

# Pakistan: The Red Mosque Saga

Friday 13 July 2007, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 13 July 2007).

At the time, when hundreds died of government negligence during the terrain rains and flood across Pakistan, the Musharaf regime has finally been able to clear the Red Mosque from the “Alqaida and Talaban” supporters after killing of 80, according to the official claims.

The claim of 80 killings is not accepted by all the critics of the regime. In the highly charged atmosphere, the siege went over 9 days with thousands of army personnel involved. The Musharaf regime was bent to show its muscles to the international donors that it is able to take on the religious fundamentalist at any cost.

The message to American imperialism was clear, “trust us, you do not have to come, we can do the job for you”. The killings of dozens of innocent students and handful of religious fanatics during the misnamed “operation silence” has earned the much need respect for general Musharaf by the American imperialism and other allied forces. What a silence during the operation, the gun fire were heard all over Islamabad for over nine days, terrifying children who were asking their parent why so much noise all the time.

It was a total failure of a military operation in professional terms. Ten soldiers were killed including two officers and paid the price for this failure. It was story of misjudgments and misinformation. It was a total collapse of the moral values during such an operation. It was a real manifestation of the psychology of a military general who is also a president of a country. “Kill them if they do not listen”.

The initial successes of the military operation to successfully arrest the chief cleric Abdul Aziz Ghazi without resistance led the thinking that it will be all over within hours. Government official claimed a “drop scene” within hours after three days of the operation. Even Ghazi Abdul Rashid, the junior cleric who fought till the end was ready surrender at that crucial time. But it was sheer high headedness of the military rulers who lost the precious time.

Those who came out of the Mosque to save their lives were branded as terrorists and those who have “surrendered”. In total humiliations they were paraded in public without shirts with their hands up. It was like an army to army operation where some soldiers surrendering. The sheer humiliation of Mullah Abdul Aziz who was interviewed by Pakistan Television in Burqah after his arrest was the turning point of the pattern of change in thinking of those who were still inside mosque. The incident gave the impression that if they come out, it could be worst treatment for them as well.

Instead of using the initial victories in humble manner to get the others to come out, the military officials went crazy in euphoria. They were all convinced, “that is it, and it is all over, showing the mullah in total humiliations in public, it will teach them a lesson”. This cruel behavior of the architectures of Operation Silence at the crucial times led just the opposite thinking by the remaining fanatics inside the mosque. “It is better to die than this humiliated behavior, at least we will all go to heaven, our sacrifices will help in bringing the Islamic revolution” were the outcry of the fanatics inside which was conveyed in these terms to many interviewers by Mullah Abdul Rashid.

Later the military official tried to lesson the harm that was done already. “no taking off the shirts, no hands up, a safe passage, a home detention with ailing mother for Mullah Abdul Rashid” all these offers were rejected by the fanatics inside. It was total break of trust by sheer humiliating behavior

of the army officials. Most of the commercial media headlines of “drop scene” after the arrest of Mullah Abdul Aziz were proven absolute wrong as the fanatics inside opted to an all out resistance till the end.

The Red Mosque saga was televised all over the world as headlines for some days. The impression was given that Musharraf is a tough guy and is ready to have a head on fight with the religious fundamentalists. Some papers commented that Musharraf has enhanced its international standing as a close ally of American imperialism. It is a wrong impression. The Musharraf regime that must take full responsibility of killing dozens of innocent students alongside with religious fanatics.

The Red Mosque incident can be best termed as fight between the two monsters. The two mullahs, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashed, were helped, developed and assisted in all means by those who are in power today. The present fight was between the two close friends who had developed some conflicts of interest. When two friends fight each other, they know the weakness of each other. They are well equipped with the information of the opposite group. In this case, the red Mosque mullahs were the junior partners and were developed to use them at proper times.

