

TERRORISM, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

By

Dr. Akmal Hussain

This is a revised version of the paper presented at the Conference on
“Terrorism in South Asia: Impact on Development and Democratic
Process”, Kathmandu, Nepal,
November 23-25, 2002

[Now published in the book titled: Terrorism in South Asia,
Shipra Publications, India, 2003]

TERRORISM, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

By

Akmal Hussain

Introduction

The term terrorism could be defined as violence designed to induce fear in the avowed enemy by an individual or group, against non-combatant members of another group within the same State or against non-combatant citizens of other States. Terrorism in many cases is rooted in economic deprivation, a sense of social or political injustice, or a narrowing of the mind induced by ideological indoctrination. The terrorist often claims that his action is an expression of his political or religious belief or retaliation against his sense of injustice.

In recent years in a number of cases terrorists have emerged from relatively affluent countries. Yet it is noteworthy that the Taliban who were integrally linked with Al-Qaeda, predominantly came from poverty stricken Afghanistan. Those Taliban terrorists who were recruited from religious seminaries (madrassas) in Pakistan also came from the poorest sections of Pakistan's society. Therefore poverty can be as fertile a breeding ground for terrorism as a sense of political injustice.

1. Combat Versus Preventive Diplomacy

The key feature of the war against terrorism that distinguishes it from wars between states is that the location and some times the identity of the enemy is uncertain. Even less certain is which individual or group of individuals is going to become an enemy in future to cause the feared mega destruction. Therefore in the prosecution of such a war, military combat and preventive diplomacy are intimately linked. If in the past, war was "the conduct of politics by other means", to-day politics is perhaps essential to the conduct of war itself. Preventive Diplomacy as a complement to combat was first used in 2nd century Rome when Marcus Aurelius Caesar secured the Roman

Empire through convivial economic and political arrangements with potentially hostile tribes and warlords on the margins of the Roman Empire. To-day given the peculiar nature of the war against terrorism, preventive diplomacy may be even more important than in ancient Rome.

Pakistan has played a crucial role in the combat operations conducted by the coalition forces against Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements in Afghanistan and the tribal belt along its border. Equally important is the configuration of economic, social and political forces in Pakistan to determine whether it can effectively provide the logistical and political support to the war against terrorism in the future. Therefore in examining the linkages between combat and preventive diplomacy, Pakistan may be an important case study.

2. State Policy in the Zia Regime and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism

In Pakistan's case the socio political roots of terrorism as well as those of the current economic crisis can be traced to the Zia regime in the period 1977 to 1988. These tendencies developed further during the decade of the 1990s when a historically unprecedented growth in poverty combined with an undermining of democratic institutions. In this paper we will analyze the interplay between the rise of militant religious groups, government policy and growing poverty during the last two decades spanning Zia's military regime and the subsequent decade of democracy.

In the absence of popular legitimacy, the Zia regime used terror for the first time in Pakistan's history as a conscious policy of the government.¹ President Zia ul Haq publicly stated: "Martial law should be based on fear".² In the same vein, Brigadier Malik wrote: "Terror struck into the hearts of enemies is not only a means, it is the end itself". The Minister for Labour and Manpower Lt. Faiz Ali Chishti declared the same policy objective regarding those who dared to dissent: "The enemies of Islam must be

¹ Omar Noman: *The Political Economy of Pakistan*, Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1988, Page 122.

² Interview with BBC Television, 4th April 1978.

hunted down and killed like snakes even when they are offering prayers”³ . In the pursuit of this policy, the democratic constitution of 1973 was set aside and draconian measures of military courts, arbitrary arrests, amputation of hands and public lashing were introduced. Pakistan’s society, by and large, was historically characterized by cultural diversity, democratic aspirations and a religious perspective rooted in tolerance and humanism. This was one of the reasons why the founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah conceived of Pakistan’s polity as democratic and pluralistic with religious belief to be a matter concerning the individual rather than the state.

“You may belong to any religion or caste or creed ___ that has nothing to do with the business of the state.... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state.... Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual but in the political sense as citizens of the state.”⁴

President Zia-ul-Haq in attempting to restructure such a state and society into a theocracy, undertook two kinds of initiatives: First, measures designed to subordinate to executive authority, institutions of state and civil society such as the judiciary and the press, which if allowed to function independently could check governmental power. In the case of the judiciary its essential powers to scrutinize the legality of martial law or the orders of military courts were abolished. The judicial protection against arbitrary detention of a citizen embodied in the right to Habeas Corpus was eliminated for the first time in Pakistan.

