

Will Pakistan's Military Operation in Waziristan end Radicalism?

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Pakistan has initiated decisive military action against Islamist militants in North Waziristan with the aim to eliminate all militants from the country. This is a commendable goal but is unlikely to be successful since military operations *per se* cannot eradicate the mindset that fosters radicalism. Instead, military initiatives need to be supplemented with new, factual, religious, historical and cultural narratives to replace the flawed narratives that have been force-fed to generations since the country's inception. While there is little doubt that the military operation can flush out the militants in a relatively short time, serious concerns exist about the political will –and government ability– to construct the religious, historic and cultural narratives that can help change the ideological landscape and prevent radical ideologies from taking hold in the society.

The Munir Commission Report (1953) identified many of the insurmountable difficulties associated with developing factual narratives: Leading Muslim *scholars, at that time*, could not even agree on a common definition of a "Muslim".¹ Urging the leadership to make bold decisions in the light of a changing global environment, the judges concluded:²

It is this lack of bold and clear thinking, the inability to understand and take decisions which has brought about in Pakistan a confusion which will persist and repeatedly create situations of the kind we have been inquiring into until our leaders have a clear conception of the goal and of the means to reach it. [...] and press Islam into service to solve situations it was never intended to solve, frustration and disappointment must dog our steps. The sublime faith called Islam will live even if our leaders are not there to enforce it. It lives in the individual, in his soul and outlook, in all his relations with God and men, from the cradle to the grave, and our politicians should understand that if Divine commands cannot make or keep a man a Musalman [Muslims], their statutes will not.

In the six decades since the publication of the Munir Commission report, ideological differences among various Muslim sects have sharpened significantly; these divisive ideologies have become deeply embedded in the psyche of successive generations and polarized society along sectarian fault lines. Education thus remains a critical strategy for unifying the society by changing people's mindsets.

The Islamists' ultimate stated objective is the creation of an Islamic State. This mythical state would comprise the institutionalization of a political caliphate: sharia would be the applicable law; jihad, apostasy and blasphemy would remain its essential pillars. Each sectarian group desires their own State and to impose their own "sharia". In reality, this is nothing more than the 8th Century Abbasid Caliphate's efforts to develop an evolving system of legislation, a system that was terminated around the 10th century. With the transformation of the global economic model from agrarian to industrial in the 18th century, the Abbasid-developed sharia became totally irrelevant in industrialized economies where new legislative systems based on elected representatives evolved. These systems fulfill the

¹ Report of the court of inquiry constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to enquire into the Punjab disturbances of 1953, p 214-5

² Ibid. p 232

essential ingredients of the Abbasid-developed system of consultation, consensus and analogy based on Qur'anic principles of peace, equality and justice.

The Islamists' chronicle has been systematically reinforced and incorporated into the Pakistani narratives. Both the civilian and military governments have used Islam as a crutch to justify and consolidate power and authority. To that extent, the original justification for partitioning India and creating Pakistan has been lost; a new justification – that Pakistan was created as an ideological Islamic state – is now commonly accepted. Pakistan's first Prime Minister surrendered to the Islamists' narrative in 1948 and accepted a compromise resolution, also known as the Objectives Resolution, which is now a part of the Constitution. This Resolution prevents the framing of laws that are against "Islam". This broad interpretation is at the root of the legislative paralysis because the parliamentarians fear infringing upon Islamic principles while discharging their responsibility! This regressive trend in the country's politics and policies was thus started in 1948.³

The radicals' strength and influence in Pakistan can be gauged from their opposition to the polio eradication campaign, which has resulted in an increase in polio cases around the country. This is occurring when the rest of the world is effectively free of this disease. Declaring a *Public Health Emergency of International Concern*, the WHO (World Health Organization) has embargoed travelers from Pakistan, Cameroon and Syria—three countries classified as polio exporting countries.⁴ Passengers departing Pakistan are required to produce anti-polio vaccination certificates, or are administered the vaccine, before being cleared for departure

