

**Pakistan On The Brink: The future of Pakistan,
Afghanistan and the West by Ahmed Rashid.
Allen Lane 2012.**

Author photos often speak as loud as the words in the books they have written, and that of Ahmed Rashid is a perfect example of this truth. The author looks down at the camera, his brow furrowed and lips taugth within a grey beard. The expression in his eyes is one of deep anxiety – for his family? His friends? His country? Perhaps all of the above.

In Pakistan on the Brink, Rashid returns to the most familiar of grounds, and in the course of nine chapters reviews the current plight of Pakistan, whether this is a result not just of contemporary error but historical events, and looks to the future with the most disturbing clarity. The chapter headings are: Osama and Obama, Legacy and Inheritance; Pakistan in Crisis; Pakistan: Who Betrayed Whom?; Afghanistan: The First Surge and the Failure of Elections; Afghanistan: Political and Military Fault Lines; Afghanistan: Talking to the Taliban; A Sliver of Hope: Counterinsurgency in Swat; Pakistan: Broken Relations, Crimes and Misdemeanours; Changing the Narrative – or Preparing for the Worst.

Western politicians often justify the ISAF presence in Afghanistan as being one of the ways in which we protect ourselves from Islamist terrorism on our own soil, but it is hard to read Pakistan on the Brink without concluding that the greater threat lies with Pakistan rather than its troublesome neighbour.

In the decades that have passed since Pakistan's independence it has repeatedly failed to sort out any of the problems that beset it – endemic corruption, obsession with the perceived military threat from India, the internal threat of extremism and radicalism, the shady behaviour of the ISI, its secret service, and the woeful failure of its governing classes to govern.

Pakistan on the Brink is highly informative and right up to date, but it is a disturbing read nevertheless. Many journalists who express criticism in Pakistan find themselves on the wrong side of the law, or dead; in the circumstances Ahmed Rashid is a man whose courage matches his integrity.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh