

STATES UNDER SIEGE

Rising Terrorism and the Ascent of Political Islam

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Religious extremists are challenging the authority of several Muslim states and the legitimacy of their governments through the use of terror. As state authority crumbles, victorious extremists could create new centers of international terrorism with wide-ranging consequences. To combat the threat effectively, it is necessary to understand both the ideology of extremism and the forces that propel it. Also, to situate them in a historical context.

I shall discuss here three topics of great contemporary concern – Pakistan, Egypt, and impact of political Islam upon Muslim states at the global level. In doing so, I shall raise questions whose answers I would like to know, but for which I do have at least some provisional answers.

- Pakistan, though an Islamic Republic, is under daily attack by Islamic groups armed with bombs and suicide jackets. These groups, which demand an Islamic state run by principles of the sharia, accuse the army and government of being insincere to Islam and of being America's agents. In less than a decade, deaths from extremist attacks have exceeded 50,000. The number of disabled is many times this number. From a law-and-order problem this morphed into a low-intensity civil war, and now has moved towards medium-intensity. But why has nuclear-armed Pakistan, with the world's 7th largest army, been unable to respond effectively or to even formulate a terrorism policy? Why does it tolerate parallel systems of governance and authority?
- Radical Islamists, marginalized in earlier decades, have recently come into the political mainstream in Pakistan and Egypt, as well as other Muslim countries. Does engaging radical Islamist in electoral politics moderate their Islamist message? Can Islamists coexist with jihadists who wish to export their revolution across borders?
- Many Muslim theologians reject the concept of a nation-state. Instead they propagate the notion of a Caliphate embracing the entire *ummah*. While many ordinary Muslims may agree with this as a theoretical principle, how do they deal with this in practice? How should the West react to proposals for a supra-national Islamic theocratic state?

Each of the above will be taken up in the following.

I. Why the Pakistani state dithers

In classical political theory, the state is an entity that "*upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order.*"¹ This definition, which owes to Max Weber, obviously requires that the state possess territory and that, through some complex process of legitimation, citizens accept that the state alone can properly exercise force. But what if groups, whether inside or outside the territory, use force frequently enough to achieve their objectives and also attain some kind of legitimacy? In this case the authority of the state is undermined and weakened. Unless this can be effectively reversed, the state will ultimately lose the territory it once held.

Indeed, Pakistan has steadily lost ground over the last one decade to Islamic extremists. Approximately 14% of Pakistan's territories are no-go areas for the civilian administration and police. Even the army dares not venture there. A part of its territory – Swat, where the Taliban had established a reign of terror – has been successfully liberated by military action but is not fully out of danger.

Most notable among anti-Pakistan militant groups is the *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan* (Movement of the Pakistani Taliban) but there are others with narrower, more sectarian, goals such as the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Sipah-e-Sahaba*, *Jundullah*, etc.* The TTP focusses on suicide bombings directed against soldiers, paramilitary forces, police, as well as political parties and election candidates which it deems secular. It says it will continue to kill polio workers, girl students, members of NGOs, and government officials. The TTP has also taken credit for attacking Karachi's Mehran naval base in 2011 as revenge for the killing of Osama bin Laden, and destroying two of Pakistan's most valuable reconnaissance aircraft.

The state appears helpless in convicting terrorists who are known to have attacked officers and soldiers. Nor can it prevent their escape from prisons. For example, in a recent brazen attack on the Dera Ismail Khan jail, the jail security staff simply opened the gates to allow Taliban attackers inside, who then released 250 hardened imprisoned terrorists.² An earlier, equally audacious attack on the Bannu jail had released 384 terrorists. It is also reported that prison guards stood aside and raised slogans in support of the Taliban attackers and imposition of sharia law. Among the escapees was Adnan Rasheed, the man convicted of plotting Gen. Musharraf's assassination.³ A military court had sentenced him and other mutineers to death, and a purge of officers and men associated with militants had been ordered.

The army, Pakistan's most powerful actor, has been unable to protect its home bases and headquarters from numerous devastating attacks. Although the TTP posts pictures and videos of tortured and decapitated soldiers on the internet, perhaps out of fear of further demoralizing soldiers the military authorities have rarely chosen to comment. In spite of their brutal tactics, the army's fight against terrorists receives little political or public support. Although there are hundreds of streets and roads named after war heroes who died in Pak-India wars or clashes, there is probably not even one named after a soldier killed fighting against the Taliban. Nor is homage paid to the thousands who died to secure the tribal areas. Talk about taking military action against terrorists is quickly shelved by claiming a lack of capacity. Instead, new atrocities trigger pleadings from political and military leaders for dialogue rather than for counter strikes. Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan have both called for negotiations without preconditions, a call that the TTP has spurned.

