



ANALYZING PAKISTAN’S SLIDE INTO EXTREMISM

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The recent horrifying terrorist attack in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, by TTP, which killed 132 children in Army Public School, certainly compels us to think about the future of Pakistan. There have been endless acts of violence and terror and the nation has become a breeding ground for terrorism. The extremist elements within Pakistan, have taken a much stronger footing than ever before, posing a threat to the very existence of the Pakistani state. Post 9/11, following Pakistan’s engagement in the US led war on terror, the nation has experienced a blossoming of terrorist networks, not only on its frontier boundaries, but in the heart of the state where the extremist elements have managed to penetrate the outfits of all the three forces, not omitting the Army headquarters.

Did Pakistan become a prey to extremism just as a fallout of its involvement in the war on terror in the last decade? The answer is clearly ‘no’. Pakistan today is actually facing the blowback of its own policies which it has believed in and pursued in the last five decades. Pakistan’s reliance on terrorism as foreign policy tool is indeed responsible for its drift into extremism. The state has shared varying relationship with Islam during different regimes

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Background

Pakistan was born as a demand for a separate homeland for Muslims as the All India Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah strongly argued that Muslims had a special identity which would not be able to survive in a Hindu dominated society, thus a separate homeland for Muslims was the only solution. But Jinnah’s dream was

quite different from what Pakistan actually transformed into.

Jinnah’s dream was a secular state where the Muslim culture and social norms could be promoted. But, Pakistan, over the decades completely drifted away from Jinnah’s spirit. Pakistan never inherited a uniform vision, and many of Pakistan’s political elites were uncertain about the role of

Islam in defining the nations’ constitutional foundations.¹ It took the policy-makers close to a decade to formalise the Constitution of Pakistan which dissolved Jinnah’s spirit of secular Islam. Lack of clarity on the role of Islam provided the political and military leadership ample space to exploit the factor of religion to serve its strategic interests over the decades.

The Beginning of the Ideological Drift and Pakistan's War for Kashmir

The factor of religion became a most critical one in Pakistan's strategic security. Pakistan launched the first war for Kashmir in 1947-48 in the name of 'tribal revolt'. The Pakistan Army, with the consent of the political leadership, invoked the tribesmen and the retired and serving army officers in the name of jihad, to raid and seize Kashmir. Islam was leveraged at the very beginning of the state itself to respond to the Indian threat. The government in Pakistan called on religious scholars to issue supportive *fatwas* (religious decrees).² The importance of the 1947-48 aggression was that it laid the basic guidelines for the future aggression by Pakistan. This was the beginning of use of religion to forward the state policies and also conduct covert operations backed by the full fledged support by the military.

Internally, Jinnah's dream of a pluralistic society was being challenged and in the early 1950s there were street protests calling for declaration that Ahmadis were non Muslims.³ In 1974, Ahmadis were officially declared non-Muslims through a constitutional amendment. Thus, religion became an important factor for political groups to lead in the power struggle. Unequal rights on the basis of sects, gender became prevalent. On the external front, the Pakistan army's covert activities expanded in Jammu and Kashmir after the 1962 India-China War. A close study of the covert activities indicates that the factor of religion started to gain momentum in the 1960s.

In 1964, Pakistan developed a strategy that came to be known as *Operations Gibraltar*, which was a covert operation that received little success and support from Kashmiris. Pakistan's failure in 1965 to achieve its objectives aggravated Pakistan's reliance on religion to further its objectives in Kashmir. In the late 1960s, a new set of jihadis emerged, deriving their inspiration from left wing anti-imperialist struggles.

Dismemberment of Pakistan and Bhutto's Islamic Socialism

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Pakistan witnessed the rising image of the military in the

eyes of the people. Ayub's successor, General Yahya Khan, talked about the Islamic identity of Pakistan and kept defence at the top of its agenda. The military's role expanded, and also political and ethnic tensions increased, eventually leading to the break-up of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh. However, the most critical development was the evolution of Pakistan's grand strategy after 1971 war. The grand strategy incorporated two important objectives which decided the future course of action for the Pakistani leadership:

First, to expand territory eastward (take Kashmir). This implied rise in covert activities in J&K and added emphasis on radical Islam in the name of jihad. Thus, terrorism to be adopted as a foreign policy tool. Second, to expand control westward (to gain leverage in Kabul). This implied creating strategic depth in Afghanistan and also facilitating a Pakistan friendly governance.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed re-emergence of Islam as a potent global force starting with Saudi Wahhabi spread of ideology. Bhutto took forward the idea of *Islamic Socialism* and thus enforced Islam as a major factor in statecraft. Bhutto's Islamic Socialism was considered insincere and it was seen more to establish the non Indian identity of Pakistan.⁴ In 1976, Bhutto appointed Zia-ul-Haq as the new Army Chief and allocated him the responsibility

to Islamize the Pakistan Army. It was during this period that "Jihad" was included as the motto for Pakistan Army apart from "Iman" and "Taqwa".

