

Paper by Dr. Saghir Shaikh, Chairman World Sindhi Congress, at the International Conference on Sindh, "International Aid to Pakistan: Issues of Human rights, Equitable Development, and Peace in Sindh," September 24, 2005, London, UK.

The title of my speech is The Military Economy and the Violence: The case of Pakistan

There is an inherent tension between every state and the liberties of its citizens. These citizens collectively decide to relinquish some of their liberties in return for welfare, security and prosperity. In many cases, proper reciprocity occurs and civil societies are formed.

In some cases, however, the state becomes an entity of exploitation -- an apparatus for greed and domination over its peoples. In my view, Pakistan is such a state. From the first day of its existence, it has deviated from the basic principle of the federal state, which guarantees an 'autonomous and sovereign' state to its constituents. Pakistan has been under military rule (directly or indirectly) for more than 45 of its 58 years of existence. Punjab, the province of the majority, has been the primary beneficiary of this military rule. Other provinces, mainly Sindh, Baluchistan and to large extent Pakhtunkhawa and Seraiki areas, fall victim to the state's greed, exploitation and domination – a process not very different from the 'Colonization' process seen in Asia, Africa and Latin America over the last few centuries. Like all instances of the colonization process, Pakistan's case of colonization and oppression is full of violence. In fact, Pakistan presents an example of a most extreme case in which the state's economy links itself to military violence.

The military institutions of various countries provide the following justifications for redefining or expanding the military's role in the economics of the state:

1. They present themselves as the sole means of producing a national savior.
2. They claim to seize rule in order to take the country to the next stage of development, or in the name of economic modernization.
3. They promise to reduce anarchy and create stabilization; sometimes they even promise a transition to democracy.

In reality, military rule remains immune to social changes and alienates democratic decision-making. It often takes the form of a strict hierarchical and authoritarian order that is inherently heavy-handed and bureaucratic in nature.

The fact is that in a fragile state with weak political institutions, the military finds itself in a convenient position to control, or to be an indispensable partner to an oligarchic group.

Expansions in military spending only result in the weakening of a country's national economy. Military rule typically has no transparency, does not allow free competition or free market, and results in corruption, nepotism and the loss of national treasures. In some cases the MNC finds it easy to deal with these authoritarian regimes and obtains concessions on regulations, bids, contracts and environmental and labour standards by bribing the governments.

The history of the Pakistani regime makes the military's overwhelming presence within the Pakistani government blatantly clear: from 1958 to 1969, Pakistan was under the rule of Gen. Ayoub; from 1969 to 1971, under Gen. Yahya; from 1971 to 1976, under Civil Martial Administrator Mr. Bhutto; from 1977 to 1988, under Gen. Zia; from 1990 to 1999, under a military-supported two-party rule; and from 1999 to the present, under Gen. Musharaf. The past five decades have seen near-constant military domination over state affairs.

Let me quote from the entry on the “Pakistan Army” in Wikipedia, one of the best encyclopedias available on the internet: “The Pakistan Army has always played an integral part of Pakistan’s government and politics since its inception.”

Now let me give you some facts about Pakistan’s budget allocation and economic situation in 2003-2004: this period of time saw 21.7% development, a 30% budget deficit, 9.3% inflation (compared to only 3.9% last year), and a 7.7% unemployment rate.

When we compare statistics of Pakistan to those of Sindh, the injustice is obvious: Food poverty in the whole of Pakistan is at 34%, while in Sindh it is 39%; the unemployment rate has decreased in Pakistan by 8% but has increased in Sindh by 14.8%; Sindh’s economy has shrunk 20% due to water scarcity; 31% of people living in Pakistan fall below the poverty line, while 51% of Sindhis are living in poverty; and the number of poor living in Sindh is projected to soon increase from 13.6 million to 21.9 million.

