

Pakistan : Illusions, Propaganda and Reality – Nawab Bugti's Assassination and the 2007 Elections

Lieutenant General Eric Vas, PVSM (Retd)

Pre-1947, the Muslim League proclaimed that the sub-continent could never be governed by a constitution, which enshrined secular [as opposed to religious] values. So, it demanded Partition and under the leadership of Mr Jinnah, took the communal path and proclaimed that it was the sole representative of Muslims in the subcontinent. Muslims who supported the secular Congress Party were branded as Hindu *chamchas* [yes men] and traitors to Islam. By this logic, Pakistan claimed that Jammu and Kashmir being a Muslim majority state should be part of Pakistan. Thousands of armed guerrillas crossed the Pakistani border into the valley. Their mood was up-beat. They were under the illusion that one Pakistani was equal to ten Indians. Their slogan was *Has kar laya Pakistan, lar kar lenge Hindustan*. The trucks in which they came were marked *Chalo Delhi*.

When the Indian Army was poised to clear the whole of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan accepted a UN cease fire. This was to be followed by a withdrawal of Pakistani forces and a UN-supervised plebiscite to decide the will of the people. Pakistan was afraid to allow a plebiscite to be held as they knew that Shiekh Abdullah and his National Conference party would sweep the polls. Thus, Pakistan refused to withdraw and no plebiscite could be held. Pakistani propaganda kept repeating that India was refusing a plebiscite. However, Jinnah saw the reality and on his deathbed admitted to his doctor that the creation of Pakistan was the biggest disaster of his life.

Pakistani generals accepted the reality that their armed forces were too weak for them to force a military solution in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan joined US-led anti-Soviet military pacts. In return, it received significant military supplies. By 1964, Pakistan's Armed Forces had a military edge over India in three vital areas: the Air

Lieutenant General Eric Vas, PVSM is a former GOC-in-C Command.

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Force, Armour and Artillery. This once again fired their illusions. Mr Bhutto persuaded President Ayub Khan that this was the time to focus attention on Jammu and Kashmir as there was little risk of provoking a military show down. Indian Prime Minister Shastri warned Pakistan that any violations of the Cease Fire Line (CFL) would be treated as a violation of the international border and India would be compelled to take appropriate action to counter this. Ignoring this warning, Pakistan launched an armoured division across the CFL, captured Chhamb, threatened Akhnur and the road communications from Jammu to Naushera and Poonch. On 6 September 1965, Shastri ordered the Armed Forces to counter this aggression and cross the international border if necessary. The Indo-Pak War of 1965 resulted in a military and political defeat for Pakistan. In the battles which ensued, Pakistan lost the cream of its armour in the Punjab. Pakistan's political aims had been countered. An emergency was declared in Pakistan. President Ayub Khan resigned. A UN imposed cease fire resulted in the re-establishment of a mutually agreed Cease Fire Line [CFL].

Pakistani propaganda claimed that India had wanted to overrun Pakistan and their aggressive plans had been crushed. This illusion is perpetuated up to this day, and 6 September is celebrated as "Save Pakistan Day". But Pakistani generals know the reality. They know that they cannot defeat India militarily. They have decided to "bleed" India by arming and training terrorists in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, and employing these across the CFL to carry out terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistani propaganda claims these people to be freedom fighters.

Meanwhile, over the years it had became apparent that there were strong cultural differences between East and West Pakistan, which could not be overcome by Islam. When the East Pakistani electorate, led by Mujibur Rehman, gained a lead over West Pakistan's Muslim League, the latter was not prepared to accept Mujibur Rehman as the Prime Minister. The President proclaimed martial law in East Pakistan, appointed Bhutto as Prime Minister, arrested Mujibur Rehman and began arresting and killing Bengali intellectuals and other prominent leaders. Millions of Bengali refugees poured across the border into India where a provisional Bangladesh government in exile was established. Bengali guerrillas were recruited, organised, armed and trained. Soon the whole of East Pakistan was up in arms. Pakistani military positions were

isolated and were faced with an impossible military task. Forces in West Pakistan, out of sheer desperation, launched futile air attacks across the western border against targets in India. In the ensuing Indo-Pak War of 1971, Pakistani Armed Forces in East Pakistan capitulated. 93,000 prisoners were evacuated to prison camps in India. East Pakistan was proclaimed as a sovereign state, Bangladesh. India declared a unilateral cease fire.