Lacking public support, the army fights as though, figuratively speaking, it has one hand tied behind its back. Conspiracy theorists have seized on this weak response and see it as proof that the army is actually colluding with extremists rather than fighting them. Else that self-inflicted wounds are shown around to the world in an attempt to rake in more foreign aid. But they have no plausible explanation for the thousands of army and police casualties, and the fact that senior officers have been targeted and killed.

Rather than ask how religious militancy should be confronted, both the state and society have taken frequent recourse to denial. Typically, even after a militant group claims responsibility for an attack through its appointed official spokesmen, that claim is suppressed by TV channels and major Urdu newspapers (although it appears in certain English ones). A common street reaction is: "*but they [terrorists] cannot be Muslims*". Officials still pretend that the enemy is unknown foreigners even as they negotiate the release of prisoners from well-known local groups and their

* Still others are India-specific. They include *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen*, *Jaish-e-Muhammad*, etc. Created with Pakistani help, they do not pose a direct danger at the moment.

representatives. Soldiers are frequently motivated to fight by telling them that the TTP is actually supported and armed by India!

This paralysis in confronting religious terrorism is a puzzle. Pakistan is not a broken down state like Somalia, Mali, or Yemen – at least not yet. In 2013, for the first time in Pakistan's history one government completed its tenure and peacefully passed over charge to the newly elected one. Pakistan has a history of being a fairly open and liberal society for the first half of its existence, and still has sophisticated professionals in both civil society and its army. Its numerous military academies and war colleges train officers from friendly countries as well as Pakistanis.

A distressed Pakistani commentator writes:

No state, not Leninist Russia, not Maoist China, not George Washington's America, not the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, tolerated the existence of free-lance bands of armed men. The illiterate (but capable) Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia understood this. Modern India, which is very much a work in progress and is as incompetent and corrupt a regime as any in Pakistan, seems to understand this. Everyone seems to understand, it but the Pakistani army high command does not? Don't they teach this in National Defense University before they teach all about DIMEFIL and its importance in Pakistani Afghan policy?⁴

After taking heavy losses for a decade while living in a world of fantasy, it finally seemed as if reality was about to dawn. The speech of Pakistan's most powerful man, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, Chief of Army Staff, appeared to be a harbinger of change. Speaking to his troops on 14 August 2012, Pakistan's Independence Day, he said:

Today, we are living through the decisive moments of our history. Disillusionment, desperation, religious bigotry, political disharmony and discord seem to permeate our lives. Naturally, the forces hostile to our motherland are benefitting from internal weaknesses and resulting uncertainty in the country. Blaming such anti-Pakistan elements aside, our efforts must be directed towards stabilizing the internal front...Today, extremism and terrorism present a grave challenge. We can claim that this menace is not of our making. This approach, however, will not solve the problem. The war against extremism and terrorism is not only the Army's war, but that of the whole nation. We as a nation must stand united against this threat. Army's success is dependent on the will and support of the people..... We are fully aware that it is the most difficult task for any Army to fight its own people. This is always done as a last resort. Our ultimate aim is to bring peace to these areas so that the people can live a normal life. But for that to happen, it is critical that people abide by the constitution and law of the land. No state can afford a parallel system of governance and militias.⁵

The speech was remarkable for two reasons: First, it was a rare official admission of the situation's seriousness and that the state was losing authority to a "parallel system of governance and militias". Second, that the challengers were one's own people rather than outsiders subservient to mysterious external forces.