Defense expenditures in Pakistan have increased dramatically over the past few years, jumping from 160 billion rupees, or 18% of the total state budget, in 2001-2002; to 210 billion rupees, or 24% of the total state budget, last year. This is direct expenditure only; indirect expenditure, debt servicing and military billing to the state for its services are additional costs! The total expenditure is an estimated 65% to 71% of the total budget, while the total expenditure on health and education remains less than 2%.

The World Report on Violence and Health defines violence as: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”

The Report’s survey of physical and psychological violence includes state violence and political violence, along with coups d’état, in which military self-entitlement, or what they call a “paradigm of necessity” in the Pakistani context, embraces violence as a tool and a means for governance.

The Pakistani military has displayed a devastating pattern of violence and genocide over the years. After the Partition in 1947, history bears witness to the Pakhtun rebellion in 1961, the Kashmir War in 1965, the Bengalese genocide in 1971, the Baluch insurgency in 1973, MRD in 1983 and 1986, Afghan involvement from 1981 to 1989, ethnic violence involving MQM and other ethnicities from 1991 to 2001, and Shia Sunni sectarian violence from 1981 to 2005.

In the Bengalese genocide of 1971, 77% of the military force came from a single province that represented only 25% of the country’s population. 1,250,000 were slaughtered and 3 million became casualties. On March 25, 1971, a death squad killed 7,000 people in a single night in Dacca. 200,000 women were raped by the Pakistani military, which jeered, “We will make you breed Punjabi children.” 93,000 were taken as prisoners of war. 10 million fled to India as refugees.

This horrific pattern of ethnic genocide still continues to some extent: we have the examples of the Baloch insurgency in 2004-2005; the killing of Sindhi activists at Thori Phatak in 1984, in which indiscriminate firing upon students’ buses resulted in 5 deaths and 35 injuries; the widespread killing and persecution of Sindhi activists; and sectarian violence. The International Crisis Group reports: “Sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the direct consequence of state policies of Islamisation and marginalisation of secular democratic forces.” “Parallel legal and judicial systems, which exist in many parts of the country with the blessing of the state, undermine the rule of law. The reform of discriminatory laws and procedures has, at best, been cosmetic -- they remain open to abuse by religious fanatics.”

The degree of violence against women in Pakistan is alarmingly high. Women frequently face sexual violence at the hands of strangers and state agents who should ostensibly be protecting them. Many of you are most likely aware of the case of Dr. Shazia, a woman who has bravely spoken out about her recent rape at the hands of the Pakistani military.

Pakistani women also face sexual violence from their family members. Widespread incidents of domestic violence include murders, fatal beatings and burnings, and disfigurements by acid. According to a recent estimate, 5,000 women are killed by domestic violence every year. Added to these deaths are honor killings – 1,900 women were killed by relatives in 2004 – custodial abuse and torture, and repercussions of the Hudood Ordinance and Qisas-e-Devat. Women also face capital punishment, death threats, death while in custody, death due to the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, deaths due to attacks by civil defence forces and paramilitary groups, genocide, and imminent expulsion. These crimes against women are carried out with barbaric impunity.

In conclusion:

We the People of Sindh and Balochistan have long been the victims of religious fundamentalism and ethnic discrimination. The military establishment of Pakistan thrives on the politics and economics of religious nationalism.

Policies of extremism do not only harm the peoples of Pakistan and neighboring countries; they now threaten to harm people around the globe. Global efforts to make Pakistan and Mr. Pervez Musharaf allies in the coalition against terrorism may actually be counter-productive. We believe the favors that the Pakistani Government receives from the European Union and the United States of America are further strengthening the military government, and that these favors legitimize laws and policies that proliferate the religious intolerance and extremism we are condemning today!

We believe that in order to ensure long-lasting peace and justice in the region and to reduce the threat of terrorism in the world, the European Union and the United States must act to neutralize Pakistan and its nuclear capability. They must ask Pakistan's military government to yield to democratic and progressive norms and allow the peoples of Pakistan to decide their own destiny. They must carefully consider long-term policies and avoid giving a complete free hand to Musharaf's government.

Saghir Shaikh
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