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Reclaiming Our Pakistan



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Today the Pakistani state—that is its government and security structures—stands exposed as never before in front of its own people as well as the world. Never before, since 1971, has the Pakistani nation felt so defenceless and so full of anger and shame. Yet the disastrous outcome for all of us to see today was the natural outcome of self-serving policies pursued by a dictator and subsequently by a U.S. manufactured National Reconciliation Ordinance—Pakistan “NRO” sanctioned leadership. Policies based on lies and propaganda were inevitably going to end up in humiliation and disgrace not just for the leadership of the country but for every living Pakistani. That is what finally happened when the U.S. invaded Pakistani airspace and carried out its operation against Osama bin Laden, unhindered and undetected by the seventh most powerful nuclear armed military in the world.

The U.S. had always stated that in case they had actionable intelligence on a high value target, they would take unilateral military action. Why was this strategic U.S. policy decision that directly impaired our security and sovereignty not made a bone of contention in any strategic

* Given the stature of this author, and the attention given to his views, we have chosen to print this article essentially as submitted.

dialogue? Similarly, the U.S. has stated that in case of any terrorist attack on US mainland, all options would be on the table. Why has our government never sought the revision of this policy conditional to our cooperation to protect Pakistan from a massive military retaliation in case of a terrorist attack against the U.S. mainland is linked to Pakistan?

By fighting a U.S. led war and hypocritically telling the people of Pakistan that it was their war, the state of Pakistan lied shamelessly. After all, al-Qaeda was in Afghanistan until the U.S. attacks on Tora Bora left an exit route for them to escape. Even more critical, no Pakistani was involved in the 9/11 attacks. But in the aftermath of 9/11 the Pakistani leadership weaved a web of deceit for its people.

Certainly Pakistan should have helped the U.S. get the 9/11 terrorists and their organisation but this did not require handing over the country to the U.S., allowing the CIA to set up a parallel intelligence network across Pakistan seriously undermining our internal security and indulging in the renditions of Pakistanis to the U.S. As Clive Smith of Reprieve has pointed out, 90% of those handed over to the U.S. turned out to be innocent; the case of Mullah Zaeef, the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan and a serving diplomat, was just one such case, where Pakistan also violated its commitments under the Geneva Convention. To our everlasting shame, after three years at Guantanamo, Mullah Zaeef was found innocent.

Using fear as a weapon and having trapped the country into deception and deceit at the U.S. behest, the Pakistani state sent its forces into Waziristan while the U.S. pounded Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan “FATA”) with drone attacks, killing thousands of civilians. It was hardly surprising to find a full-blown tribal rebellion and the Pakistani Taliban as a result of these erroneous military-centric policies. Lies continued to be fed to the Pakistani people on the casualties of the drone attacks. Much before the killing of the tribal Jirga earlier this year, in September 2004 a drone attack killed 70 people while another 40 were killed the next day during the funerals being held for the earlier victims. With no substantiation, Interior Minister Rehman Malik declared that all those killed were “militants” when the Member National Assembly—Pakistan “MNA” from South Waziristan—had declared that if even one of the victims was a foreign militant he would resign! Who can forget the 2006 drone attack in Bajaur, which targeted a Madrassa, and of the 80 killed, 60 were children? Three days later, a relative of one of the victims committed a suicide attack on soldiers in Malakand killing 50. By far the biggest lie was that the Pakistan army was fighting an ideological Taliban rather than 90% of the militants being our own tribal people. There was another blatant lie emanating from a Pakistani general that drone attacks always kill militants. There is no way of ascertaining who has been killed. There are no DNA tests conducted as people are just blown into pieces.

Drone strikes constitute not only a blatant breach of Pakistan’s sovereignty, but it is also a grave violation of the international humanitarian laws where the U.S. acts as the judge, jury, and the executioner—all put into one—killing suspects’ wives and children. The drone strikes have created more hatred against the Americans than any other single incident. According to those who attended the dharna (the sit-in protest) the rationale was that one killed out of ten may be a militant. The others are innocent citizens who have nothing to do with any terrorist activity. The New American Foundation Survey that was conducted about six months ago has reiterated that more than 80% tribal people oppose the drone strikes as they believe that these attacks mostly

kill innocent people.