But a year after this "landmark" speech, little has changed. No counter-terrorism policy has been announced nor has there been a diminution of terrorist violence. A day-by-day record of terrorist incidents compiled from press reports shows that not a single day passed without several reported deaths.⁶ The first 69 days of 2013, witnessed 1,537 fatalities, including 882 civilians, 116 SF personnel and 539 militants.*

* These statistics do not, of course, reveal the ghastly nature of the attacks. For example, on January 10 a suicide bomber targeted snooker players in a hall in Quetta. Cruelly, rescuers and survivors were targeted

Outside help is considered anathema. In North Waziristan the only challenge to militants comes from remotely operated American drones that ply the skies above. But, because they obviously violate Pakistan's sovereignty, drones are a source of serious tension in Pakistan-US relations. In June 2013, the government once again protested to the United States against a CIA operated drone strike in Waziristan that killed the TTP's second in command, Wali-ur-Rahman, the key organizer of the Mehran base attack.⁷ Cricketer Imran Khan declared Rahman was a moderate who had been killed by America so that Pakistan would remain at war with the Taliban!⁸

Two fundamental reasons lie behind the pusillanimous response of the state – one that boasts a high degree of military professionalism – and the rapid descent into confusion and chaos:

First – Pakistan's foreign and domestic policies have been strongly driven by its desire to confront and defeat India in Kashmir and Afghanistan. This keeps priorities away from fighting terrorism, and has also created a blowback of militarism and jihadists.^{**}

Second – Pakistan is still struggling to resolve a fundamental issue that lies in its genesis sixty five years ago: was it meant to be just a Muslim majority state or, instead, an Islamic state which would be run by Islamic law, the sharia?

We now turn to a consideration of the above.

Anti-Indian sentiment and the cultivation of a siege mentality begins early in the life of a Pakistani child. Therefore one should not be surprised by the results of a recent poll: a cross-section of Pakistanis was asked about the biggest threat to their country – India, the Taliban, or al-Qaeda. A majority – fifty seven percent – said India.⁹ The attitudes of army officers, who are immersed in anti-Indianism starting from their Cadet College days, are still firmer.

Given this frame of mind, checkmating India and avenging the 1971 defeat has been the state's foremost priority. Quite serendipitously, this became a possibility during late 1980's and early 1990's. Three new elements had entered almost simultaneously, making possible a very different approach from that in earlier decades.

- a) A large jihadist force with highly experienced fighters, created with American and Saudi help, was ready and available for use after the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan in 1988.
- b) Around this time, Pakistan had succeeded in making its first few nuclear weapons (1986).
- c) Rigging of elections by Delhi in 1987 had outraged Kashmiri nationalists and a subsequent military crackdown had forced large numbers to seek refuge in the Pakistani part of Kashmir. Young refugees subsequently became the nucleus of various groups fighting against India.

India, with its much larger conventional forces, could now be challenged by Islamic militant groups sheltered on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control. It was hoped that resolving the long stuck Kashmir dispute could somehow be quickened – in Pakistan's favor. The covert war's goal was to weaken India by raising the human and economic costs of its occupation of Kashmir. At

by a second bomber, bringing the tally to 120 dead. All were Hazara Shiites, an easily identifiable ethnic group persecuted by Sunni extremists of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi which claimed credit for the attack. Earlier, the TTP had released videos showing 17 Pakistan soldiers being beheaded after being captured in Dir. Their military badges were then placed by the side of their separated heads.

^{**} As of the time of writing (August, 2013), a week long exchange of fire between Pakistani and Indian troops along the Line of Control in Kashmir has kept public attention riveted there. Earlier, a Pakistani military exercise, *Azm-e-Nau*, showing the military's hi-tech capabilities with jet-fighters and missiles, was given considerable publicity.

some point, Pakistan's military reasoned, it would become too much trouble for the Indians to hang on to Kashmir and they would be forced to withdraw.

At its core, the new Kashmir strategy had nuclear weapons that would protect Pakistan if India were to launch cross-border retaliatory raids. Cocooned under this umbrella, militant groups flourished and freely organized along the length and breadth of Pakistan, drawing upon both official and public support. The situation changed after September 11, 2001 when General Musharraf's U-turn turned some former jihadist allies into adversaries. Support to anti-India groups was maintained, but an attempt was made to make this not too obvious. Resisting American pressure, Pakistan secretly allowed Mullah Omar's Taliban – expelled from Kabul after the US invasion – to be headquartered in Quetta but ordered them to keep their heads low. Later, the Taliban also established a strong presence in Karachi.

Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban arises less out of some imperial ambition, and more out of fear that a Delhi-friendly government in Kabul will somehow enable India to encircle Pakistan. Today the Pakistani military and civil establishment's antipathy and fear of the "bad Taliban" of Hakeemullah Mehsud is overshadowed by the hopes it places in the "good Taliban" of Mullah Omar. The latter are thought to be allies who can never make friends with secular India, while Hamid Karzai is considered unfriendly because he has welcomed Indian aid and influence in Afghanistan.

