

# Pakistan: A Radicalised Society

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What has really changed in Pakistan? Two policy strains run continuously through the course of Pakistan's post independence history. The first is the use of religion as a binding glue to keep the nation together and the second, Pakistan's resort to terrorism as an instrument of state policy. Both have impacted Pakistani civil society to the extent that today, large segments of society stand completely radicalised.

The use of terrorism to secure foreign policy goals started with the birth of the nation, when, soon after gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan sent its armed raiders into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), in a bid to wrest the state from India by force. Armed and supported by the Pakistan Army, the raiders went on an orgy of rape, loot and plunder, killing thousands of people in the Kashmir Valley, not even sparing the nuns working in the St Joseph's Hospital at Baramulla.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, the Indian Army reached Srinagar by air in the nick of time and over the next few months, pushed these forces back to the position known as the Ceasefire Line (CFL).<sup>2</sup> Pakistan has continued to use these policies in its attempts to wrest Kashmir from India. It did so unsuccessfully in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan Wars and was also rebuffed when it attempted such tactics in the 1999 incursion into Kargil, where it was forced to effect an ignominious withdrawal. These policies remain institutionalised within Pakistan and are reflected in the support given by the state to terrorist groups and organisations within Pakistan, to target India.

The use of religion as a tool to unify the state started in the early years of Pakistan's formation, with the promotion of Islamic ethos at the expense of

local and regional agendas. The Objectives Resolution, adopted on March 12, 1949, averred that sovereignty belonged to Allah and the Constitution of 1956 went further towards theocracy by declaring the state as an Islamic Republic. This was a dangerous precept as

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potentially, any law made by Pakistan's Parliament could be overturned on the grounds that it was not in conformity with Islamic practice. This also empowered the clergy, which in its self-image, now saw itself as above the Constitution. It is interesting to note that in 1956, Hans Morgenthau observed, in an article critiquing the Asian policy of the US, that "... Pakistan was not a nation and hardly a state. It has no justification in history, ethnic origin, language, civilisation, or the consciousness of those who make up its population. They have no interest in common save one: fear of Hindu domination. It is to that fear and to nothing else that Pakistan owes its existence, and thus far, its survival as an independent state".<sup>3</sup> He further observed that it was hard to see "how anything but a miracle or else a revival of religious fanaticism, will assure Pakistan's future".<sup>4</sup>

Morgenthau was prescient when he spoke of Pakistan's future. Islam proved to be an inadequate glue to bind the state and within 25 years of its creation, its East Wing broke away to form an independent Bangladesh. The miracle which Morgenthau alluded to, which could secure its future, was not forthcoming, but predictably, Pakistan slipped into the path of religious fundamentalism. The process began in the early years of the formation of the state, when President Ayub Khan made the study of Islam or 'Islamiyat', compulsory in Pakistan's education system. History, as taught in school texts, became a product of the arrival of Islam in the subcontinent and gave short shrift to the subcontinent's syncretic and shared Hindu-Muslim heritage. Consequently, school texts reinforced notions of implacable Hindu and Indian hostility to Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Though Ayub Khan was not imbued with radical ideology, he was neither a secularist nor was he averse to Pakistan having a state ideology. These policies received an additional impetus when Zia-ul-Haq took over the reins of the state in 1977, following a military coup. While Zia was not the first to promote the Islamisation of Pakistani society to gain political legitimacy, his policies promoted a hardline Islamic ideology and went further down the road in Islamising Pakistan's legal and educational systems. He promised to establish an Islamic state and enforce the *Shariah* law, and towards that end, he started the Islamisation of institutions, largely using the Islamic card to defend his dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> But his policy was an extension of a consistent