General Zia's Pursuit of Islamisation

General Zia systematically reinforced the *Islamisation of Pakistan* and his vision came out very clearly in his words: "Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country."⁵

Zia introduced 'Islamic Reforms' in various aspects of the Pakistani society and economy and Islamic practices in day to day life were made mandatory by the state. Pakistan Army in this period developed close links with the various Islamist groups and religion was used more and more in strategic thinking. Zia, in the process of reinforcing the Islamization of Pakistan and

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introducing Islamic reforms, allowed the Tablighi Jama'at (an Islamic missionary society) to operate freely within the Army. The Islamist parties and especially Tablighi Jama'at linked to the Deobandi tradition got much more access to the military officials.

As Zia endeavoured to Islamise the Pakistan Army during the 1980s, adherence to Islamic practices emerged as a major criteria for selection in the Army. According to Zia, a soldier had to be a true Muslim before he takes the responsibility of defending the Islamic Republic. The state was now being run on values interpreted on the basis of religion. The number of mosques increased in the country. The education system was deeply influenced and Islamiat and Pakistan studies became compulsory for B.A, Engineering, Medical, Commerce and Law students.

It was during this process of *Islamisation* that the Afghan War, following the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, came to being and totally altered the dynamics of Pakistan's political, military and strategic policies. The most significant developments as the outcome of Afghan war were:

The acquisition of nuclear capability in the late 1980s further enhanced Pakistan's capability and will to wage and escalate the covert war in Kashmir as nuclear weapons were believed to deter India from conventional military retaliation.

1. The US war in Afghanistan led to structural and organizational development of the factor of *religion in war*. The soldiers for war were being trained to fight in a "holy war" in the name of God. The declaration of "jihad" in Afghanistan led to the legitimized structural development of institutions preparing young fighters. Religious belief made the Mujahideen formidable warriors to defeat.⁶

2. *Pakistan* became a training ground for the guerilla fighters. The leadership agreed to support the guerrilla warfare with arms, ammunition, money, intelligence, training and operational advice. Pakistan offered the border areas of the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) as a secure base for the Mujahideen guerrilla fighters.⁷

3. The US intelligence services followed a strategy of supplying enormous amounts of arms and ammunition to Mujahideen leaders and commanders in the field.

4. The development of the narcotics trade on the frontier borders of Pakistan flourished with CIA assistance to fund the covert operations.

Rise in Terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s

In Kashmir, in the 1980s, religious resurgence coupled with increasing alienation of the youth for diverse reasons started to grow in Kashmir and Pakistan's strategy of covert war through terrorism began to concretize. What was happening in Afghanistan and also simultaneously in Punjab in India (with Pakistan's active assistance), had direct impact on the valley. In the late 1980s and 1990s Pakistan became much more active in sponsoring terrorism in J&K.

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Policy makers in Pakistan seem to be convinced that they will be able to carry on or rather accelerate their activities in Kashmir with the threat of using nuclear weapons if required and this would control India's strategic moves in the valley. This thought process seems to be have grown with Pakistan's "first use policy".

In the 1990s, after Zia's death, economic downslide started,

jihadi culture took firm roots and the democratic regimes between 1988 and 1999 were unstable and changed frequently. The ISI became an important centre of power on account of its role in the Afghan war and its involvement with the Americans. Although the fundamentalists and Islamists appeared to have lost in the elections, their influence continued to grow, especially among the intelligence agencies, military officers and emerging middle class in Pakistan.

The leadership in Pakistan intensified its terrorist activities on the Indian soil through their proxies and anti-India terrorist organisations became much more active not only in the valley, but also in other parts of India. The largest state sponsored parties which received (and till date receive) state patronage and funding were LeT, JeM, Harkat-ul-Mujahidden (HuM) and Harkat-al-Jihad-al-Islami (HJI).

On the Western front, Pakistan was keen to create its strategic depth in Afghanistan and not to have a hostile government. The Army, ISI, along with the political leadership came together to support a new class of warriors – *Taliban*. In 1994,

Afghanistan saw the outbreak of Taliban, which was composed of the younger generation of Pakistani-Afghans. Taliban were mainly the Afghans who grew in the Pakistani refugee camps and were products of Madrassas which were encouraged during Zia's time and were funded by the Saudi money. The Pakistani leadership extended full-fledged support to Taliban and added to their strength from Pakistani Madrassas. Taliban began to take over one province after another in Afghanistan and brought the whole of Afghanistan under their control in less than five years.⁸

Post 9/11

Post 9/11, following Pakistan's third alliance with the US, General Musharraf attempted to project a path of moderation and publicly announced on 12 January 2002, that Pakistani territory will not be used for (jihadi) terrorism. In 2004, he announced his plea for *Enlightened Moderation*, which could provide an answer to Pakistan's identity and its relationship with Islam. Defining Enlightened Moderation he said:

"The strategy of enlightened moderation ... is a two-pronged strategy. One prong is to be delivered by the Muslim world itself by shunning militancy and extremism and adopting the path of socioeconomic uplift to achieve its own emancipation. The other prong is meant to be delivered by the West, and the United States in particular, to determinedly resolve with justice all political disputes in which Muslims are engaged and also assist in the socioeconomic betterment of the deprived Muslim world."⁹

Although Musharraf talked about the moderate, secular path which included rejection of extremism, but the actual strategies which military pursued were certainly not in sync with the announced – Enlightened Moderation. The military regime came under immense pressure by the American administration to act against the terrorist organisations. Military's efforts to counter terrorism and insurgency in the tribal belt failed to provide results. The Military's partial and selective approach towards the war on terror has been largely responsible for rising extremism and flourishing insurgency on Pakistan's frontier borders – KPK and FATA.

