

Pakistan: The Cracks in the Edifice

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The Start

Pakistan was created as a result of the two-nation theory. When Pakistan did come into being, it feared that it would be looked upon as a 'lesser India'. It was exactly like India, just smaller and poorer. So, Pakistan embarked upon a mission to project itself as a nation that identified itself as 'we who are not India'. It rewrote history. It created Arab and Central Asian ancestry for its people out of thin air, and convinced its citizens of their non-existent foreign origins.

Therein lie the foundations of the first cracks in the edifice of the state of Pakistan. Urdu was imposed and this was one of the many reasons that led to the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. But the "Urdu problem" as the Bengalis would sometimes refer to this imposition, was planned in 1947-48, with Mohammad Ali Jinnah travelling to Dhaka in what was then East Pakistan, to announce his grand plan to have Urdu as the only national language of the "moth-eaten" state of Pakistan. No one realised the irony of it then. Jinnah was selling a language that he did not speak, to a people who could not understand it. The Bengali language is more than 1,400 years old. Some believe it carries nuanced sophistication on one shoulder. Others believe that it carries a chip on the other, but that is open to debate. Oh, the Bengalis love a good debate.

Created to be a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims, it was believed that Islam was the glue that would hold Pakistan together. On December 16, 1971, that glue unravelled. In the first partition of its kind, a majority broke away from a minority. Punjabi sub-nationalism was simply too heavy, handed

to permit coexistence. That you were Muslim was not good enough. You had to be Sunni Punjabi Muslim. Pakistan was to be an Islamic welfare state, based on the *Riyasat-e-Medina* model, the first Muslim state set up by Prophet Mohammad after his *Hijrat*, or migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. That did not happen. There were simply too many pulls and pressures.

Pakistan faces a war within due to religious, ethnic and social issues.

Religious Identity

Muslims are not a homogeneous entity. Pakistan's two hundred million people follow a staggering variety of 'sub-faiths' and each 'sub-faith' is followed with a passion that can sometimes border on the terrifying. The Deobandis have a fundamental difference of opinion with the Barelvis. Together, they share a visceral hatred for the Ahl-e-Hadith. This often results in bloodbaths and bombing of mosques of the other sect. Interestingly, these three sub-sects of Islam were created in North India, before partition. Most Pakistani Sunni Muslims belong to the Hanafi Fiqh. Salafism and Wahabism, born in the deserts of Egypt and Arabia, are fast finding their feet in Punjab and Sindh, once the nurseries of Sufism.

The two branches of Shia Islam in Pakistan are the Twelvers or Imamiyyah and Ismailis, with the Twelvers being the most widely practised Shia faith. Ahmadis were declared non-Muslim in Pakistan by the Second Amendment to the Constitution and by Ordinance XX. These are the broad schisms in the Pakistani Muslim landscape. Muslims form a staggering total of 96 per cent of the population of Pakistan. By one estimate, the break-up is: Shia (Twelvers) 18 per cent; Ismailis two per cent; Ahmadis two per cent; Barelvis 50 per cent; Deobandis 20 per cent; Ahl-e-Hadith four per cent and other minorities four per cent.

Students of sub-nationalism in Pakistan know about the Baloch freedom struggle and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). They lament the dying out of the Jiye Sindh Movement and the brutal suppression of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). The Baltistan Movement is picking up steam and we hear angry voices from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). But clearly, there is no constant and consistent momentum. There cannot be, not without outside support. India has steadfastly maintained a policy of not supporting secessionist movements in Pakistan or other countries.

A cursory look at the Pakistani society reveals a nation that is forever at the edge of implosion. It is not the strain that comes with the ebbs and flows of a democracy, because whatever its veneer might be, Pakistan is not a democracy.

The war within is religious, ethnic and social. For India, this has provided a window of opportunity, which has been ignored for too long. Indians worship passivity and take great pride in saying that they have never attacked any country, ever. This has been India's undoing; this and the entire narrative of being a non-expeditionary Army.

Fomenting Trouble

For 72 years, we have either been fighting Pakistan and its proxies or have been in a state of no war-no peace. Our conflict with Pakistan is existential. Let us, as a nation, accept the fact that Pakistan will never allow India to live in peace. Pakistan thrives in a synthetically created eco-chamber in which the mere existence of India is anathema, and Kashmir, the cornerstone of its foreign policy. Since its creation, Pakistan has dedicated enormous resources to widen the fault-lines in India. It started the Khalistan movement in Punjab and followed it up with terrorism in Kashmir. It was able to do so because we were weak—diplomatically, militarily, politically, economically and socially. Specially when Kashmir blew up in our faces in 1989, foreign reserves were down to the last billion, we had a weak coalition government at the Centre, we were embroiled in Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka, operations in Punjab and the northeast, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the world was looking the other way. As astrologers would say, it was an 'opportune moment' for Pakistan.

Present State

Today, Pakistan is down on its knees. Economically, it is staring at bankruptcy, politically it is unstable, with Imran Khan taking a beating from the opposition parties and widely believed to be selected by the Army and not elected, and diplomatically it is isolated. A study of the socio-political landscape will tell you that the country has never been so fractured. Militarily, the Army Chief finds himself at odds with his own Generals. His three-year extension has sealed the fate of his first line. Sub-nationalism in Pakistan, which has never been fully dormant, raises its head again. It is often violent and put down even more violently by the Pakistan Army. The cycle of violence never ceases. Pakistan's human rights record is only slightly better than Saudi Arabia's and North Korea's. The media, a section of which has managed to remain away from the direct influence of the Director General Inter-Services Public Relations (DG ISPR), is being browbeaten.

