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Military-jihadist nexus in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the religious right-wing as a formidable political force in Pakistan seems to be an outcome of direct and indirect patronage of the dominant military over the years. Ever since the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in , the military establishment has formed a quasi-alliance with the conservative religious elements who define a strongly Islamic identity for the country. The alliance has provided Islamism with regional perspectives and encouraged it to take advantage of the concept of jihad. This trend found its most blatant manifestation through the Afghan War. Thanks to the centrality of Islam in Pakistan's national identity, secular leaders and groups find it extremely difficult to make a national consensus against groups that describe themselves as soldiers of Islam. Using two case studies, the article argues that political survival of both the military and therefore the radical Islamist parties is predicated on their tacit understanding. It contends that without de-radicalization of jihadis, the efforts to 'mainstream' them through the electoral process have huge implications for Pakistan's political system also as for prospects of regional peace.

Keywords: Pakistan, Islamist, Jihadist, Red Mosque, Taliban, blasphemy, ISI, TLP, Musharraf, Afghanistan, Military

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the connection between the Islamic faith and political power has emerged as a stimulating field of political analysis. Particularly after the revival of the Taliban and therefore the rise of ISIS, questions associated with Islam's role in Pakistani politics are frequent in academia. While political Islam is deeply connected to South Asia's geopolitical currents, Pakistan presents ample evidence that the emergence of Islamist parties in conjunction with politics of jihad is an outcome of the Military's patronage. The dominant military and therefore the right have strengthened an interdependent alliance partnership while undermining the mainstream political parties in Pakistan. This paper traces the brief history of the Pakistani state's tolerance of politics rooted in religion, while explaining that survival of radical Islamist parties within the country has depended an excellent deal on the military's complicity through outright support or transactional cooperation or coexistence or turning a blind eye when indirectly threatened. The political use of Islam in terms of the strategy of jihad against the Soviets was a key think about militarising Pakistani society. The radical Islamist parties have gradually transformed Pakistan's society by promoting the politics of extremism. While giving historical context, this text limits its consideration of the military's patronage of right-wing Islamist parties during the last one and a half decades, particularly with references to major episodes. The most appropriate argument is this: an interdependent relationship, which has evolved between the military and therefore the Islamist parties, has facilitated the emergence of the religious right-wing as a formidable political force in Pakistan. This manifestation of the military's direct and indirect nexus with the novel Islamist elements is that the mainstreaming of jihadis and consequent marginalisation of moderate sections of Pakistani society. The article has three parts: First, historical background including discussion on the emergence of the Taliban creates the right context to explore the topic. Then, the article discusses the road toward the Red Mosque crisis, and the way the state responded, followed by another case study of the Faizabad episode a decade later. Within the final part, it critically explains the challenges of mainstreaming jihadi forces in Pakistan's politics and society. The historical overview presented within the first part of the article has captured the attempts by the Pakistani state, led directly and indirectly by the military, to co-opt Islamic parties for ideological ends. The mainstream academic literature on the military's relationship with the Islamist forces in Pakistan is extremely rich, and it's impossible to interact with it in its entirety. The research by Husain Haqqani and Hassan Abbas within the beginning of the cur-

rent century has been popular; it's explained how the tolerance and encouragement of extremist ideologies by security institutions has pushed Pakistan towards extremism and led to the growing influence of jihadis. Ayesha Siddiqi has introduced the new concept of 'Milbus', implying military capital used for the private advantage of the military and its cronies. Ayesha Jalal has contended that domestic ethnic and regional rivalries have created a siege mentality encouraging military domination and Islamist extremism. The

latest theoretical contribution is additionally very engaging. It's an accepted wisdom that the military has assigned Islamist militants different political roles as per their ideological affinity with the military. Paul Staniland, Asfandyar Mir and Sameer Lalwani have wedded instrumental with the ideological motivation to elucidate the complex interaction between the military and therefore the Islamist militants. Three approaches – collaboration, benign neglect and belligerence – are wont to explain Pakistan's attitude toward Islamist militants. Stephen Tankel has added another conceptual category of 'coopetition' to explain the dynamic nature of Pakistan military's relationship with Islamic militancy.

While building from the extensive scholarship, this text makes a crucial contribution by providing further empirical evidence of the very fact that Pakistan army's patronage continues to assist radical right-wing parties increase their legitimacy in mainstream politics. The article employs a chemical analysis of official documents, biographies and autobiographies, media reports and public statements with secondary literature providing important sources for understanding the difficulty.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The state of Pakistan, created within the name of Islam in 1947, had to integrate six major ethnic groups – Bengalis, Sindhis, Baloch, Pakhtuns, Punjabis and incoming Mohajirs from India. Islam was seen by many because the binding force for Pakistan, but ethnolinguistic ties proved to be stronger. Albeit Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah had used religion and therefore the difference between the leading communities – Hindus and Muslims – because the core of his argument for nations – Pakistan and Hindustan – he understood that such cleavages threatened Pakistan's future, and thus never spoke of Pakistan as an ideological state.

Islam as a defining component of Pakistan's national identity started with the Objectives Resolution of 1949 and strengthened under the age of Pakistan's first military dictator, Marshal Ayub Khan. He articulated that Pakistan needed an ideology to define itself which Islam was that ideology. Ayub had no particular fondness or respect for the religious clerics: the Constitution, prepared under Ayub's direction, initially dropped the Islamic label, but struggling from the religious groups, the Islamic label was restored and therefore the Islamic features of the previous constitution kept intact. By the time Pakistan's first civilian Prime Minister was elected in 1973, the country had skilled three wars with India, lost half its territory and quite half its population in 1971. The primary directly elected National Assembly of Pakistan, led by the charismatic Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, adopted the third constitution of Pakistan in April 1973. The Constitution involved al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, support for the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies and exact printing of the Quran. Moreover, Islam was declared the state religion of the country for the primary time within the history of Pakistan. It's interesting to notice that the constitutions of 1956 and 1973 had only made it mandatory for the President of the republic to be a Muslim, whereas the 1973 constitution went further by declaring that both the President and therefore the Prime Minister were required to require an oath declaring their belief within the finality of the Prophet Muhammad's prophetic mission. In renaming his ideology 'Islamic socialism', Bhutto assuaged the Islamic and populist forces within the country.

Demands by the Islamic orthodoxy led Bhutto to appease them even further bypassing laws banning horseracing and alcohol consumption, and therefore the declaration of Friday as a politician holiday in conformity with Islamic ideology. Bhutto also shared with Pakistan's military dictators the assumption that India provided an existential threat to Pakistan and sought to undo Partition. For him, the Islamists were differently to face up to India; he didn't see them as a threat, and therein lay his mistake. Nine anti-Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) parties came together in a marriage of convenience to form the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), which also included three major Islamist parties – the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiatul Ulama-i Pakistan (JUP) and Jamiatul Ulama-i Islam (JUI). The PNA criticised the government for being detrimental to the Islamic cause, and for turning Pakistan into a 'land of sin'. Unwilling or unable to realise that his own policies had resulted in massive support for the PNA, Bhutto drew the wrong conclusion that the PNA's appeal lay in its Islamic slogan, and forced his party to tone down its socialist rhetoric while proving that its own 'Islam' was more enlightened than that of the PNA. Bhutto was overthrown in a military coup in 1977 and subsequently hanged by his chosen army chief, General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq.

Zia was Pakistan's first openly religious leader who believed that 'the ideology of Pakistan is Islam and only Islam... We should in all sincerity accept Islam as Pakistan's basic ideology... otherwise...this country [will] be exposed to secular ideologies'. Biographical accounts of Zia's days in Stephens College in Delhi include such details as that 'he offered his prayers regularly, observed fasts and mobilized the Moslem youth to serve the cause of faith'. One can also see the influence of Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami and first theoretician of an Islamic state, on Zia's thoughts. Zia stated that his 'only ambition in life [was] to complete the process of Islamization so that there were no turning back'. He oversaw the transformation of Pakistan's army into an Islamic-orientated one, as reflected in his changing of its motto from 'Unity, Faith, and Discipline' to 'Faith, Piety, and Struggle in the Path of Allah'. Zia encouraged the Tablighi Jamaat to operate freely within the army and he was the first army chief to attend the Tablighi's annual convention. With Zia's encouragement, Islamic teachings such as those pertaining to the conduct of war were introduced in Pakistan's military academies and integrated into the syllabus of the Staff College.

More army officers grew beards, and a number of signboards quoting the Quran and the Prophet were placed around the army cantonments. Zia believed that a truly Islamic Pakistan would have the moral strength to fight India. As a consequence of this pervasive Mullah-Military alliance, many conservative army cadets reached the senior command level and took control of sensitive institutions, including the powerful intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Bhutto had asserted before his execution: 'We know that Israel and South Africa have full nuclear capability. The Christian, Jewish and Hindu civilizations have the capability. The Communist powers also possess it. Only the Islamic civilization was without it, but that position was about to change'. Bhutto's final testimony, Zia-ul-Haq's subsequent drive for Islamisation, and the policies pursued by his successors demonstrate that Islam and Jihad had become major pillars

During the war against the Taliban, Musharraf was presented with an inventory of non-negotiable demands by the US, including denying al-Qaeda a secure haven in Pakistan, sharing intelligence, granting the US over-flight rights and breaking diplomatic ties with the Taliban. Although Musharraf 'faced intense internal pressure [because] turning against the Taliban was unthinkable for hardliners in his government and intelligence service', he differentiated between various jihadist and extremist groups. While many foreign terrorists with links to al-Qaeda were handed over to the US, local jihadists also because the Afghan Taliban were left alone. Covert support for the Afghan Taliban was Pakistan's policy to affect the aftermath of America's eventual military withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, blowback from Afghanistan led to Pakistan's 'Talibanization', the disastrous consequences of which are reflected within the Red Mosque or Lal Masjid crisis.

3. RED MOSQUE CRISIS

Extremist and terrorist groups were openly proliferating across Pakistan, which Musharraf used as an excuse to convince Washington that the military was essential in protecting Pakistan from being converted into a Taliban-controlled fundamentalist Islamic state. But Musharraf's reluctance to uproot extremism in Pakistan proved costly both for Pakistan and therefore the War on Terror. Islamic radicalism emerged within the nation's capital itself when ferocious battles erupted between Islamic radicals and Pakistan army commandos within the Red Mosque. The Lal Masjid and its adjacent Hafsa madrasa had adopted a Taliban-style system of 'moral policing' with virtually no government intervention or oversight. The Mosque was led by two cleric brothers, sons of the pro-jihad cleric Maulana Abdullah. Maulana Abdul Aziz headed Islamabad's biggest Jamia Fareedya madrasa that land had been allotted by General Zia-ul Haq. Following the mosque's issuing of a fatwa opposing the military operations in Waziristan and calling for a boycott of the namaz-i-janaza of soldiers killed within the fight with Islamic militants, the govt arrested some members. However, Maulana Ghazi escaped arrest, and no concerted efforts were made to apprehend him again.

In January, the government's ordered demolition of some illegal and unauthorised mosques was fiercely opposed by Lal Masjid clerics and students. In protest, many burqa-clad and baton-wielding women from the Hafsa occupied children's library, and increased their radical demands when the govt was seen as capitulating. The Lal Masjid brigade began to threaten shop-owners with dire consequences if they didn't stop selling video or music cassettes. The Human Rights Commission and other women's groups accused the hardline students of 'harassing and terrorizing ordinary citizens within the name of Islam' and urged the govt to require strong action against them. The authorities remained reluctant to require action on the pretext of avoiding bloodshed, simply ignoring Abdul Rashid Ghazi and Maulana Abdul Aziz's Islamic court. This muted state response further emboldened the brainwashed students who believed themselves to be the self-appointed enforcers of shariah.

However, when some Chinese citizens, including six women, were abducted from a massage parlor alleged by the scholars to be a brothel, the govt had no option but to require action. The kidnapping of Chinese nationals within striking distance of state institutions of Pakistan, which was projected as China's closest ally, caused serious difficulties for China's communist government and was an enormous diplomatic embarrassment for Musharraf's administration.