Ideological confusion is the second reason. The warm front of political Islam meeting the cooler air of nationalism creates a thick ideological fog, leaving the army confounded and confused. The Pakistani state lacks powerful arguments that could arouse its soldiers and citizens to fight the brutal TTP. A core question – but one never raised publically – is: Who are the truer Muslims? The bearded militants who seek to destroy the state and its citizens, or the bearded soldiers and paramilitary men who die while seeking to protect their state? Is the Pakistan Army an army for Islam first or for Pakistan first?

Political Islam, which made its debut in Pakistan with General Zia-ul-Haq's coup of 1977, has transformed both the military and society. Earlier, Islam was largely understood as a normative system whose role was to govern an individual's personal life and act as a moral compass. In contradistinction to this, "political Islam" insists that Muslims can only live out their faiths as Muslims in an Islamic state that could have the form of a national state, caliphate, sultanate, or kingdom. Zia was helped in his efforts to redefine Pakistani national state as an Islamic state by the *Jamaat-e-Islami*. In time proselytizing groups such as the *Tablighi Jamaat* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* deeply penetrated the army, which took upon itself to "defend the ideological frontiers" of Pakistan together with the physical territory.*

As a consequence of these shifts, only a razor's edge separates the Pakistan Army from the ones they fight. In the half million strong army, it might be hard to find more than a few thousand soldiers who would disagree with the TTP's demand that sharia should be the law of the land. Or, for that matter, with the TTP's other demand – namely that Pakistan break relations with the United States. But the army that is accused of being America's pawn by the Taliban is, in fact, deeply anti-American! In principle it would have no difficulty in acceding to both demands.

So could Pakistan's civil war be ended by simply capitulating to the TTP's demands?

* One can gauge the level of hard-core Islamist penetration from the observations of someone who grew up in a Pakistani military family. He notes that, "until the late 1970s, the mosques located at the armed forces bases (military, air force and navy), were 90 per cent Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaa't (Sufi), 8 per cent Deobandi, and 0 per cent Salafi. Currently 85 per cent of the mosques are Deobandi or Salafi, and less than 10 per cent are Ahle Sunnat Wal Jama'at."

This apparent solution cannot solve anything. Breaking off relations with the United States, Pakistan's largest trading partner, would cause a tottering economy to topple over. Isolation from the world of international finance would mean that there would be no chance of rescue. Wiser heads have realized the catastrophic consequences of an economic meltdown.

Still more importantly, in spite of it being a popular demand, actual implementation of the sharia would light the fires of a full-scale civil war. Time after time, whenever rival political Islam groups compete for attention and power, they have put forth rival versions of the true faith and the true sharia. Each claims itself to be right and the others wrong. In a country that is as religiously bitterly divided as Pakistan, the imposition of any one of the four brands of sharia – *Hanafi*, *Sha'fi*, *Maliki*, and *Hanbali* – would be cause for unending strife. Even if one Sunni faction succeeded in imposing one form of sharia, competing factions could accuse it of heresy or apostasy. The Shiites, of course, do not recognize any kind of sharia. They would join Pakistan's other marginalized non-Muslim minorities such as Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians.

What does the army plan to do about the worsening situation? One strategy is to manipulate differences between various *lashkars* (armed groups) in the hope that they will cancel out each other. For example, it has been recently reported that the *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (LeT), a group closely associated with the Pakistan Army that is well known for carrying out operations inside India, has been accused by the TTP of hatching a plot to attack its bases and supporters in Mohmand Agency.¹⁰ But similar experiments in the past have not worked well. Confusing matters still further, the TTP has said it will attack India unless it stops firing across the Line of Control in Kashmir. Asked about what logic they had for attacking Pakistani forces defending the country's geographical frontiers against India, the Taliban stated, "we are fighting the Pakistani government for the sake of Islam, but it does not mean that we will allow the enemies of the country to attack our homeland."¹¹

Another part of the strategy is to buy time through negotiations. But the TTP has little need to negotiate with the Pakistani state; it wants a plain surrender. With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan just around the corner, Taliban power is likely to grow still stronger. This will ultimately challenge Pakistan's military and political elite, whose good life stands threatened.