In the case of the press, President Zia ul Haq gave a pithy statement of Martial Law Policy: “Democracy means freedom of the press, Martial Law its very negation”.⁵ In the pursuit of this policy, press control measures were introduced. The government

³ Morning News, Karachi, 20th January 1980.

⁴ Speech of Mohammad Ali Jinnah as President of the Constituent Assembly, August 11, 1947, cited in Muhammad Munir, from Jinnah to Zia, Vanguard Books, Lahore 1979, Page 29-30.

⁵ Dawn, 12th July 1977, cited in Omar Noman, op.cit. Page 124.

constituted committees at the district level to ensure that articles repugnant to the ideology of Pakistan were not published. Those members of the press who had refused to acquiesce faced state repression. A number of newspapers were banned and journalists were arrested and given flogging sentences by military courts.

The second set of measures towards a theocratic state sought to inculcate obscurantist views and induce a narrowing of the human mind. It involved a suspension of the sensibility of love and reason underlying the religious tradition signified in Pakistan's folk culture⁶.

In the absence of a popular mandate, Zia claimed that his mission to bring an "Islamic Order" in Pakistan had a divine sanction: "I have a mission given by God to bring Islamic Order to Pakistan"⁷. Advocacy for a theocratic social order was conducted through the state controlled television and press⁸. Individual and group behaviour and society were sought to be controlled through the enforcement of coercive measures such as the amputation of wrists and ankles for theft, stoning to death for adultery and 80 lashes for drinking alcohol. Apart from this, in 1984 a law was passed to officially give women an inferior status compared to men.⁹ In August 1984 the government began a national campaign involving the direct physical intervention of the state into the personal life of individuals. For example the Nizam-e-Salat Campaign was launched through the appointment of 100,000 "Prayer Wardens" for rural and urban localities. The task of these state functionaries was to monitor religious activities of individuals and to seek their compliance in religious practices.

The institutional roots of "Islamic Fundamentalism" were laid when government funds were provided for establishing mosque schools (madrassas) in small towns and rural areas which led to the rapid growth of militant religious organisations. This social

⁶ The hero Ranjha is celebrated as the synthesis of love and reason, See: Najam Hosain Syed, *Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry*, Punjab Adbi Markaz, Lahore, Second edition, 1986.

⁷ Omar Noman, *op.cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

process was catalyzed by the Afghan war. As General Zia moved towards the construction of a theocratic state and brutalized civil society, his isolation from the people as a whole was matched by increased external dependence. He sought political, economic and military support from the U.S. by offering to play the role of a front line state in the Afghan guerilla war against the occupying Soviet army. Accordingly, Pakistan obtained from the U.S. a package of \$ 3.2 billion in financial loans and relatively sophisticated military hardware. Moreover, with the support from the U.S., Pakistan was able to get additional fiscal space by getting its foreign debt rescheduled, and increased private foreign capital inflows. These official and private capital inflows played an important role in stimulating macro economic growth in this period. They also helped establish a political constituency both within the institutions of the state and in the conservative urban petit bourgeoisie, for a theocratic form of military dictatorship.

As the Zia regime engaged in a proxy war, some of the militant religious groups together with their associated madrassas were provided with official funds, training and weapons to conduct guerilla operations in Afghanistan. While they helped fight the war in Afghanistan, the religious militant groups were able to enlarge the political space within Pakistan's society as well as in its intelligence and security apparatus. Since the late 1970s with the steady inflow of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and its use as a conduit for arms for the Afghan war, two trends emerged to fuel the crisis of civil society: (a) A large proportion of the weapons meant for the Afghan guerillas filtered into the illegal arms market in Pakistan. (b) There was a rapid growth of the heroin trade¹⁰. Powerful mafia type syndicates emerged which conducted the production, transportation and export of heroin. The large illegal arms market and the burgeoning heroin trade injected both weapons and syndicate organisations into the social life of major urban centers. At the same time the frequent terrorist bombings in the Frontier province together with a weakening of state authority in parts of rural Sindh, undermined the confidence of the citizens in the ability of the State to provide security of life and property. Increasing numbers of the under-privileged sections of society began to seek

¹⁰ According to an estimate which is really in the nature of a "guesstimate" the narcotics trade amounted to US \$ 3 billion, See the Weekly "The Economist" (London), April 10, 1985.

security in various proximate identities whether ethnic, sectarian, biraderi or linguistic groups.¹¹

