# Foreword

History, it has been remarked, has no favourites. It is in the character of the nation-state that each people believe themselves privileged, in some sense 'chosen', but the enterprise of nationhood is fraught with risk, constantly under threat, and it is renewed only through relentless vigilance and striving. Across South Asia, nations see the promise and optimism of freedom and independence dissipated, as they spiral into disorder, skirting failure. The progressive entrenchment of the predatory state and of irresponsible kleptocracies in government has created wide spaces for rising ideologies of political extremism and violence.

This has, moreover, proven to be an age of grand delusions and of feeble power. Pakistan has engaged in the most extraordinary strategic overreach, and is now crumbling against wave after wave of 'blowback'. It continues, nevertheless, to sponsor terrorism – though it has taken fitful action against groups regarded as inimical to Pakistani or US interests. The bulk of the *sarkari* (state supported) terrorist cohorts, however, continue to enjoy substantial freedom of operation, and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) remains the most significant terrorist organization – operating through numerous proxies – in South Asia. The footprint of most major acts of international terrorism – from South East Asia, through South and Central Asia, into the heart of Europe, and beyond, to American shores – has inexorably been traced back to Pakistani soil, to entities with shadowy links with the state's premier covert agency, the ISI.

Bangladesh has steadily been drawn into Pakistan's web of machinations. There has been continuous evidence of official support to terrorist organizations in India's Northeast and to the growth of Islamist extremism within Bangladesh itself. More recently, there has been the abrupt appearance of evidence of operational coordination between Bangladeshi and Pakistani Islamist terrorist organizations, including joint terrorist modules

executing attacks in India. Bangladesh is also increasingly a victim of the monster of its own creation, but, as with Pakistan, complex structures of incentives and disincentives keep the political elites tied to Islamist extremism and to the collusive arrangement they have created with terrorist groups, even while there is a growing recognition that these forces constitutes the gravest danger to their own and the country's political future.

Political collusion with violent radicals – though to a far lesser degree than the direct sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan and Bangladesh – is a fact of life in most of the countries in South Asia. Worse, regimes across the region have abdicated the fundamentals of governance in wide areas of their territory, ceding these areas to disorder and violence, and abandoning their populations to terror. Reacting to rising waves of violence, or to a widening of the theatres of violence, states within the region have alternated between harsh military responses and craven appeasement, and the record of successes has been poor. False 'peace processes' have become a dominant – and globally approved – fashion, though they have contributed, essentially and overwhelmingly, to the consolidation and legitimization of terrorist forces. These processes are compounded with a range of false 'solutions' that are conjured with unfailing regularity, often by outside powers with little or no stakes in the region's future, or by meretricious local players, even while the enterprise of terrorism is allowed to thrive.

Against these sweeping developments, small islands of economic progress are engaged in a desperate race against time. A continuous extension of these islands offers a possible, though necessarily partial, strategy for the containment of violence – but this is contingent on the restoration of lawful governance in vast and growing areas of neglect. An understanding of structures of society, politics, governance, and of complex interdependencies in the architecture of regional and global relations, consequently, becomes central to the struggle for a stable and secure future, free from terror, in South Asia. *Faultlines* remains an abiding exploration of elements of these structures.

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