The future: It is likely that, at some point, the Pakistani establishment will realize that it has no choice but to stand up and fight for all that its worth. This will have to be both in the military and ideological domains. But when such a realization will actually come about is anybody's guess. Until then the state shall continue to wither and its authority erode both along country's tribal periphery as well as at the center.

II. Pakistan and Egypt: does democracy moderate Islamist zeal?

In early August, the Egyptian army used live fire on Muslim Brotherhood supporters of deposed president Mohammed Mursi who were demanding his reinstatement. More than 900 pro-Mursi demonstrators, and a few policemen, have died. This has been one of bloodiest times in Egypt's history. A few secularists and liberals expressed distress but stopped short of condemning the army's actions. The population is deeply polarized between secularists and Islamists, a sign of bad times to come.

Mursi had been deposed in a coup. But this was no ordinary coup. One quarter of Cairo's population was in Tahrir Square on 30 June 2013, and over half of the electorate – about 22 million – had signed a memorandum demanding Mursi resign. Protests had built up over a year against his ruinous economic steps, disenfranchisement of Coptic Christians, attacks on churches, lynching of Shiites, etc. The huge turnout showed that after decades of Hosni Mubarak's rule, the political divide over defining Egypt's national identity – secular versus Islamic – is fierce. Significantly, it also shows that secular Egyptians exist in large numbers.

While similar divides exist in Pakistan, Islamists there vastly outnumber secularists and religious minorities have few defenders. On other counts, a comparison of Pakistan and Egypt shows interesting similarities:

1. Both are American allies that, over decades, have received large amounts of economic and military aid from the US.
2. Both possess strong militaries that remain popular in spite of harsh experiences. Pakistanis trust their military more than civilian institutions – a staggering 88% reposed confidence in the interventionist military.¹² Similarly in a poll in May 2013, only 27 percent of the Egyptians surveyed identified civilian control of the military as “very important.” One does not know as yet the impact of recent events on this.
3. Both have had extended periods of dictatorship, and have inefficient structures of governance that create frustration in their publics.
4. Both countries, headed respectively by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Gamal Abdul Nasser, had secular beginnings. But this was to dissipate and political Islam asserted itself as a powerful force in both countries. By the early 1980's, Islamists had become a major contender for state power.

In Pakistan the conceptual basis of political Islam was laid down by Syed Abul Ala Maudoodi (1903-1979), founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Maudoodi championed the cause for an Islamic state, the head of which should be a pious Muslim male who would Islamize the nation and make better Muslims of his subjects. Sovereignty would lie with Allah, not the people, said Maudoodi. Secularism was the enemy of the Islamic state, as were people like Jinnah and others who he regarded as creatures of Western culture. During the 1940's, Maudoodi referred to Jinnah in speeches as “*Kafir-e-Azam*” (the great unbeliever) and to the idea of Pakistan as “*Na-Pakistan*” (land of filth). At that time he argued that it was wrong for Muslims to hanker after political power if they did not live ‘proper’ Islamic lives themselves. But after Partition, this view changed. Maudoodi threw his lot in with those who chose to migrate to Pakistan from Hyderabad while vigorously arguing that Muslims throughout the world were one single nation.¹³ He now argued that Muslims would have to seize political power if they were to lead lives of piety. His insistence that Islam demanded a single global Islamic state resonated across the Middle East, and his works were translated into Arabic.

Syed Qutb (1906-1966) was Maudoodi's Egyptian counterpart. As a student at the Colorado State College for Education, he had concluded that major aspects of American life were primitive and “shocking”, and Americans were “numb to faith in religion, faith in art, and faith in spiritual values altogether”. Qutb's writings denouncing secularists as the enemies of Islam inspired, among others, the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Qaida.* He was involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Nasser in 1954 and was hanged two years later at the age of 59. Like Maudoodi, Qutb discounts democracy, insists that only the pristine Islam of the Prophet can save mankind, says non-Muslims can be tolerated in an Islamic state but only if they pay the imposed *jizya* tax, and that the jihad must be waged to save the world from the *jahiliyah* who, by definition, do not accept Islam and the Word of God. He associates *jahiliyah* both with western civilization and secularist Muslims.¹⁴

We now turn to the question posed above: has mainstreaming and access to political power tempered the radicalism of Maudoodi's and Qutb's followers, or of other hardline Islamists?

