TV Paul: “Pakistan: In Comparative Perspective”

Professor TV Paul of McGill University, and author of the recently published *The Warrior State,* spoke on the complexities of Pakistan and the challenges that arise when studying such a complicated country. His major goal was to explain Pakistan’s security predicament; over its 66-year history, Pakistan has been excessively focused on military preparedness to the detriment of other goals. He made his intentions to not blame Pakistan, or present their struggles in a negative light, clear and hoped to offer an objective perspective on their domestic, regional and international situation.

Professor Paul emphasized long-term trends, asserting that Pakistan as a developing country wrongly adhered to the European Experience school of thought that followed the model made famous by Charles Tilly that the state made war and war made the state. In this model, states go through a multi-stage process in which they eliminate external rivals, suppress or pacify of internal enemies, extract sufficient resources through taxation, and strengthen pacts made with various social groups. Today, this model is counterproductive and assimilation of different groups economically and socially has become more important than conflict. Pakistan has focused too strongly on national security and military development instead of taking the more civil society-focused approach of developing countries in Latin American. Pakistan’s military preparedness has led it to be under military rule for half of its existence. The military infrastructure supports the Afghan Taliban and it has also developed 110 nuclear weapons. The military is involved in every business and retired military personnel are given the top “private sector” jobs. Pakistan consistently ranks near the top of the Failed State Index; the government’s control of the Northwest Frontier Province is tenuous at best. It was also among least internationally competitive and among the least globalized countries in the world.

Still, he noted that there have been some “silver linings” to the Pakistan experience. There was a move towards peace with India when the Sharif transition occurred, and for the first time, the U.S. also opened up trade talks with Pakistan. The military is also remaining in its barracks more than it has in the past. There are also greater efforts at economic integration including a trade deal with the European Union. For now at least, Afghanistan is also holding together.

The next part of Professor Paul’s talk focused on two questions: 1) Why is Pakistan weak despite its national security focus? and 2) Why have the policies introduced only led to short-term positive results? First, he analyzed the structural elements in combination with the agency of individual decision-makers. He then looked to Pakistan’s “geostrategic curse” of occupying a geostrategically important location that operates much like having a large oil supply. The position encourages great powers to interfere in Pakistani politics in order to bolster their larger position, which leads to significant amounts of economic aid. The elite class controls the aid money funneled into the country from abroad preventing other institutions from being enhanced and brought to their full potential. Likewise, economically advantageous policies such as land reform human development are not fully pursued. Pakistan is extremely reliant on aid money to run the country and the bureaucracy because the government collects very little taxes. Less than two percent of people pay income taxes, only 2.5 million people are registered to pay income tax, and only 0.7% have paid income tax in the past. Compared to government revenue, aid amounts are very large and Pakistan is very reliant on maintaining good relations with the U.S. to ensure money from the U.S. and their allies continues to come into the country. This geostrategic curse also has an adverse effect on democracy, undermines the development of a middle class and encourages patron-client relationships.

Unlike its rival India, Pakistan does not have a strong middle class and therefore has not experienced the economic boom that India has. They also lack a civil society and are very divided, but there is not much external pressure for this to change as aid money is more dependent on military than civil concerns. Professor Paul explained that Pakistan has taken much longer than developing countries such as China, Taiwan and Korea to reach a point of economic development. After 66 years, as opposed to China’s 20 and Korea’s and Taiwan’s 40, Pakistan still is behind. Going forward, transforming civil structures and maintaining more peaceful relations with India are central to bringing about change in Pakistan. He concluded by arguing that to be truly strong Pakistan must adopt a Trading State mentality rather than always prioritize security considerations.