state ideology and not an aberration. From Ayub onwards, all military dictators have used religion to gain legitimacy and as a consequence, a nexus between the military and the clergy was forged. The establishment of the Federal Shariah Court by Zia to examine laws in the light of Islamic injunctions and to review all military and civil verdicts for compliance with Islamic law gave further impetus to this nexus and consolidated the role of the clergy in running the affairs of the state.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan gave Zia the opportunity to create Islamic extremists in the 1980s to fight the Soviets and in this endeavour, he received the support of the US and its allies. During his tenure of over a decade, Islamic laws were introduced and Islamists were inducted into the judiciary and the bureaucracy. But what caused an even greater impact was the Islamisation of the educational curriculum and the opening up of thousands of religious seminaries across the country. Majid Siddiqui, a Karachi based journalist, succinctly put this in perspective when he stated that Zia's pernicious ideology is very much alive in Pakistan, and today's Pakistan is a reflection of those policies.<sup>7</sup> It was Zia who declared that the "preservation of Islamic ideology and the Islamic character of Pakistan were ... as important as the security of the country's geographical boundaries".<sup>8</sup> From this point onwards, the Army took upon itself the mantle of guarding the nation's ideological frontiers over and above its mandated role of guarding Pakistan's geographical boundaries. Today, the Pakistan Army claims that it will do whatever it takes to "secure the future of Pakistan which undoubtedly lies in an Islamic Republic".<sup>9</sup> In the *Dawn*, of June 11, 2011, Badar Alam, the Editor of *Herald*, wrote: "And it is in this perplexing admixture of the here with the hereafter, the concrete with the abstract and security with identity and religion that the nub of the problems facing Pakistan lies. The country has almost always neglected its present for the future and endangered its security for its ideology. This fatal order of priorities led it to overrule, in fact brutally suppress, the will of the majority of its population living in East Pakistan; to fight an American-funded religious war in Afghanistan; to sponsor and train local and foreign fighters to foment and create trouble for the neighbouring states; and, in its latest bout of regression into a self-pitying cocoon of national honour and sovereignty under threat, to fan an anti-Americanism that nobody knows the end result of".<sup>10</sup>

The third strain in Pakistan's polity which has remained remarkably consistent is the role of the Army in the state's polity. For much of Pakistan's history, the state has been ruled directly by the Army or under the influence of the Army. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did make an attempt to put the Army

under political control, but paid the price and was removed in a coup by Gen Zia-ul Haq and later hanged on a murder charge. Later, when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in his bid to exercise control over the armed forces, sacked Gen Pervez Musharraf on October 12, 1999, following Pakistan's disastrous Kargil operation, the military staged a coup and Sharif was removed. Nawaz Sharif was subsequently charged with terrorism, hijacking and conspiracy to murder, offences which carry the death penalty, but was convicted only for terrorism and hijacking and jailed.<sup>11</sup>

Post the raid by US forces which killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan President Zardari too made an attempt to rein in the military, but found himself embroiled in an unsavoury controversy. This pertained to a memo, sent to Adm Mike Mullen, then the Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, written by a Pakistani American businessman, ostensibly seeking US support for Pakistan's civilian government against its military. While Mullen did not find the memo credible, misinformation was spread that it was the handiwork of the Pakistan government, working through its Ambassador in the US, Mr Hussain Haqqani.<sup>12</sup> That effectively put paid to any thought that the civilian establishment had of putting the military in its place and Zardari's presidency thereafter was a lame duck affair. Protests by a Muslim cleric, Mr Tahir-ul Qadri, ostensibly backed by the Army, in January 2013, literally laid siege to Islamabad, in a massive demonstration calling for a clean-up in the country's electoral system, further delegitimising the Zardari government.<sup>13</sup> This further exposed the linkages between the military and the clergy, each using the other to further its own agenda.

Nawaz Sharif came back into the picture after winning the election in 2013. His attempts to try former Army Chief and later President, Gen Pervez Musharraf over his imposition of emergency rule in November 2007, led to the courts taking cognisance of the same and hearing the case in a Special Court. But the Army did not take too kindly to that and it was Nawaz Sharif who found himself on a sticky wicket, facing charges of corruption on the Panama Papers leak case. Sharif was tried and sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment on July 06, 2018.<sup>14</sup> Sharif blamed his woes on the treason case he had initiated against former dictator Pervez Musharraf.<sup>15</sup> The trial of Musharraf, meanwhile, remains in limbo.

The Army in Pakistan will, hence, not let the political authority erode the power that it enjoys and any attempt by the elected governments will meet with severe retaliation. In this, the military-mullah nexus forms a strong bond, each

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supplementing and complementing the other in its bid for legitimacy. The space for elected political parties consequently has declined, with the Army calling the shots on issues which impact on its ability to retain control over certain institutions of governance.

The nexus with the clergy also came to the fore with respect to Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism as part of its foreign policy goals. The Afghan Taliban were armed and trained in Pakistan by its military to fight the Soviets and given religious indoctrination by the clergy. They are today considered by Pakistan as their strategic assets, to further their security interests in Afghanistan. The Pakistan Army has also created similar assets for use against India, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Hizbul Mujahideen (HuM), which are funded, armed and trained in Pakistan for use against India. The co-founder of the LeT, Hafiz Saeed, an internationally designated terrorist who is also the chief of Jama'at-ud-Da'wah, a UN-designated terrorist organisation, operates openly from Pakistan. Indeed, the spread of terrorism in J&K and in some other parts of India is a consequence of the actions of groups such as the LeT. What India is witnessing in the state of J&K is no longer a fight for "*azadi*," a term which means different things to different people, but a more insidious religious war, prompted by Pakistan to introduce religious fundamentalism in the state. It is now a conflict between the idea of Indian democracy and an inclusive society on the one hand, and a system which believes in hate and exclusion, on the other, and which advocates the rule of *Nizam-e-Mustafa* and the implementation of the *Shariah* in the state.