Let us deal with Pakistan first, where right-wing parties swept the 2013 polls taking 62% of the popular vote. Although the religious parties were not united in a single platform, their combined

* While they were students in King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri were introduced to Qutb's philosophy by his brother Mohammad Qutb.

victories were significant and larger than at any time in the past. The pro-Taliban *Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl* (JUIF) won 10 seats nationally and won 22% of the votes in Baluchistan.

Pakistan's religious political parties, now mainstreamed, can no longer be called extremists. But this is only because the edge of the spectrum has shifted further rightwards. The TTP's *Wahabist-Salafist "takfiri"* ideology is so extreme that it has targeted the top leadership of *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* with bomb attacks. Together with JUI-F, the TTP condemns the TTP's vocal defender, Cricketer Imran Khan, as a Jewish agent. Although the TTP successfully prevented secular parties from campaigning by the use of suicide attacks and bombings, it distributed pamphlets saying it would allow religious parties to campaign for candidates. However these parties were warned to "*stop using religious anthems during the election campaign and corner and public meetings*". The pamphlet explains that religious parties were not sincere about implementing Islam. Clearly the TTP insists on having a monopoly over Islam and will brook no rival.

The ballot box has failed to moderate Pakistan's religious-political parties. The *Jamaat-e-Islami*, which is rooted in Pakistan's educated urban middle class, may now appear less extreme but, in fact, its ideological stance has not softened. It still calls stridently for jihad in Kashmir and against India, refuses to condemn the TTP's attacks upon civilians and soldiers, is known to have protected several important Al-Qaida members, insists that Pakistan must be governed by sharia law, and remains resolutely opposed to birth control.

Now for Egypt: shortly after the Arab Spring took off and Egypt prepared for its first elections after Mubarak's departure, many observers were optimistic that the *Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood) would move away from its violent past and instead turn towards moderation. Founded in 1926 by Hassan Al-Banna, a school-teacher and Islamist scholar, its motto was: "*Allah is our objective; the Quran is our law, the Prophet is our leader; Jihad is our way; and death for the sake of Allah is the highest of our aspirations.*" Sixty one years ago, as described by Arnaud Borchgrave, the "Big Cairo Fire" set off by the Brotherhood to protest King Farook's rule "destroyed 30 banks and major companies, 13 hotels, 310 stores, 92 bars, 40 movie theaters, eight automobile showrooms."¹⁵

The new hope was that even if the Brotherhood paid lip service to Qutb's philosophy, the demands of electoral politics would surely move it away from violent jihad in the direction of becoming populist vote seekers. This would require it to seek a softer line on women and religious minorities than other sharia-seeking movements. Indeed, the pragmatic Brothers did discard Qutb's call for jihad and for resurrecting the Caliphate. Instead they sought softer parts of his writings more relevant to the realities of modern Egypt. This brought them into the bad books of Salafists and Al-Qaida extremists. After the coup, Aiman al-Zawahiri, while accusing the US of plotting to overthrow Mursi in collusion with secularists and the military, condemned the Brotherhood as well. "*Muslim Brotherhood government strove to please America and the secularists as much as it could, but they were not satisfied with it,*"¹⁶ said Zawahiri, accusing the Brotherhood for abandoning the call for jihad and seeking power through democracy. In seeking power through the ballot box rather than bullets and bombs, the Brotherhood has indeed compromised on its Qutb'ist roots.

It would, however, be a mistake to think that the Brotherhood will compromise on what it considers to be the fundamentals. Religious and personal freedom, women's rights, and pluralism are anathema to its core beliefs. A restored Mursi would probably trample on these no less than before. So how should one understand Egypt's predicament and what is to be done?

My personal feeling is that a coup in the name of democracy is not the worst thing that can happen to a country. The jubilation of Egypt's liberals and pluralists following Mursi's removal is understandable. But the excessive use of force by the military was unwarranted and the failure of liberalists and pluralists to condemn this damages the chances of eventual reconciliation. There is

great danger that unless a compromise can be arrived at – one that is firmly rejected by the Brotherhood which insists that Mursi be restored – the Brotherhood's loss could quickly turn into the gain of Salafists and Al-Qaida.