Military has been selective and unwilling to touch the outfits it views as serving their strategic interests such as, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. Also, the top leadership of Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban continued to receive state support.

Talibanisation

The Taliban insurgency began as early as 2002 when the Al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban fighters were flushed out of Afghanistan by the US Armed forces. In 2007, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged as an entity in the context of a series of military operations (that took place post 9/11) in FATA as well as U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strikes in FATA. TTP has adopted a strictly anti-state and specifically anti-military agenda and has been conveying its message by consistently attacking the government/military offices. TTP draws its ideological supervision from al-Qaeda, and al-Qaeda relies on TTP for a safe haven in the FATA. This mutual cooperation gives TTP access to both al-Qaeda's global terrorist network and the operational experience of its members. Given the proximity of the two groups it would not be inappropriate to say the TTP is a force multiplier for al-Qaeda.¹⁰ TTP has adopted an anti-state posture and has claimed responsibility for most of the terrorist attacks including assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The organisation is growing in influence among young and unemployed youth and is using *Sharia* to promote its political and ideological agenda.

Conclusion

Presently, Pakistan is facing a broad landscape of militancy. A variety of terrorist groups with varying agenda operate from Pakistan and share varied relationships with the state. Some of these organisations like the TTP regard the state as an enemy of Islam for joining hands with the West and killing their own people. On the other side, are deadly groups like the JuD, which are flourishing in the heart of Pakistan and are under state patronage. Pakistan military and the ISI have nurtured the terrorist organisations which it categorically grades as their "strategic assets" and is clearly not willing to act against them.

The frontier borders - FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have become the breeding ground for terrorists. Al-Qaeda, Haqqani and Taliban have established their sanctuaries in these areas. Insurgency in Baluchistan, which became active in 2004, aggravated much more after killing of Akbar Bugti in 2007. Added to this deadly mix of extremist organisations is the TTP, which has posed real danger to the state and they are, in a way, an extension of Sunni Deobandi militancy. The Pakistani Taliban has absorbed members of radical Sunni organisations. This has also further exaggerated the problem of Shia-Sunni violence not only on the tribal belt but also in other parts of Pakistan.

Jihadi militancy in Pakistan today is an outcome of the policies and strategies the state has adopted over the past five decades. Religion has remained central to Pakistan in conducting its state policies at the domestic level and also at the strategic level. But the interpretation of Islam has varied under different regimes. Jinnah talked about a secular Islam, Bhutto endorsed Islamic socialism and under Zia, religion found the most radical expression. Zia cultivated a venomous strain of Islamic ideology in Pakistan. In 2004, Musharraf announced 'Enlightened Moderation', which is a moderate interpretation of Islam, but the military continued to support radical terror outfits which it feels are essential to fulfil its strategic objectives. The strategic calculus for the Pakistani leadership unfortunately remains unchanged, with its continued belief in terrorism legitimised by religion as a foreign policy tool. Pakistan certainly needs to identify the nature of relationship with Islam it wants to endorse. Consistent contradictions in theory and practice would continue to escalate extremism and militancy in the state.

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Notes

- ¹Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (London, Foundation Books, 2009), p. 5.
- ² Ziad Haider, "Ideological Adrift", ed. Maleeha Lodhi, *Pakistan Beyond the Crisis State* (New Delhi, Rupa Publications, 2011) p. 116.
- ³ Ahmedis are followers of an alleged nineteenth century messiah called Mirza Ghulam Ahmed.
- ⁴ See, Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005) p.170.
- ⁵ "General Zia ul-Haq 's Address to the Nation on July 5, 1977", quoted in Hasan Askari Rizvi, *The Military and Politics in Pakistan 1947-1986*, (Lahore, Progressive Publishers, 1986), pp. 289-93.
- ⁶ Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf and Major Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, (Lahore, Jang Publishers, 1992) p. 32.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 49.
- ⁸ Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift Into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror*, (New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p.155.
- ⁹ Speech by General Musharraf, "OIC Challenge and Response: Enlightened Moderation", 1 June 2004, at <http://president.musharraf.wordpress.com/2005/01/18/musharraf-oic-enlightened-moderation/>
- ¹⁰ "Tehrik-e-Tliban Is a Terror Group", *VOANEWS.com Policy*, July 9, 2010, at <http://www.voanews.com/policy/editorials/Tehrik-e-Taliban-Is-A-Terror-Group-102393269.html>



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