All militant activity in the state of Pakistan is, however, not controlled by the state. In July 2007, the Pakistan military, in an ill advised operation against terrorists, holed up in the Lal Masjid in Lahore, used excessive force to free the mosque, in the process killing over 100 militants in the bloody operation. The masjid was a centre of radical Islamic learning and before the bloodshed, had a reputation for radicalism, mostly attracting Islamic hardline students from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which were the strongholds of both the tribal militant groups and also of Al Qaida.<sup>16</sup> This led the tribal groups to coalesce under the umbrella of an overarching organisation called the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The state remains embroiled with this organisation, till date. It also faces serious security challenges from Baloch groups which have been fighting for an independent homeland since Pakistan's forcible annexation of Balochistan. Sindhi nationalism is also a matter of

concern to the Pakistan military, especially in Karachi, which frequently erupts into violence. Added to that are the sectarian fissures in society, which have promoted a Shia-Sunni divide, with the minority Shia population facing the brunt of the repression. The Ahmadis and other minority groups have since long been bludgeoned into silence, but the long-term prognosis for Pakistan on such count spells serious instability.

But perhaps the one defining feature which indicates that Pakistan has crossed the tipping point and is now on the way to becoming a failed state is the radicalisation that has seeped into civil society. In 2011, the Governor of Punjab, Mr Salman Taseer was shot dead by his security guard, Mumtaz Qadri, who claimed it was his religious duty to kill the Minister, who was an outspoken critic of Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws and supported liberal reforms.<sup>17</sup> Qadri came from the more moderate Barelvi sect and was linked to the Dawat-e-Islami, a Sufi organisation, which was opposed to the Taliban and the Deobandi school of thought. Qadri's arrest and his subsequent execution led to massive street protests, which was symptomatic of the extent to which civil society had been radicalised and affected by the virus of an exclusive ideology, which had no space for the other. A large shrine on the outskirts of Islamabad has been dedicated to Mumtaz Qadri—a visible symbol of Pakistan's radicalised society.

Recent events further strengthen the belief that radical parties can hold the country to ransom. Soon after the Imran Khan government was sworn in, the new government selected Dr Atif R. Mian of Princeton University as one of the 18-members of a newly constituted Economic Advisory Council (EAC), to advise the government on economic policy. Dr Mian's selection was opposed by religious political parties such as the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal and the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Parties, on the grounds that he belonged to the Ahmadi faith. Violent street protests forced the government to back down and remove Dr Mian's name from the EAC. This was deplorable as Pakistan's Minister of Information, Fawad Chaudhary, had earlier vigorously defended the government's decision and stated that the government will not bow to extremists.<sup>18</sup> Within a few days, however, the government buckled and Dr Mian was asked to step down. In an editorial on the issue, the *Dawn* wrote, "The religious far right in the country has been mobilised in a manner that ought to worry all right-thinking citizens: short-sighted concessions and manipulations by the state will have far-reaching consequences for society".<sup>19</sup> The *Nation*, another mainline newspaper was equally blunt in its editorial, saying that the government had dashed hopes that it would uphold the

Constitution and stand for meritocracy. "... it seems we are resigned once again to a situation where bigotry, hate and divisiveness won, instead of waking up to a Naya Pakistan, the one envisioned by our founders, where Muslims and non-Muslims can live peacefully side by side without discrimination. We wonder if we ever will".<sup>20</sup>

The government buckled yet again to street power, when Pakistan's apex court, in October 2018, overturned the death sentence awarded to Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy, and ordered that she be set free. But this epic judgement by a three-member bench led by the Chief Justice, Saqib Nisar, ignited countrywide protests from the TLP, which was then joined by other right-wing religious organisations, including the Jama'at-ud-Da'wah (JUD) and Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam. The TLP leader threatened to paralyse the country if Asia Bibi was freed, while another TLP leader, Afzal Qadri, called for the execution of the judges. Pakistan Army soldiers were asked to revolt against their officers if they supported the decision. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, in a televised address said that the Supreme Court decision was "according to the Constitution and Pakistan's Constitution is according to the teachings of Islam".<sup>21</sup> But the fires were only allayed when the government said that Asia Bibi would be kept confined and not allowed to leave Pakistan.

These two incidents were an inauspicious start to Imran Khan's tenure, but they are an apt reminder of the power of the clerics who can drum up street support through whipping up religious sentiment and force a democratically elected leader to reverse a decision taken by him or to hold in abeyance the judgement of the apex court.