The junior partner, the Mullahs of Red Mosque, went out of control after 9/11 in a gradual process. The history is full of example of such incidents, where gangsters go out of control of the boss. The Indian and Pakistani film industry glorify such stories in many feature films. The political history of the Indian subcontinent has also several such related stories.

In June 1984, The “Operation Blue Star” by Indian army on Golden Temple in Amritsar resulted in killing of hundreds of rebellious Sikhs including their leader Bhinderwale. Bhinderwale was helped and developed by Indra Gandhi, the then Indian prime minister to counter the growing influence of Akali Dal, the main party of the Sikhs in Punjab. Bhinderwale was arrested in 1982 on the charges of killing many leaders of Arya Samaji, the fanatic Hindu organization. He was released in two days on the orders of anonymous forces. He went out of control of Indra Gandhi to go an all out war against Hindus and for an independent Sikh State. Bhinderwale had to be killed by Indra Gandhi force in two years after his release. Within six months of killing at Golden Temple, the holiest place of Sikh religion, Indra Gandhi herself was killed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984 by two of her Sikh guards. The killing of Indra Ghani resulted a civil war where over 1000 Sikhs were massacred within days of the assassination.

It was also the similar case of the two Mullahs, who were arrested as being close allies of Alqaida in 2004 by the Musharraf regime but were helped in their release by the present federal Minister of religious affairs Ijaz ul Haq. It is no coincidence that Ijaz ul Haq is the elder son of late military dictator General Zia ul Haq. General Zia was primarily responsible in helping the religious forces on the instruction of the American imperialism. But when general Zia went against the American plan of conciliation with Soviet Union and opposed the Geneva accord in 1986, he did not live long. He died in plane crash in 1988, no one knows up till now who killed him.

The changing relationship between the religious fundamentalists in Pakistan and the state forces were felt in many incidents after the 9/11. The decades old close relationship between the two has resulted in growing influence of religious fundamentalism. The religious fundamentalist forces now control North West Frontier Province (NWFP) one of the four provinces. They share the coalition in the second province Baluchistan with the ruling Muslim League, a staunch support of General Musharraf. The official opposition leader in the so-called parliament is from MMA, the alliance of religious forces. Thanks to the support of the government that the majority party in the parliament the Pakistan Peoples party was deprived of being the official opposition. The total votes of the religious forces in the fraudulent general elections were around 15 per cent. Incidents like Red Mosque have definitely helped the religious forces to increase their share of votes and sympathies.

The religious fundamentalism can not be defeated by use of force. The war and occupation policies of American imperialism is quite evidence of this phenomenon. It has to be political fight to expose the real meaning of religious fundamentalism to the lives of ordinary people. "you can not kill ideas" is the lesson of the growing influence of the religious forces across Muslim world. By killing dozens at the Red Mosque, the General Musharaf regime has created more difficult situation for the genuine progressive forces in Pakistan. The incident has polarized the Pakistan forces.

The incident has led to re-groupment of different political parties and alliances. It has shattered the seven year old Alliance of Restoration of Democracy ARD. Pakistan Peoples Party has not joined the recently announced All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) in London. Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Benazir Bhottu has landed full support to the military operation saying that General Musharaf had no other choice. This is in persistence to her policies during the last few months. The PPP hopes to form the next government with the support of general Musharaf. This mingling of PPP with the military junta will reinforce the religious fundamentalists who are the main force behind the newly formed APDM.

The progressive forces in Pakistan must have an independent position to condemn the both. We can not lend our support to one enemy in opposition to the other one. The Military Junta with the support of American imperialism and the religious fundamentalists are both enemies of the working class. They both are against trade unions and radical social and political organizations. They both are believers of private property and free market. They both have same economic policies which are primarily responsible for the absolute poverty stricken conditions of the masses across glob. We can not sit a side to see the fight between the two bulls. We must oppose the both to build our own ranks by fighting for the rights of the working class.

---

**P.S.**

\* Farooq Tariq is general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan.