

ISLAMABAD PROTESTS WILL CHANGE THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF PAKISTAN

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Background

Post talks resolving the recent sit-in at Islamabad, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) lashed out at the Pak army on its role as a mediator in the crises. The army had been requisitioned by the centre to disperse approximately three thousand protestors belonging to the Tehreek Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi. They had been blocking approaches to Islamabad for the past three weeks. The IHC had directed the state to clear the protestors. Initial action by the state involved over eight thousand policemen, which led to six dead and scores wounded, but failed to evict the protestors. In desperation, the centre called in the army.

The army, while agreeing on its tasking, placed questions before the government. The army statement to the government included words, 'while it was fully ready' to act, a 'few points need deliberation'. It never deployed, disobeying the government. Even before the blotched police action, the DG ISPR had stated in a tweet, that 'both sides' should show restraint, implying equating the state with the protestors.

Ultimately the army acted as a mediator, more supporting protestors, than the state, compelling the government to accept all demands of the TLY including sacking of a minister, release of all protestors, dropping of charges against them as also investigating the role of police forces which acted against them. It even gave a future role to the TLY in many future committees including in a panel to decide text book changes.

Surprisingly, the government even agreed that a board of clerics would decide on action against a state law minister on his comments and he would be compelled to abide by it. Khadim Rizvi had openly stated that the army had assured them that all their demands would be met.

It was in reality, a sell-out to the TLY, opening doors for more such actions. Thus, while the protestors got away scot free, post everything they did, those who acted against them would face penalties. What infuriated the IHC was the final sentence in the agreement signed between the government and the protestors, which read, 'We are thankful to him (General Bajwa) for saving the nation from a big catastrophe'. It was also signed by an army Major General. The judge's final remarks were that 'this was proof of the army's involvement'.

Outsourcing of Proxy Wars by the Pak Army

The Pak army has been outsourcing all its proxy wars to religious and fanatical agencies. A proxy war in nations surrounding it has been done by employing jihadist organizations. Even within, it has taken support of religious groups to threaten and weaken the political leadership, at times placing it in embarrassing positions, as the recent incident indicated.

It has formed, nurtured and financed multiple terror groups to operate in Kashmir, employing as cannon fodder radicalized youth, who are cheap and easy to lure. It even attempted to engage the JuD in forming a political party, Milli Muslim League, to contest the last bye-elections, which it did, however failed to register itself as one. The army ensured that Hafiz Saeed was released from prison, as soon as the US delinked the LeT from the Haqqani network. He has possibly better security than most Pak ministers. The other group leaders have been given similar importance.

Post the Mumbai blasts, which it engineered through Dawood, it has been protecting him and his family in Karachi. He is secure and has possibly even become a money launderer and drug exporter for the Pak army foundation. He remains well protected and secure. Similarly, it was the Pak army, which provided Osama bin Laden a safe house in Abbottabad, where he was ultimately annihilated.

In Afghanistan, it has formed, supported, armed and funded the Taliban and the Haqqani network, seeking to place in the country, a government favourable to it. These groups have caused maximum casualties within the civilian population. It has taken steps to ensure that there would no peace in the country, compelling the US to change its stance against Pak. Despite US pressure, it has failed to act against them.

Lal Masjid Scare

Internally, the one mistake made by Musharraf of storming the Lal Masjid in Dec 2007, leading to the creation of the TTP, the anti-Pak Taliban, was a lesson for the army. The TTP, though loosely linked to the Taliban, and its breakaway groups have been causing mayhem and blasts within Pak, compelling the army to launch multiple operations to dislodge them. It has taken the Pak army over a decade to overcome the damage to its reputation, since the incident.

It has since then changed its approach and begun supporting religious groups to its advantage, threatening political parties. It was very clear, in their approach to the recent sit-in that it would never side the government, but seek to gain the support of the TLY. Photographs showed the head of Karachi Rangers, a major general, personally distributing thousand Rupee notes to freed protestors, supposedly as bus fare back home. It was the army's way of thanking those who came forward to protest on their directions to embarrass the government.

Unbecoming of a Disciplined Force

This approach by their army, challenging the writ of the government is unbecoming of any disciplined force, tasked to ensure the sovereignty of the state. However, in Pakistan, the military is head of the government and not vice-versa. This attitude was so markedly clear and brazenly open, that the Islamabad High Court Judge remarked, 'Where is their Radd-ulFasaad now? Did they not see any Fasaad (anarchy) in this protest?' He was referring to the much-hyped anti-terror operation launched by the army in Feb this year. The judge added that this action of the army was proof of their involvement.

Pak's Internal Dynamics Changed Forever

The Pak army in this one brazen display of disobedience has changed politics forever in Pak. It has given religious parties dominance over government. Rather than helping curb fundamentalist tendencies which would harm the nation in the future, it has taken steps to ensure that the government is helpless and can be overthrown by fundamentalists. Religious and terror group leaders like Hafiz Saeed, would under army patronage, be officially permitted to form political parties, prior to the next elections and threaten other political parties. Pak's internal dynamics would only change for the worse in the years ahead.

Impact on the International Environment

If religious parties begin to gain the upper hand in the elections next year, under army tutelage, Pak itself may follow Iran into greater isolation. It would only increase fears within the international community about the security of Pak's nuclear assets. The Pak army is leading the nation downhill, not on a path of stability.

China who have heavily invested on the CPEC, may see roadblocks in stability, threatening their investments. With religious groups dominating politics in Pak, export of jihadists to Xinjiang would soon commence. It may never recover its investments, ultimately dumping Pak.

India would have to deal with a greater unstable Pak, as also a more fundamentalist country, with unpredictable leadership dominated by fanatics. To counter Pak, India would need to strengthen its armed forces as a strong counterbalance. Its desire to stoke fires in Kashmir would only increase. The two nations would only move further apart.

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