Bhutto released Mujibur Rehman and began negotiating for the repatriation of 93,000 prisoners of war. India demanded that the CFL be demarcated by a joint team. India wanted this to be treated as an international border, but Bhutto apparently pleaded that this decision be delayed until he had consolidated his position in Pakistan. India agreed and the prisoners were repatriated; the CFL was thereafter referred to as the Line of Control [LOC]. The Pakistani military was subdued after this defeat in Bangladesh but it was not prepared to allow Bhutto to consolidate his political power. Bhutto's opponents accused him of murdering a political rival. Bhutto was arrested, tried, found guilty and hanged. The military once again became the power behind the political throne in Islamabad.

Partition had deeply affected the demographic balance of some areas of Pakistan. The majority of the migrants who went from India were Sunnis who were either serving in the armed forces or working as farm labourers. Many started working on the farms of Pakistani Shia landlords. Their poverty led to deep resentments and created an angry group deprived of resources and political representation. Fearful of Shia activism following the 1978-79 Islamic revolution in Iran, General Zia inflamed Sunni fears and militarised Sunni militants. With the praiseworthy exception of Nawaz Sharif, all successive Pakistani governments have continued to manipulate sectarian tension for political purposes. With the assistance of Inter-Services Intelligence [ISI] successive governments also used sectarian elements to sustain Pakistan's interests in the conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan. The Army has been accused of having encouraged sectarian conflict, which it can no longer control. Yet careful examination shows that the army has always been able to maintain sectarian violence at an acceptable level by fostering infighting between groups and even eliminating key leaders whenever an organisation or individual became too difficult to control.

Historically the Army has been able to remain in full control of the country since 1947 in one form or the other. It has occasionally withdrawn behind the scenes whenever it could not fulfil the economic, social and political expectations of society or when the Army suffered a major military set back as happened in East Pakistan or when international pressures were too strong. But the Army never really gave up power. After every crisis the Army was able to control the main lines of power while civilians had to bear the burden of governance.

The military regime by building up an alliance with religious organisations made these an integral part of the military system of dominance. Thus, the emergence of the MMA [a combination of several religious organisations] as a political force in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) did not impose any constraints on the government. On the contrary, the MMA split the votes of the other political parties and allowed Musharraf to pass the constitutional amendments necessary to transform the parliamentary system into a presidential one and institutionalise the political role of the Army through the creation of a National Security Council.

Although General Musharraf's role as a liberal moderniser is accepted by many, we should not exaggerate the dangers, which could arise by the possible assassination of the General. Notwithstanding the human tragedy of such a loss, his absence will not significantly shift the power centre of the country. A suitable relief would be found by the military. The policies on Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan would continue and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons would remain under army control.

The military knows that the illusion of formal democracy is an essential facade when it deals with the West. It, therefore, perpetuates a political party system and elections. The military continues to hold the reins of government while letting politicians deal with the difficulties of governance. Thus, free and fair elections and the formal transfer of power to a civilian head of state, though a necessary first step in the restoration of democracy, will by itself not result in the democratisation of the country. After they form a government, civilians will face an almost impossible task of balancing the priorities of civilian politics with the "demands" of the military. Lacking true autonomy, civilians will not be able to perform

better than the military. At the same time, civil helplessness in the face of orchestrated sectarian violence will reinforce the army's role as the only institution able to physically control it. This is one of the main reasons why democratic politics have been repeatedly discredited in Pakistan.

Prominent Pakistani politicians have understood this. In May 2006, long time exiled rivals Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif got together in London and signed a "Charter to Democracy" for their country. This takes a comprehensive stance against the overweening position that the army and intelligence apparatus occupy in Pakistan's polity. This Charter envisages bringing the military under civilian control, disbanding the National Security Council, bringing the defence budget under parliamentary oversight and throwing out military officers who occupy civilian posts. An independent election commission would conduct polls and independence of the judiciary would be restored. This effort, if accompanied by sustained economic growth, will result in the emergence of a substantial middle class with a democratic character. It is this element that is likely to demand more participatory governance and evolve a democratic tradition. Significantly, the MMA has accepted reality and also declared its support for the Charter.

General Musharraf's position has been eroded considerably since his coup in October 1999. His propaganda machine is finding it difficult to project him as a knight on a white charger, out on a mission to rid Pakistan of corrupt politicians, or to rid the country of internal sectarian violence or to protect Pakistan from Indian aggression. Terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir can no longer pretend that they are freedom fighters and that their violence is directed at assisting the political aspirations of the people. Kashmiris have begun to see the reality of their situation. They have at last understood that Pakistan's game plan undermines their prosperity, without achieving any political gains. Moreover, today the West has understood that the risk of an Islamist take over in Pakistan is a myth created by the military to consolidate its hold on power. Propaganda on all these connected issues no longer works.

The Army knows that it can no longer rely on full support from Sind, Baluchistan or the NWFP. It clings to the illusion that as long as Punjab continues to remain pro-army, and it can prevent

the exiled politicians from establishing a working coalition, there is little that they can do to oust the army. To dispel this illusion, the opposition must sweep the polls and make the Charter work. For this to happen it is imperative that Sharif and Bhutto return to Pakistan sometime before elections that are scheduled to be held next year. Of course the present government will clamp both of them into jail. But jail can be a good place to lead political campaigns from. Politicians have one big advantage. The common man has dispelled many old illusions. The army's propaganda machine no longer works.

Under these circumstances, India should not only continue its "peace talks" with Pakistan but should prepare and plan for a post-Musharraf future and an inevitable structural change in Pakistan. Cynics will scoff at the talk of democracy in Pakistan. There is no reason to believe that army rule is divinely sanctioned in Pakistan. The question is not whether Pakistan will forever be under the thumb of the Army but whether India is preparing itself for inevitable changes in Pakistan. India has no reason to keep quiet about the forthcoming elections in Pakistan. Like all the other friends of Pakistan, India too must insist on an electoral process that is at once 'legitimate' in terms of first principles, and 'free and fair' in terms of the process. New Delhi needs to keep in touch with Pakistan's exiled leaders. It also needs to engage with such leaders as Qazi Hussain Ahmad, head of the Jamaat-e-Islam. These are very small steps for India, but could set the tone for a more assertive Indian policy towards Pakistan that will benefit the people of both countries.

Faint-hearted Indians will feel that these steps might rebound to India's disadvantage. Musharraf knows that this is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people. This is an internal struggle for power and Pakistani strategists will welcome an opportunity to somehow involve India. Critics warn that by supporting the opposition, India would be playing into the Army's hands. They claim that this would help the military to win public support on the grounds of national security against their arch rivals – devious Hindu infidels who want to break up Pakistan.

Others note that Pakistani COAS General Aslam Beg has publicly announced that any threat to Pakistan's security, no matter by whom, would evoke a nuclear strike against India. Could an

internal political "threat" against military authoritarianism be treated as an Indian inspired threat? Admittedly it is difficult to know what desperate crazy leaders will do when they sense that they are losing power. There is no limit to the scary scenarios nervous strategists can conjure up. While it is necessary that the Armed Forces be prepared for any eventuality, it is necessary for Indian leaders to draw a line between possible and probable threats. At the same time it should persistently remind Pakistan that in the event of a nuclear threat, India has the power to wipe out Pakistan.

Pakistan Army's best bet would be to avoid a direct confrontation with India and continue sponsoring terrorist attacks, such as were carried out on the trains in Mumbai on 11 July 2006. The aim is to provoke communal riots; to create several mini-Pakistans within India; to prove to their people that a secular governance doesn't work in India. India's response to this is to keep cool and improve its intelligence and security, and deal swiftly with those who plan and execute such attacks.

History tells us that authoritarian military regimes in due course of time invariably overstep their limit and collapse. As if to demonstrate this cliche, on 26 August 2006, Pakistan Army launched a heliborne commando raid on a Baloch stronghold northwest of Quetta. The ensuing battle left Nawab Akbar Bugti, his guards and about 20 Pakistani soldiers dead. This incident has given a fresh lease of life to Balochistan's long simmering insurgency and put further strain on Pakistan's fragile nation state. There have been contrary reactions within Pakistan's establishment to this incident. Some speak of a great military triumph, others ask, 'why was it necessary to kill a highly respected man who is over 80 years old and in the last phase of his life? Some fear that this could bring about a 'recrudescence of nationalist sentiment' within Pakistan and discontent within Pakistan's political mainstream. Some claim that Bugti was never a target; his death was accidental when his bunker collapsed during a battle against armed rebels. A few of Musharraf's close associates appear to be distancing themselves from the attack. Pakistan's famous political exiles are reportedly in a state of high exultation.

India has balanced its response to this development. India's official statement has termed the incident "unfortunate" and observed that "military force can never solve political problems". It is clearly

not in India's interest to get involved with Balochistan insurgency. India is taking pains to ensure that its empathy for the Baloch cause does not give an opportunity to Islamabad to either discredit the movement or divide opposition leaders by laying them open to the charge that they are toe-ing the Indian line. At the same time it cannot but be interested in the project of a democratic Pakistan.

Before his violent death, Nawab Bugti had demanded that the Pakistan military go back to the barracks where they belong. This is the spectre that is going to haunt the ruling establishment in Islamabad during the coming elections. Indian leaders must not let their fears deter them from taking bold action to support the democratic process. Pakistani propaganda will persistently tell its people that Indians are undermining the unity of Pakistan. India has no cause to be apologetic. Its response is that it looks forward to the establishment of a free, democratic and prosperous Pakistan. The coming year promises to be a tense period in Indo-Pak relations.

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