So why did the Pakistani state accept such a suicidal policy under U.S. pressure? Pakistan's ruling elite—civil and military—since the 1960s have sought U.S. crutches for prolonging their hold on power at the cost of building state institutions and our economy. Instead of investing in education and social reforms they have taken short cuts at the expense of the Pakistani people, seeking U.S. dollars whenever the opportunity presented itself to sustain its corrupt and extravagant lifestyle as well as inept governance. The same rentier class obliged the U.S. during the Gen. Zia's period to resist the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan with the help of the CIA by creating and funding several militant groups. The one time heroes of the West turned villains after 9/11. Our leaders also changed their colours and with their new found passion to be portrayed as liberals and bulwarks against Islamic extremism. Their latest mantra of liberalism was music to Western powers that were willing to ally with every scoundrel and thug as long as they danced to their tunes. Most disgracefully, by seeking to make themselves indispensable to the West, our rulers have played a major role in creating the misperception abroad that Pakistan is a haven for radical Islam, despite the reality that every election has shown the religious parties to be marginal in the politics of the country.

Meanwhile, fear has been used as a weapon on the Pakistani people: fear of US military action against them; fear of an economic collapse; and most damaging, fear of the country being overrun by militants and extremists. As a result, while the wealth of the rulers continues to multiply, the country has faced \$68 billion in losses over the last decade, as well as 35,000 dead and a national debt that has doubled in three years from Rupees. 5 to \$10 trillion. Add to this the displaced people from FATA where the population of 6 million has seen its lives devastated and traumatised, and the monsoon natural disaster visited upon Pakistan becomes clearer. Yet we are not trusted by our so called western allies who are pointing accusatory fingers at us as harbourers of terrorists. Typically, President Zardari declared at a Friends of Democratic Pakistan "FoDP" meeting in Japan (2009) that "we are fighting to save the world" and then demanded dollars; but in reality, it is Pakistan that needs to be saved from its rulers and their lies and corruption.

There is only one way forward for Pakistan today. The NRO-sponsored leaders came to power through fraudulent elections as the Election Commission has now made public that, out of 80 million registered votes, 37 million were bogus and 35 million unregistered in the last elections. This government must resign or be made to resign through public pressure so that fair and free elections can be held under an independent Election Commission and National Database and Registration Authority – Pakistan "NADRA" based electoral rolls.

Reforms must be instituted. An austerity drive must be in place to stop the shameful extravagance of the rulers. A democratic government needs to own its war on terror based on indigenously formulated policies. Most significantly, a democratic government must take responsibility for all acts of terror in its country. The more our military and political leadership is seen as a mercenary of the U.S., the more it increases the radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism within Pakistan. Whenever, al-Qaeda and the Taliban announce Jihad against the U.S., they also announce it against U.S. agents – meaning the Pakistani state. This undermines the Pakistan military's ability to fight militancy effectively. The U.S. should be told categorically that no help or aid is required from it and that the Pakistani state can no longer be America's

hired gun. The tribe's, who have never been involved in terrorism, need to be co-opted into a national policy to fight and isolate the real terrorists.

Rule of law is critical and all militant groups, private armies and other non-state actors carrying arms must be disarmed. There can be no exceptions to this rule.

Corruption can only be tackled through an independent accountability process involving auditors and lawyers while tax collection needs to be widened by withdrawing all exemptions so that the rich can be taxed. A most important aberration that needs to be tackled is illiteracy. An education emergency must be declared and one uniform educational system needs to be put in place as a soon as feasible for the whole country.

These problems and their solutions are totally doable but only by a credible and democratic government that has the capacity to mobilize the people and indigenous resources. Perhaps the crossroad that Pakistan has been pushed to at present can be a blessing in disguise. At a time when the whole Osama operation has exposed the Pakistan state and its duplicity internally and externally, with overseas Pakistanis suffering an extreme reaction especially in the U.S., Pakistanis can choose to rid themselves of this complicit and disgraced leadership. This is the time for a national revival through restoration of national dignity and sovereignty. Today Pakistan has no other choice.

Long live Pakistan and good people of the world.