Today, the rallying of opinion among Islamists in favor of Mursi is ominous. Whatever their inner wrangles, they are united well enough when it comes to confronting secularists. A boost to the Mursi camp comes from the fatwa issued by the influential Sheikh Yousuf el Qaradawi, president of the International Council of Islamic Scholars. Qaradawi calls upon General Sisi to restore the Constitution and Mohamed Mursi to power. He declared in June 2013 that,

*It is haram on Egypt to abandon its constitution, its elected leader, and the Shariah of its Lord. Nothing can come after this except Divine wrath and punishment.*¹⁷

Glancing at Algeria twenty years ago, one can see truly terrifying possibilities for Egypt. When the Algerian army forbade the last round of elections in 1972 for fear that their Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), would win, it opened vast prison camps in the Algerian deserts to jail thousands of FIS supporters without trial. If Egyptian generals were to exchange notes with their Algerian counterparts, they would learn of the catastrophe that followed the cancelled elections in 1992. A civil war, no less horrific than what one sees in Syria these days, killed upwards of two hundred thousand people.

Recently a senior official of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Ali Belhadj, has called on the Egyptian and Tunisian leaders to "*learn from the Algerian experience and prevent it from happening in their own countries, under the pretext of a war on terror.*"¹⁸ The leadership in Egypt should not make the same mistake, he warned, because Algeria is still "paying the price" for that mistake 20 years ago. He could well be right.

The Caliphate versus the Muslim Nation-State

The world's 1.6 billion Muslims live in 46 nation-states with defined borders that may be crossed only by individuals possessing passports and visas. For the ordinary unskilled Pakistani and Bangladeshi worker, getting a visa to Saudi Arabia or a Gulf State is a tedious and difficult process. It is likely that he will be exploited and abused by his Muslim employers but he will take more abuse from them than if they were non-Muslim. If asked, he would probably support the idea of a supranational state, the Caliphate.

In principle the Caliphate is a Sunni Islamic state without national borders, ruled by a male caliph who would command the allegiance of the entire *ummah*. As head of state the caliph would govern as prescribed by the sharia, and would command allegiance from all living Muslims as their supreme religious and political authority.

In actual fact, unity of the *ummah* has been an elusive ideal from the very beginnings of Islam. The death of Prophet Mohammed created an enduring schism on the question of who would be the next leader of the faithful. Although Muslim empires in the Middle East and Southwest Asia have been called Caliphates, they have never been accepted by all Muslims and at times rival caliphs have existed contemporaneously. After Turkey's Kemal Ataturk abolished the Caliphate in the 1920's, few Muslim countries wanted it restored. Since that time, the position for Islam's supreme religious as well as political leader has lain dormant and largely unclaimed.

Nevertheless the Islamic State, headed by a caliph, occupies a central place in the Islamist discourse. It is therefore important to know what is meant by it.

It is not straightforward to say what an Islamic state is because the Qur'an, which is the source of all authority for Muslims, is silent on the matter. Pre-Islamic Arabia had no state and Prophet Mohammed created the Medina state after *Misaq-e-Medina*, an accord with various Jewish and pagan tribes. But there was no written law, much less a constitution. There was no taxation system nor any police or army, no concept of territorial governance or defense. Each tribe followed its own customs and traditions. There were inter-tribal wars and all adult tribal men took part in defending ones tribal interests. The only law prevalent was that of *qisas* i.e. retaliation.

Lacking specific guidance from the Holy Book, Islamic scholars have created their own individual understandings. Abul Hasan al-Mawardi (974-1058), a scholar in service of the Abbasid rulers and one of Islam's first political theorists, justified the need for a religious state and writes of "A leader through whom he [Allah] provided for the deputyship of the Prophet", meaning a caliph who would be God's vice-regent on earth. Agreeing on al-Mawardi's need to unite state and religion, Maudoodi created yet another version some 900 years later (see above). Other Muslim scholars disagree with both Mawardi and Maudoodi. There is nothing surprising in these disagreements; consensus rarely emerges from theological argumentation.

So if Islamic theology is ambiguous on the Islamic State (hence Caliphate), and popular Muslim opinion is not insistent upon creating this borderless entity, then why be concerned with mere abstractions that have zero chance of becoming reality? After all, the Caliphate's principal advocates are just fringe radical groups such as *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* (an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood), *Al-Qaida*, and *Jemaah Islamiyyah*.