From 1987 onwards sectarian violence mushroomed in the Punjab province (which till then had been relatively peaceful) and later spread across the country. The phenomenon of large scale sectarian violence conducted by well armed and trained cadres was closely associated with the rapid growth of Deeni Madrassas (“religious” schools). While historically, such schools merely imparted religious knowledge, in the late 1980s a new kind of Deeni Madrassa emerged, which engaged in systematic indoctrination in a narrow sectarian identity, and inculcated hatred and violence against other sects. In 1998 there were 3,393 Deeni Madrassas in the Punjab alone and 67% had emerged during the period of the Zia regime and after. The number of Pakistani students in these madrassas were 306,500 in the Punjab. Between 1979 and 1994, many of the madrassas were receiving financial grants from Zakat funds. According to an official report of the police department, a number of madrassas were merely providing religious education. Yet as many as 42% of them were actively promoting sectarian violence through a well conceived indoctrination process¹². The students predominantly from poor families were given free food and lodging during their term at the madrassas. As poverty increased in the 1990s, the burgeoning madrassas provided a growing number of unemployed and impoverished youths with the security of food, shelter and an emotionally charged identity: a personality that felt fulfilled through violence against the other.

As the new kind of sectarian madrassas emerged and grew during the Zia regime. so did sectarian violence. The number of sectarian killings increased from 22 during the 1987-89 period, to 166 during the 1993-95 period¹³. Thus violence against the other became both the expression and the emblem of the narrowed identity.

¹¹ Akmal Hussain, Civil Society Undermined, in, Strategic Issues....., op.cit., Page 386.

¹² Zia ul Hasan Khan, Rise of Sectarianism in Pakistan: Causes and Implications, Research Paper (Mimeo), Pakistan Administrative Staff College, Lahore 1995.

¹³ Ibid.

The mobilisation of these narrow identities involved a psychic disconnection from the well springs of universal human brother hood within the Islamic tradition. Its liberating elements of rationality and love, were replaced in the narrowed psyche, by obscurantism and hatred. Violence against the “other” became an emblem of membership within these identities. Thus, civil society divorced from its universal human values began to lose its cohesion and stability.

3. Economic Growth and the Prelude to Recession

The rapidly growing debt servicing burden together with a slow down of GDP growth and government revenues that had occurred at the end of the Bhutto period (1977), would have placed crippling fiscal and political pressures on the Zia regime but for two factors: (a) the generous financial support received from the West, and (b) the acceleration in the inflow of remittances from the Middle East which increased from US \$ 0.5 billion in 1978 to US \$ 3.2 billion in 1984. These foreign capital inflows eased budgetary and balance of payments pressures, and thereby enabled the Zia regime to undertake the policy of building a theocratic State.¹⁴

Although the GDP growth rate during the Zia period did increase, yet this higher growth rate could not be expected to be maintained because of continued poor performance of three strategic factors that sustain growth over time: (i) The domestic savings rate continued to remain below 10% compared to a required rate of over 20%. (ii) Exports as a percentage of GDP continued to remain below 10% and did not register any substantial increase.(see table 1). (iii) Inadequate investment in social and economic infrastructure. As defence and debt servicing expenditure increased, the Annual Development Programme (ADP) through which much of the infrastructure projects were funded, began to get constricted. For example, ADP expenditure as a percentage of GDP fell from an average of 7.4% in the Z.A. Bhutto period (1973 to 1977), to 6.2% in the Zia period (1977 to 1988).

¹⁴ As many as 78.9% of emigrants the Middle East were production workers See: Jillani et.al. Labour Migration PIDE, Research Report No. 126.

It is not surprising that when the cushion of foreign loans and debt relief was withdrawn at the end of the Afghan War, the underlying structural constraints to GDP growth began to manifest themselves: Debt servicing pressures resulting from the low savings rates, high borrowings and balance of payments deficits related with low export growth and poor infrastructure, combined to pull down the GDP growth into a protracted economic recession in the 1990s. Similarly the seeds of social conflict sown with the breeding of the religious militant groups, began to erupt and feed off the poverty and unemployment associated with the economic recession of the 1990s.

4. Poverty, Politics and Terrorism in the 1990s

The decade of the 1990s was marked by a protracted economic recession, a historically unprecedented increase in poverty and a deteriorating law and order situation. There was a sharp decline in the growth rate of GDP from 6.3% in the 1980s to 4.2% in the 1990s. During the decade of the 1990s political instability, historically unprecedented corruption by the top leadership and the worsening law and order situation had a significant adverse effect on private investment and GDP growth. Yet these factors merely accentuated the tendency for growth to slow down as a result of structural features of the economy that were manifest even in the 1980s. The failure of successive governments in this period to address the deteriorating infrastructure and the emerging financial crisis further exacerbated the unfavourable environment for investment. (Investment as a percentage of GDP declined from 18% in the period 1988-92 to 16% in the period 1993-97). This decline in investment was accompanied by a decline in the productivity of capital thereby accentuating the decline in GDP growth rate¹⁵. The sharp decline in the GDP growth rate was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in poverty. In terms of the calorific norm the percentage of the population below the poverty line increased from 17% in 1987-88 to 32% in 1999-2000. While one third of the

