive note deliberately for that reason. My final chapter is a profile of a man who is my personal hero, his name is Abdul Sattar Edhi. He’s in his eighties. He’s this amazing man who founded a free ambulance service for the poor many years ago. It has since grown into this amazing. I don’t want to call it empire, but mission to not only help the poor, but it’s an ideology he believes in empowering the poor. He’s very radical in a way, he’s an extraordinary man. He believes in empowering the poor and in shaming the rich and he never minces words, he’s said a lot of tough things to the Pakistani elites. And there are people like him, there are human rights lawyers, there are civic activists, there are very hard working people in education, NGOs all over the country, many of them not well known. Pakistan doesn’t have a lot of very well known public heroes, but it has a lot of small ones in places you’ve probably never of.

Ian Moncaster

We have a question from the audience, a little tangential, you talked about many small NGOs, are you the same Pam Constable with a rescue kennel in Afghanistan?

Pamela Constable

Yes, I started that a long time ago, we vaccinate and treat stray animals because no one else does.

Ian Moncaster

We spoke about glimmers of hope. What is the role of the middle class, you’ve spoken a little bit of the upper class by and large not wanting to pay taxes, political clout, you talked about in many respects parts of Pakistan where there is no real government, it’s more local control. What’s the role of the middle class in the development of Pakistan?

Pamela Constable

Well in the first place it isn’t big enough, I mean, that’s the real problem. There simply isn’t enough to go around. You have this vast underclass of people that never get anywhere and then you have this tiny elite on the top and in the middle you have people who are really struggling below where they should be. It’s very hard to get into college, it’s very hard to get a higher education. And when you do, there aren’t any jobs. I’ve talked to so many young men who’ve graduated from engineering colleges and other institutions in Pakistan. There's nothing for them to do. They end up
working selling mobile phones or driving taxis. The economy simply hasn’t developed enough. I always hat to compare Pakistan to India because Pakistanis don’t like to be compared to Indians, but if you look at what India’s done with its economy and its huge class of technically educated young people who have just sort of taken over the world. Pakistan has not been able to do this. It has not invested in building an educated middle class and it’s really suffering as a result. They all leave.

**Ian Moncaster**

What would it take when we go back and we look at what’s gone on in what’s called the Arab Spring, you look at the middle class that came out in Philippines, the middle class that came out in Haiti, the middle class that came out in some respects among the lawyers within Pakistan. Is it anywhere near a critical mass?

**Pamela Constable**

I don’t know, but I think that if there were to be another moment I think you’d see, I think people are waiting. People are afraid now. People are really, people by which I mean middle class, sort of middle of the road, I don’t want to use the word liberal, but moderate people are becoming more afraid to say that that’s what they are. They’re becoming more afraid to speak out and say what they think. Civil society is about this big and it’s mostly rich housewives, still. There is not a lot of sort of open, civic, public activism. India has an NGO for every square mile. India has a civic association for every block. India is so full of public life, you stumble over them in the streets, you can’t walk down the street without seeing a demonstration in India. It’s a much smaller, it’s a much more repressed society. You don’t have tanks in the streets, but people don’t...that’s why the lawyers movement was so unusual, it’s not a place where people pour out in the streets and try to fix things.

**Ian Moncaster**

One of the things that builds a middle class is education. What is the status of education? Is it mandatory? What percentage of the schools are madrases?

**Pamela Constable**

There are approximately twenty thousand religious seminaries in Pakistan. There are many many many more schools than that, by which I mean state schools, public schools.

**Ian Moncaster**

Religious seminaries meaning madrases?

**Pamela Constable**

Correct I’m just using a word that people would understand. The problem is that state schools are not very good. The reason that religious seminaries flourish is not only because they’re getting money from religious groups but because the public schools are so terrible especially in poor communities, and poor cities and in many villages, they’re empty shells with no teachers, no books. They are just there, somebody is getting a salary but no teaching is going on. In many villages girls aren’t allowed to go to school for cultural reasons and in the cities many schools simply don’t function. So what’s on paper and what’s actually offered in terms of learning are very very different.
Ian Moncaster

Keeping on this theme of the middle class. There is a very large American middle class, Americans of Pakistani origin. In certain contexts for example, the South Asian Indians have returned, they immigrated to this country, they went home to help build the country. The University of Washington is famous for having the Minister of Finance who was from Libya who’s gone back to Libya. There is a series of questions around the role of Americans of Pakistani origin helping to rebuild, helping to get involved and number two to tie it back to this question, around shedding light Americans of Pakistani origin serving in the American military in Afghanistan and the discrimination they face as a result of that. Have you done any work on the latter part?

Pamela Constable

No, I don’t very much about that. But I certainly know that there’s a huge diaspora, especially you mentioned, the UK, United States, Canada, Australia, the Gulf, but it’s not really middle class, it’s really more either upper class people send their kids to schools here or doctors, lots and lots of Pakistani doctors in the United States, they can’t get the research and the clinical opportunities, and the professional opportunities there so they come here, so that’s upper class. Then you have these poor guys that work in the Gulf in two hundred degree heat everyday, they’re lower class. I really don’t think there is a vast middle class emigre population just as there is really nowhere they really come from. But the question of them going back: I know a number of people who are from Pakistan who have gone home to do things like help with education, help with schools, help with health, there are a lot of people who do want to help their homeland there’s quite a bit of philanthropy from the ex. I was going to say from the exile, but from the emigre community. But again, it’s not enough. It’s not like India, people don’t come here get a medical degree and say great, I’m going to go back to Bangalore or Hyderabad there’s really no equivalent. Pakistan doesn’t really have a place for them to go. The opportunities aren’t there yet for the brain drain to become brain gain yet.