In his opportunistic desire to become the political leader of the Muslim world—with Saudi Arabia as the spiritual leader—the first popularly-elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, authored the current constitution but later amended it to define a Muslim. General Zia-ul-Haq deposed and executed Bhutto and exchanged the immediate Islamization of Pakistan for petrodollars to fund the country's nuclear program and then further Islamized the country by instituting *Islamic Laws*. These laws curbed freedom of religion and freedom of speech through legislation that outlawed apostasy and blasphemy, each of which constitutes a capital crime. These dreaded laws have become effective tools not only for settling personal scores but also are used by land-grabbing mafias and other criminal gangs to further their nefarious goals. Reversing these matters will be not be an easy task. In the meantime, Pakistan has acquired the ubiquitous distinction of being a country where premeditated murderers can be acquitted by justifying their crimes under religious, cultural, or traditional facades.

Changing the current ideological narratives will require a fresh start and involve: (1) amending the Constitution and revising the Penal Code, (2) replacing the revisionist history with real history, (3) reforming the entire educational system, (3) separating religion and politics.

Pakistan has two parallel legal systems – secular and Islamic. These competing systems not only create unending confusion but also help maintain the status quo. The two systems frequently represent opposite ends of the spectrum and prohibit legislation for fear of infringing on Islamic principles. An exemplar of the disharmony of the two legal systems is that in 1992 the Federal Shariat Court (the Islamic court) declared all forms of interest-based banking un-Islamic and ordered the introduction of an

³ <http://www.dawn.com/news/542417/objectives-resolution-the-root-of-religious-orthodoxy>

⁴ http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/press/news/layouts/forms/News_DispForm.aspx?List=8db7286c-fe2d-476c-9133-18ff4cb1b568&ID=1013

interest-free banking system by June 2002. On appeal, the secular Supreme Court rejected the Shariat Court's ruling. In 1999, the Shariat Appellate Bench upheld the Sharia Court's ruling, thus pitting the superior courts of the two legal systems against each other.⁵ The matter remains unresolved.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in a tactical convergence of goals between the secular Western World and the radicalized Islamists in Pakistan. The need for trained *Islamic mujahedeen* ('freedom fighters') was accommodated by exploiting the radicals' narrative of jihad as an armed struggle to kill the enemy. Infrastructure, training (military and ideological), and armaments were provided by an alliance of Pakistan's military government, the USA, and their Middle Eastern proxies since the defeat of the "infidel" Soviets would accelerate the defeat of Communism in addition to supporting the radicals' agenda.

Changing geopolitical considerations can often make strange bed follows. The Pakistani military has finally moved to confront both 'good' and 'bad' Taliban. The good Taliban were considered political assets to create unrest in Indian-held Kashmir and to gain strategic depth in Afghanistan following the cessation of USA combat operations in 2014 and full withdrawal in 2016. Likewise, changing interests in the Muslim world have created new and deeper divides among Muslims and positioned the West against their prized asset for defeating Communism – al-Qaida and the Taliban. ISIS' (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) ongoing advancement through Iraq is encouraging the West to seek Iran's help to check their advance and prevent a major escalation in the sectarian war between Sunnis and Shias. ISIS has roots in Pakistan and its current leader has lived there. If the radical mindset in Pakistan is not reversed, ISIS and their affiliates can create situation akin to Iraq in that country.

Reconstructing the flawed narratives and gaining the society's acceptance will help minimize the confusion and provide space for separating religion and politics. Accomplishing this in the absence of credible leadership is a steep, uphill task. Rather than relying solely on the government's efforts, each Pakistani should understand the issues clearly. Freedom of choice and expression will go a long way in generating a constructive dialogue that will foster common objectives and lead to peace. This essential ingredient for long-term peace in Pakistan is missing in Pakistan's fight against radicalism and must be developed to support the military's expected successes in Waziristan.

⁵ <http://www.dawn.com/news/44707/fsc-to-decide-riba-case-afresh-supreme-court-sets-aside-earlier-judgment>