¹⁵ Akmal Hussain, et.al., *Overcoming the Crisis: Poverty, Growth and Governance*, UNDP, NHDR (Draft), mimeo, 2002, Chapter 3.

population was hungry the majority of the population was deprived of access over basic services such as education, health, sanitation and safe drinking water.¹⁶

Pakistan's demographic age profile shows that as much as 49% of the population is below 18 years of age. These young men and women are living in families, which in one third of the cases are hungry, where the elders are predominantly sick and without adequate medical treatment. In most cases the young women and men are not only subject to the pressures of hunger and untreated illness in the family but have little prospects of education or employment. These are desperate circumstances which in some cases are inducing suicide¹⁷ and in many others constitute the social base of religious violence. Madrassas linked to armed militant groups which provide food, shelter and a sense of group identity, therefore found ready recruits in this period. During the 1990s acute political stability, combined with official tolerance of armed religious groups gave them an opportunity to increase recruitment and enlarge their political constituencies particularly in the provinces of NWFP and Baluchistan. (In these provinces large sections of population had kinship and ethnic ties with communities across the border in Afghanistan). As the Taliban regime consolidated its hold over Afghanistan during the 1990s it found loyal support from some of the armed militant groups functioning in Pakistan.

After 9/11, the Government of Pakistan wisely joined the international coalition in the war against terrorism. Courageous policies were undertaken by the government to

¹⁶ The prevalence of mal-nutrition made a large proportion of the population susceptible to disease while lack of access over safe drinking water and poor sanitation intensified the health problem. It is not surprising therefore that our survey for the National Human Development Report shows that almost 65% of the poor population in Pakistan is suffering from illness. Yet due to the woefully inadequate coverage of the health facilities the poor are in most cases unable to get adequate medical treatment. Our survey shows that amongst the extremely poor population, of those who seek medical treatment 58% go to private medical practitioners rather than government hospitals. The latter are poorly equipped and doctors are often absent from duty. Thus while 65% of the poor population is sick, when they go for medical treatment, they get locked into a high cost medical service which pushes them into debt and deeper poverty.

¹⁷ There is now evidence of an increasing number of cases of poverty related suicide in Pakistan. This is particularly significant in a country where there are strong social and religious norms against suicide. (See Akmal Hussain et.al., *Overcoming the Crisis: Poverty, Growth and Governance*, UNDP, National Human Development Report, (Mimeo), First Draft, 2002

provide logistical support to coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan. At the same time the government took up the challenge of taking action under the law against some of the armed militant groups that were operating within the country.

Conclusion

Pakistan is to-day at the cross roads. It can emerge as an enlightened, moderate and modern Muslim country that can make a significant contribution to world peace and human civilization in the 21st century. Pakistan's society has a deep rooted tradition of religious tolerance and is imbued with universal values of humanism. It has a talented and creative human resource base. For Pakistan to actualize its great human potential, it is necessary to strengthen the institutions of democracy and to undertake a process of rapid economic development. Poverty must be quickly overcome and access over education, health, transport and housing must be provided to those currently deprived of these basic facilities.

Terrorism at a psychic level involves a divorce from the wellsprings of reason and humanity that give to the individual his sense of wholeness and relatedness with others. If Pakistan is to avoid becoming a breeding ground of terrorism in the future, then poverty and illiteracy must be overcome. This is necessary to enable its people to love and reason rather than hate and kill.

References

1. Hussain, Akmal: Strategic Issues in Pakistan's Economic Policy, Progressive Publishers, Limited, Lahore 1986.
2. Hussain, Akmal et.al.: Overcoming the Crisis: Poverty, Growth and Governance, UNDP, National Human Development Report, (forthcoming).
3. Jillani, S. et.al.: Labour Migration, Research Report No. 126, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.
4. Khan, Zia ul Hasan: The Rise of Sectarianism in Pakistan, Causes and Implications, Research Paper (Mimeo), Pakistan Administrative Staff College, Lahore 1995.
5. Morning News (The Daily), 20th January 1980.
6. Noman, Omar: The Political Economy of Pakistan, Routledge Kegan and Paul, London, 1988.
7. Syed, Najam Hussain: Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry, Punjab Adabi Markaz, Lahore, 2nd edition 1986.
8. The Economist, London, April 10, 1985.