This is the perfect time to take advantage of all of Pakistan's fault-lines. We do not need to take a leaf out of Pakistan's book and start arming and training

disaffected elements. The Pakistani society is already well armed and trained. It is one of the most weaponised nations on earth. The country is a tinderbox. All it needs is a spark. *Social media is that spark*. The low hanging fruit is the ideological schism between the Deobandis and Barelvis. Over a period of years, if carefully nurtured, it has the potential to bleed Pakistan. While the Ahl-e-Hadith comprise a small percentage of the Sunni Muslim population in Pakistan, like the Deobandis and Barelvis, their *tanzeems* or armed groups have been deployed to devastating effect. Shia *tanzeems* are active in Karachi and also in areas bordering Iran. While the Pakistan Army has tried to disarm some of these groups, many remain in the woodwork, beneficiaries of the deep state's largesse.

India must develop an information warfare organisation to take E-war to Pakistan.

India would also do well to stop looking at Balochistan in isolation. The Pakistani Punjabi tendency to look down upon every other ethnicity as socially and racially inferior puts it at loggerheads with every other sub-nationality in Pakistan. Our narrative needs to be crafted in a manner that makes it Punjab versus the others. This emotion already exists in Pakistan. It is merely a function of reiterating it again and again. Punjabi hubris was on full display during the events leading up to the 1971 War and the eventual dismemberment of Pakistan. No lessons have been learnt. Nothing has changed.

The PTM, MQM and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) are very different in the way they operate. Their ideologies are different. The PTM is largely peaceful, whereas the BLA is violent. The MQM, after being battered to the ground, is slowly rising again. The common factor is that the people they represent have been marginalised, their resources stolen and their jobs snatched. Their homes have been razed, their women raped, their relatives killed and their culture destroyed by an overweening Punjabi establishment. Punjab is Pakistan. Pakistan is Punjab. This is what merits telling and retelling.

If there is an institution in Pakistan that has a veneer of strength and solidity, it is the Pakistan Army. However, it has its own skeletons. From the initial days of the creation of Pakistan to the years before and during the 1965 War, the turbulent years before and after the fall of Dhaka, the Zia years and then the rule of Pervez Musharraf have seen that despite its outward sheen, the Pakistan Army is vulnerable to factionalism and intrigue. Post the Kargil War, factionalism within the Pakistan Army was out in the open. Defeat does that. The incarceration of Lieutenant General Sarfraz Sattar and his forced resignation for opposing the

three-year extension given to General Qamar Javed Bajwa is a case in point. That seven of the seniormost Generals of the Pakistan Army openly revolted against their own chief in the extension issue tells us that there are cracks in the Pakistan Army that can be exploited.

In the recent past, Pakistan Army Chiefs have made a habit of settling abroad. Generals Pervez Musharraf, Ashfaq Parvez Kiani and Raheel Shareef are not in Pakistan. Most Pakistani senior military officials, bureaucrats and politicians have homes and investments abroad. In many cases, their children are foreign citizens. The widening chasm between the haves and the have-nots is a sore point with Pakistanis who live without electricity, water and basic amenities. Rising inflation, the cost of food and the all-encompassing absence of hope are forcing the common Pakistani to rise against the system. In the past, this dissonance has often taken the shape of violence.

The media finds itself managed and controlled. Major General Asif Ghafoor, the former DG ISPR, ran a personality cult using the Pakistan Army's resources. While the gist of his endeavours was anti-India, he established himself as the voice of Pakistan on social and mainstream media. Major General Babur Iftikhar, the current DG ISPR is expected to be more circumspect. Having said this, the Pakistani media is generally expected to fall in line with what the ISPR dictates. The ISPR almost functions like the parent body of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). The truth is that the Pakistan Army crushed the PEMRA's autonomy and spirit long ago. In the mainstream media, journalists and anchors have been intimidated, killed, beaten and shot at. Pakistan's top TV anchor Hamid Mir carries two bullet wounds on his body, a reminder to him about who the real boss is, in Pakistan.

The Next Step

It bears admission that we are years behind Pakistan in Information Warfare (IW). They became better than us not because they had more talent and money, but because they had no choice. After having lost every war to India, they became experts in hybrid warfare. They looked for non-investment heavy solutions and found them.

We have far more money and talent than Pakistan will ever have. What we lack is the realisation that the media and social media are weapons of war. Sun Tzu, the famous Chinese philosopher had said, "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting". If Facebook had existed during Sun Tzu's time, the philosopher would have smiled in satisfaction. In the end, all war is deception.

What we need is an information warfare organisation, which comprises experts. I have seen no proof of the military having the talent for information warfare, or even the simple realisation that a few credible Twitter handles are far more dangerous than a battalion of soldiers. We need an organisation that is run by the military but manned by writers, singers, video editors, musicians, content creators, historians, social media experts, hackers, theological experts, geo-strategic experts and a host of other talent that exists outside the military. This organisation must be supported by intelligence agencies. The scale and scope of this organisation must be large enough to take this e-war to Pakistan.

This organisation will be tasked to create narratives through videos, songs, stories, blogs, Vlogs, articles, video games, documentaries, social media accounts and will also serve as a feeder to the mainstream media. It will function through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other social media platforms. It will create content that will directly address the fault-lines in Pakistan. It will reiterate, constantly and consistently, the narrative that Pakistan is tearing itself at the seams. Pakistan ranks 25th in the global internet penetration list. Only about 15 per cent Pakistanis have access to the internet. But with China investing heavily in Pakistan's telecom infrastructure, the number of users is expected to increase exponentially by 2025. If we are innovative and consistent in our approach, the fault lines in Pakistan will begin to hemorrhage. It is only a matter of time before Pakistan again goes to war, this time with itself.

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