

Obscurantists and apologists

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Pakistan has become the battlefield for the Saudi Arabian-Iranian proxy war through outfits such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, and Al-Qaeda on the one hand, and Tehreek-e-Jafria Pakistan and Sipah-e-Mohammad on the other

Whoever is behind the heinous crimes of 28 May is neither a Muslim nor a Pakistani. The perpetrator is, at best, a death merchant, blindly driven by monetary incentives and a religious brute, fuelled by hatred and devoid of any rationality. These characteristics are rooted in history and precipitated by a disastrous mix of politics with religion; a combination used for political survival.

Whether it be an attack on an Ahmadi or Shia mosque, or an assault on General Headquarters or on the Parade Lane Mosque in 2009, or suicide attacks in Peshawar or Lahore, or incidents of violence against Christian Pakistanis (Shangla Hill and Gojra); all point to the treacherous socio-political path that successive leaders have put this country on. These include Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who declared Ahmadis non-Muslims, Maulana Mufti Mehmood and Maulana Maudoodi whose agitation in 1977 resulted in "Islamic" steps such as bans on racing and alcohol, and General Zia-ul Haq who promulgated Ordinance XX in 1984 that resulted in the Ahmadiyya community being classified as a minority group.

We are experiencing the consequences of decades of religious conservatism, hate speech, and contempt for other beliefs. Military and weak civilian governments have been buckling under pressures from hypocritical religio-political groups for far too long.

The Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were a godsend for General Zia-ul Haq. Not only did Zia allow the use of Pakistan as a launching pad for jihad in Afghanistan, but he pushed the establishment to help direct jihadi infiltration in India.

Punjabi and Pashtun jihadis who fought in Afghanistan came in handy. Most of them originally had either belonged to the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam or Jamaat-e-Islami (Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Al-Badr, Hizbul Mujahideen and the off-shoot Lashkar-e-Taiba). They gladly embraced the cause, and crossed over to Indian Kashmir under official patronage.

Such patronage in the long run has been strategically disastrous. It has fanned all sorts of militant extremist thought and attracted extremist forces from outside Pakistan; creating an environment in which they have found supporters, sympathizers and apologists.

On one hand the hydra of religious conservatism and jihadism, consisting of groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and their affiliates, is looking for targets. On the other hand, external influence of those with potential vested interests like Al-Qaeda, Iran, India and even the United States, is complicating the situation.

Pakistan has become the hunting ground for many stakeholders. It is a battlefield for the Saudi Arabian-Iranian proxy war through outfits such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al-Qaeda on the one hand, and Tehreek-e-Jafria Pakistan and Sipah-e-Mohammad on the other.

Another factor feeding the current situation through brazen acts of terror could be our strained ties with India. For years Pakistan has discomforted India through insurgencies in Eastern Punjab and Kashmir. Pakistan now finds itself embroiled in an insurgency-like situation; it is quite possible that the Indian security and intelligence apparatus exploits this volatility. If we go by the advice that leading security experts gave to the Indian government, we cannot rule out a direct or indirect role played by India.

The Afghan intelligence and security apparatus, dominated by non-Pashtuns, is not favourably disposed towards Pakistan either, because of Pakistans support to Hekmetyar, Mulla Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani in the past. Furthermore, Afghan Pashtun nationalists also have an issue with Pakistan as they consider lands up to the eastern bank of the Indus as "occupied Afghanistan."

Of course there is little solid evidence to support these inferences. Yet, such evidence will always be close to impossible to come by.

The civilian and military leadership must join hands to neutralize the sympathizers, supporters and apologists of Islamist jihadis present in influential positions in the bureaucracy, media, judiciary, law, and intelligentsia. A determined effort to identify and sideline such elements is needed if we were to save Pakistan from its present predicaments.

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