Hectic negotiations between the govt and therefore the hardline clerics helped secure the discharge of the Chinese people, with Ghazi stating that despite 'greatly respecting Pakistan-China friendship but it doesn't mean that foreign women can come here and enjoys such vulgar activities.' a couple of days later, during a separate incident, militants killed three Chinese businessmen in Peshawar, the capital city of Pakistan's then North West Frontier Province (NWFP), forcing China to ask Pakistan publicly to guard its citizens. It must be noted that around, Chinese people lived and worked in Pakistan in various Beijing-funded projects, many of which were opposed by various militant groups. These kidnapping and killings had serious repercussions for Pakistan's ties with China, and Musharraf's subsequent confrontation with the Islamist radicals surprised even the US, whose prior efforts to urge Islamabad to clamp down on militancy had been outmaneuvered by Pakistan's security establishment. Before the military raid, a delegation authorised by Musharraf met the Islamic militants as a last-ditch effort to finish the siege and release the scholars and their relations who were being held hostage. the govt even brought within the imam of the Holy Mosque in Mecca from Saudi Arabia to appeal to the radicals who remained adamant. Despite the face-saving offer proposed to the Islamists to surrender Abdul Rashid Ghazi and every one the weapons inside the mosque to senior clerics, the talks came to a deadlock when the negotiating team was informed that foreign (Uighur) militants were within the complex. The talks having failed, Musharraf ordered the military strike on the Red Mosque on July, , and defended the raid by arguing that the militants had 'challenged the writ of the government'. He further proclaimed that Pakistan wouldn't allow any mosque or madrasa to be misused just like the Red Mosque. The eight-day siege at the Red Mosque left quite a number of people dead, including Abdul Rashid Ghazi and a dozen members of the Pakistani Special Forces. The siege was depicted as an important conflict between General Musharraf and therefore the Islamic radicals who had grown in Pakistan and whose influence had steadily spread to cities from the remote tribal regions along the border with Afghanistan. Although the govt was swift to attribute responsibility for the crisis to Ghazi, the signs of a 'creeping Talibanization' enabled by the Musharraf regime had been visible for long before the Lal Masjid episode erupted. When after / these forces came home to roost, the Pakistani army retained its confidence within the possibility of striking a bargain with them, unaware that the attempts to barter peace would come to no avail. The Red Mosque became an icon of Islamist militancy that the Pakistani state either tolerated or was incapable of acting against.

When a Frankenstein wreaks havoc, his maker's initial reaction could also be shock, amid denial. This was the case of the Pakistani state: its intelligence agencies, having created uncontrollable Islamist elements to fester over the years, underestimated their strength to pose a subsequent challenge to the State. Consistent with Carlotta Gall, who had discussions with the govt ministers during the siege, the role played by ISI was 'strangely ineffective' because it had maintained a 'long relationship with the mosque and its leaders'. She further stated that the ISI had two informers inside the Red Mosque during the crisis and received 'accurate intelligence on the amount of armed militants inside' but apparently did not persuade the Ghazi brothers to prevent defying the government's writ. The Musharraf regime had tolerated the behaviour of radical students for years: as an example, failing to chop off the Lal

Masjid's electricity or phone connections when its students violently enforced Islamic morality, and allowing its illegal station to function. The Lal Masjid was state-run and state-funded, and yet the govt didn't dismiss the clerics from government service. Moreover, these activities were never covertly executed, but rather carried out at the complete view of the ISI headquarters located within the same neighborhood because the Lal Masjid.

Maulana Abdul Aziz's fate following the military siege on the Red Mosque is interesting to notice here, because it highlights Pakistan's non-chalant attitude towards tackling extremism. Despite his arrest upon fleeing the besieged mosque and twenty-four serious indictments, Aziz was eventually granted bail by Pakistan's Supreme Court and acquitted without appeal. His presence during a negotiating team nominated by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for peace talks with the Nawaz Sharif government in early 2011 attested to his reputation with the Taliban. After the TTP's December attack on the Peshawar Army School, Aziz brazenly refused to condemn the killing of youngsters or consider them martyrs, remaining unapologetic despite outcries from civil society. Many extremist and terrorist groups showed solidarity with Aziz, including a Sunni militant group, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), a banned anti-Shia militant offshoot of the Sipah-e-Sahaba. Until December, Aziz led the Friday congregations at the Red Mosque and delivered sermons demanding the implementation of shariah, whilst security agencies warned the govt of his links with known terror groups and therefore the serious risks to law and order in Islamabad posed by his anti-government rhetoric.