In a discussion at the Jinnah Institute, Humaira Masihuddin, a high court advocate in Pakistan, stated that the No 1 problem in Pakistan stems from religious extremism, which has legitimised the use of violence as a means of achieving its goal or aims.<sup>22</sup> What she found particularly disturbing was how the use of certain words, which were rarely uttered earlier, are now being routinely used even in the conversations of children. Words like *wajib-ul katal*, *murtadd* and *gustaaqh* are the new lexicon,<sup>23</sup> which brand the other and are used as justifications for violence. These are heavily loaded words and provide a sort of justification to sectarian killings and the persecution of religious minorities. There is no need to kill—just an accusation is enough to get scores of people together to attack the hapless accused.<sup>24</sup> In the same conversation, Humaira talks of a programme on TV, where small children are reciting nationalist poetry. One of the verses was:

*Main watan ko ek ikai bana doon,  
Nai Tehzeeb ki sari kitabe jala doon,  
Jo watan ka hai dushman, woh hai mera dushman,  
Main chahun to dushman ko jinda jala doon.*

Roughly translated, the verse means:

*To weld the nation into one  
All books of differing thought will I burn  
The enemy of Pakistan is my enemy  
That enemy too, I shall burn alive.*

If this is the standard of nationalist poetry, then it speaks of a mindset and narrative which has crept into the social space in a big way.<sup>25</sup> Writing in the *Dawn*, A Rehman observed, “Forty years ago Gen Zia-ul Haq seized power and put the country under its third and longest martial law. Over the next decade, he decisively transformed what was left of Jinnah’s dream of a secular democratic Pakistan into an almost completely theocratic polity. His handiwork has survived more than three decades and appears unlikely to be replaced with another political structure in the foreseeable future”.<sup>26</sup>

Today, the vast majority of Pakistan’s population has been successfully radicalised and its Constitution has been distorted and enfeebled. The military and the fundamentalists are firmly entrenched in the power structure, cutting across polity and institutions. Redeeming the situation will require at least a generation to effect change, but the likelihood of such action appears remote. The tipping point in the radicalisation process has been reached and there is no turning back now. India and the world will have to deal with the consequences of dealing with a radicalised state.

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## Notes

1. Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir* (Delhi: Penguin), pp. 80-96.
2. Post the 1972 Simla Accord, the CFL was designated as the Line of Control (LoC).
3. Hans J Morgenthau, “Military Illusions”, *New Republic*, Vol. 134 Issue 12, March 19, 1956, pp. 14-16.
4. Ibid.

5. Ziad Haider, "Islam and the Early History of Pakistan", available at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/defining-ideas/article/77366>
6. Mohammad Dawood (2018), "Causes of General Zia ul Haq's Islamization Program", available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325653742\\_Causes\\_of\\_General\\_Zia\\_Ul\\_Haq's\\_Islamization\\_Program](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325653742_Causes_of_General_Zia_Ul_Haq's_Islamization_Program). Accessed on January 13, 2019.
7. Shamil Shams, "Pakistan's Islamization: Before and After Dictator Zia-ul Haq", available at <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistans-islamization-before-and-after-dictator-zia-ul-haq/a-19480315>. Accessed on January 13, 2019.
8. Hasan-Askari Rizvi, cited in Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Oxford, 2006), p. 84.
9. Badar Alam, "Survival of the Self-Centered", *Dawn*, June 15, 2011, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/636710>
10. Ibid.
11. Luke Harding, "Sharif Sentenced to Life for Musharraf Plot", *The Guardian*, April 7, 2000, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/apr/07/pakistan.lukeharding>
12. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/16/exclusive-mullen-confirms-existence-of-secret-memo-pakistani-ambassador-offers-to-resign/>
13. <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/01/14/world/asia/pakistan-qadri-march/index.html>
14. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/the-nawaz-sharif-corruption-case-a-timeline-1883004>
15. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/320455-nawaz-blames-his-woes-on-musharraf-treason-trial>
16. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6503477.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6503477.stm)
17. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35684452>
18. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/363833-fawad-chaudhry-defends-appointment-of-atif-r-mian-as-economic-advisor>
19. *Dawn*, September 8, 2018.
20. *The Nation*, September 8, 2018.
21. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/31/asia-bibi-verdict-pakistan-court-overturns-blasphemy-death-sentence>
22. Humaira Masihuddin, "Countering Extremism: Language and Jurisprudence", in Jinnah Institute ODI Interview Series, January 2019.
23. Sunni Muslim bigots consider the adherents of minority Muslim sects like the Ahmadi and Shia as heretic, and, thus, *wajib-ul katal* or worthy of death. *Murtadd* is a term used for an apostate—a person who abandons Islam and has, thus, committed treason which is punishable by death.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. *Dawn*, July 2, 2017.