

Pakistan: The khaki-green alliance

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Between the mullahs and the military, the future of Pakistan is being squandered in the name of God and security respectively.

There are certain necessary fictions that underwrite the project of departmental Pakistani historiography and current explanations of the Pakistani body politic:

- The Ulama, by and large, claim that Pakistan was created as an Islamic state and must, therefore, have an “Islamic System of government.”
- The military keeps reminding us that the integrity of Pakistan depends upon the existence of a strong military force to forestall against any aggression against our status as a free nation by our so-called “arch enemy,” India.

There is a need, therefore, in the public sphere as well as in the Pakistani educational system to adopt more critical modes of engaging with the history and the current state of Pakistani democracy.

By far the Ulama, by hijacking the basic narrative of Pakistan’s creation, have done the most damage to the future of Pakistan as a viable democracy. We need to remember that during the last crucial years of the Pakistan movement, all major factions of the Indian Ulama were opposed to the creation of Pakistan. Their reasons, however, were more philosophical rather than being political. The Ulama saw the creations of a separate Muslim state as a failure as it would, in their view, divide the Muslim nation of India. Even Mawdudi, even though theoretically in favor of a separate Islamic state, was not very sanguine to the idea of Pakistan.

The first major crisis after the creation of Pakistan—the framing of a constitution—was primarily caused by the contesting narratives of Pakistan’s creation. The secular leaders—including Jinnah—were not deeply interested in creating an Islamic state, while Mawdudi and his followers insisted that as it was created in the name of Islam, Pakistan must, therefore, have an Islamic constitution. The situation was eventually resolved through a compromise by inserting the Objectives Resolution into the preamble of the 1956 constitution. Thankfully, though, this divisive and exclusivist insertion was not and is not binding on the rest of the constitution. The 1956 constitution, however, was a terrific document and ensured the future stability of both East and West Pakistan, precisely because the East Pakistanis, in a magnanimous act that still remains unacknowledged, accepted parity in terms of power distribution with their West Pakistani counterparts even though they had an obvious numeric superiority.

The first fiction that we need to eliminate from our national psyche is that Pakistan was created to be an Islamic state. Yes, Islam as a signifier of Muslim political identity was important but Jinnah and his cohorts never for one instance had imagined a theocratic nation-state. In fact (and this has been well articulated by Ayesha Jalal) until the end Jinnah still wanted to wrest a sort of federation from the British in which both India and Pakistan could have existed as two autonomous zones with a shared federal government with equal representation for Muslims with their Hindu counterparts. Pakistan, therefore, was a compromised solution caused by the failure of Jinnah’s larger dream.

The Ulama have also damaged Pakistani democracy by aligning with several dictators and by making democracy itself into a suspect concept. Their emphasis on individual personalities as reformers, redeemers, and their claims to understanding God's mind create a sort of fascist mentality in which the people keep waiting for one or the other messiah.

The Ulama have also, so far, failed to give us a viable system of Islamic government. The only faction that did have power and formed a government in Afghanistan—the Whabi Taliban version—were only successful in creating a most inhumane, cruel, and intolerant death-world ever created in the name of any religion.

The military, of course, has been the most detrimental to the development of democracy in Pakistan. I am aware of all the arguments in favor of military rules and interventions, having believed in them as an army officer during my ten-year service as an officer. (So, any young and old military officers please spare me your sanctimonious outrage over this criticism of the military). The first major damage done to Pakistan, and perhaps the one that ultimately caused the failure of East-West Pakistan relations, was the abrogation of 1956 constitution by Ayub Khan. By abrogating the constitution, Ayub Khan initiated the process of Pakistan's eventual dismemberment. His 1962 constitution, by promoting indirect elections, replaced the power of the people with that of urban and rural elite, who then became the powerbrokers during his ten-year illegal rule. The symbolic damage to Pakistan's future was even greater. After Ayub Khan the Pakistani public psyche was restructured so that it became possible and even convenient for the army to take over popularly elected governments without any fear of a popular uprising. This attitude and the frequent army takeovers—all in the name of national security—have been the most damaging to Pakistan as they precluded any long and sustained practice of democratic norms. After all, how would people learn to be democratic if they cannot really see democracy being practiced regularly?

The myth of army's efficiency and lack of corruption is also just a myth. Mostly, the reason the army does not see itself as corrupt is because most of its corrupt practices have been regularized and normalized. Here are some examples that were accepted practices while I was in service:

- The moment one becomes a divisional commander (A Major General) one earns a right to a certain amount of prime agricultural land.
- These lands are usually in the fertile regions of Pakistan and are tilled by captive labor (Yes, army owns its own villages and its own cadres of tenant farmers) managed by serving Junior Commissioned Officers. These practices are never frowned upon and are accepted as rightfully earned privileges.
- The general officers also get to keep their latest staff car after they retire.
- The army also owns factories, bakeries, shopping plazas and even movie theaters and the revenues from these ventures are completely tax free and beyond the reach of any outside oversight.
- During the last dictatorship of General Mushrraf this system of appeasement was further expanded to include mid-level officers who now get developed land plots in housing projects developed by the army itself.

Of course, readers sympathetic to Pakistan army would probably argue that the army does a lot for the people: flood relief, security operations etc. But that all is part of the army's mission and not something extra that they perform. And let us not forget, every time the army is deployed in "aid of civilian authority" all military personnel are given a daily allowance (IS Allowance) that does not come from the military budget but is extracted from whatever meager civilian resources are left

after the defense allocation. So to speak plainly, the army has not only damaged Pakistan's prospects symbolically by destroying political processes, it is also a constant drain on Pakistani economy. It seems the entire country exists to consciously feed the defense budget. The price, of course, is the future of all the rest of Pakistanis.

Between the mullahs and the military, the future of Pakistan is being squandered in the name of God and security respectively. We must learn to view their truth claims with healthy suspicion if we want to ensure a prosperous future for our children. So, beware of any mullahs who claim to have access to divine knowledge and who promise to solve all our problems by focusing on a great Islamic past that is irretrievable and can only be accessed through textual interpretation. Any interpretation of the Qura'n that makes our society into an intolerant, unkind, and exclusivist is a misguided interpretation, for any religion without kindness, love, and a bit of laughter is inhuman and inhumane. And we should also be on guard when demagogues in uniform try to convince us that they have a better recipe for our collective future.

My personal prognosis of democracy in Pakistan, despite the prevarications of Mr. Zardari and other politicians, is pretty positive because of the last elections. In the last election we saw the issues of constitutionality and rule of law being foregrounded as opposed to the traditional bread and butter politics. Those who stood for integrity and claimed not to have sold their consciences to Musharraf convincingly defeated the bunch of turncoat opportunists who stood with Musharraf. Similarly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, ANP defeated the mullahs cunningly. Based on these positive signs, I have no problem in believing that the people of Pakistan know what is in their best interest. All they need is a more acute media, a better system of education, and, perhaps, a chance at going to polls every four years.

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