But the matter is not so simple. Those who have read the Urdu novels of Nasim Hijazi, a Pakistani writer, will understand the powerful nostalgia aroused by mere mention of the Caliphate. Ancient glories and wonderful achievements, real and imagined, are associated with one or the other caliph. Cherished both as memory and ideal, the Caliphate is seen through the prism of centuries with all rough edges smoothed over. Its end in 1926 galvanized Muslims, albeit unsuccessfully, across the world. One scholar of the time regretfully described what happened subsequently as the "cutting up of Muslim lands into measly little pieces called nations".

Movements such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir draw strength from the fact that most Muslims across the world think of themselves as Muslims first, and then as citizens of their respective countries. In Pakistan this may be especially true. Drawing conclusions from a British Council survey conducted in 2009, The Telegraph says:

*The report found that three-quarters of respondents identified themselves foremost as Muslims, with just 14 per cent describing themselves primarily as a citizen of Pakistan. Only 10 per cent have a great deal of confidence in national or local government, the courts or the police and just one third advocate democracy for the country.*¹⁹

Corroborating the above survey, another survey conducted by Express Tribune found that a majority of Pakistan's internet users say they consider themselves 'Muslim first' (49%), 'Pakistani' second (28%) while 23% voted 'Other'.²⁰ A Pew Global Attitudes Survey found that 43% of Turks consider themselves Muslim first and only 29% as Turks first. A majority of Muslims in six countries want Islam to be part of political life.²¹

The reader must keep in view a bewildering range of facts while contemplating the present and future of global Islam. Most Muslims,

- Think that a modern Caliphate would be a good thing, will embody within it justice and fair play, is sanctioned by the Qu'ran and Sunnah, but has little chance of becoming reality.

- Have little idea of what a Caliphate might mean in practical terms; whether it would be capable of governing 1.6 billion Muslims; do not know if some mechanism can be created to judge the level of a candidate's piety; or even how a pious *shura* (council) could be elected that would subsequently elect the caliph.
- Feel connected to each other in spite of bitter fratricidal wars that rage in many countries.
- Are deeply upset when Westerners and other non-Muslims criticize the politics of global Islam or the goal of a modern Caliphate.

The last is particularly worthy of note since it unifies Muslims across the religious spectrum. For example, in 2006 President George W. Bush, while speaking to the Military Officers Association of America, said,

*They hope to establish a violent political utopia across the Middle East, which they call caliphate, where all would be ruled according to their hateful ideology. Osama bin Laden has called the 9/11 attacks, in his words, "a great step towards the unity of Muslims and establishing the righteous caliphate." This caliphate would be a totalitarian Islamic empire encompassing all current and former Muslim lands, stretching from Europe to North Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.*²²

The fierce reaction to Bush's speech, which was seen as taking a shot at Islam, resonated across the world. Coming after the invasion of Iraq, it added to the perception – held by a majority of Muslims today as well – that the United States is waging war against Islam. The lesson to be drawn is that unless Westerners wish to ignite a religious war they will need to lay off criticizing the Caliphate. Instead, it must be left up to history to show why it is infeasible.

In conclusion,

1. **Pakistan's** sixty-year long conflict with India lies at the very core of its problems with terrorism today. There is some good news in this regard. Although he is conservative in the religious sense, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif understands this. But the question is whether he can take his army – which is now besieged by terrorists but which foolishly still helps some among them – along with him.

--- Until such time as Pakistan can assert control over FATA, American drone strikes are likely to continue. Pakistan must insist on a strike protocol that protects non-combatants but it cannot reasonably protest against the targeting of terrorists. This needs to be explained to citizens.

--- There is little that the West can do change the situation in Pakistan because its capacity to influence events in Pakistan has sharply dwindled. By necessity this change will have to come from argumentation and introspection; Pakistan will have to fight its own battles against terrorism.

2. **Egypt** is at a crossroads and needs help. The Muslim Brotherhood showed its intolerant nature after coming to power through the ballot box. But its removal through a coup – albeit a hugely popular one – is fraught with danger. Anger among Islamists could feed the ranks of Salafists and groups such as Al-Qaida. Hence outside forces, particularly the United States and Saudi Arabia, need to push the military and Brotherhood towards a compromise. The US, which pursues its strategic security interests in Egypt, must instead put human rights ahead of these interests.

3. *The Caliphate* in modern times is a non-starter but it is not for non-Muslims to say so. Outsiders should concentrate on matters that directly concern them, such as security. To criticize Islamic theology and principles is counter-productive.

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