Described by Khaled Ahmed because the 'frontman of al-Qaeda's policy of Islamic vigilantism in Islamabad, whom the judiciary is just too scared to convict in many cases of terrorism', Aziz attempted to require control of the Red Mosque's microphones several times in . When it had been announced that Aziz would lead prayers in May at Lal Masjid after three years, the govt prevented him from delivering his divisive sermons, but pursued no further action against him. Whether thanks to his influence among the Pakistani people, or the negligence of the Pakistani security establishment, Aziz managed to stay unscathed despite countless samples of his role within the mobilisation of extremist groups in Pakistan.

4. FAIZABAD EPISODE

It is worth noting here that, while civil society groups and nonviolent movements are unable to carry demonstrations in Pakistan, Islamists are allowed to get siege to cities and convey life to a standstill. Beginning in November, the novel rightwing Islamists, led by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah and its Islamist allies, besieged Islamabad for weeks, disrupting lifestyle within the Islamabad-Rawalpindi belt. Attempts to barter and a judicial order mandating the ending of the siege did not persuade the clerics, during a clear act of muscle-flexing designed to undermine the authority of the Pakistani government. The violent siege ended only after the govt surrendered to anti-blasphemy activists' demands for the resignation of Zahid Hamid, the Minister for Law and Justice whom they had accused of committing blasphemy. The military-mullah nexus was also evident during this crisis, because the protest leader, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, only suspended the protests after the military Chief, Qamar Javed Bajwa, assured him of Hamid's resignation. Thus, the episode, which has been explained subsequently intimately, only confirms Pakistani military's intervention in domestic politics and therefore the collusion between rightwing militant groups and the military. While protests by ulemas and Islamists are nothing new in Pakistan, what's new is that the emergence of a replacement group of Islamic clerics united under Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY), a spiritual movement and party. It's led by an inflexible cleric, Maulvi Khadim Hussain Rizvi, who belongs to the Barelvi school of Sunni Islam. Rizvi is notorious for his vitriolic sermons also as his glorification of Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer. The TLY announced its appearance in electoral politics by putting up candidates within the National Assembly by-elections in Lahore and Peshawar where its candidates received a big number of votes, undermining the support base of old mainstream religious parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami.

In November, the Pakistani government pushed through an amended election bill within the National Assembly. While it allowed Nawaz Sharif to regain his position as head of the PML-N, it made a textual change within the oath, replacing the words 'I solemnly swear' with 'I believe' during a clause concerning a candidate's belief within the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad. This led to anti-blasphemy protests; despite Minister Hamid's defense of the bill, the National Assembly Speaker accepted that a 'clerical error' was liable for the change within the Khatm-e-Nabuwat oath, and every one political parties agreed to revert to the first declaration. Here, blasphemy laws in Pakistan were used and still be used as a tool for applying pressure by the military and its Islamist allies, by leveraging accusations of blasphemy to intimidate anyone who crosses its path, including politicians. Even judges and lawyers involved in blasphemy litigation haven't been spared, and many people are arrested and killed following accusations of committing blasphemy.

In reality, at the core of this issue was the facility struggle between the PML-N and therefore the military, and it had been no secret that the military wanted to urge obviate Sharif. The military has always been uncomfortable with any popular civilian leader, and no prime minister has ever served a full five-year term in Pakistan. Although the military may have in previous decades staged a coup d'état to forcibly remove a democratically elected government, it's more averse to intervening directly in politics since it's developed more sophisticated methods of removing elected prime ministers who are seen as acting too independently. During a recent research, Ayesha Siddiqah has termed this phenomenon as 'hybrid martial law' during which the military wields the important power and therefore the civilian government functions merely as a junior partner. Over the years, the military has consolidated its power and influence in Pakistan, with the help of Islamist parties whose agenda broadly aligns with its own.

In the Faizabad blasphemy case, when the protestors refused to budge, the govt unwittingly sought the help of the military, whose subsequent refusal to assist might be interpreted either as being hand-in-glove with the Islamists or as reluctance to use force against its rightwing allies. General Bajwa publicly asked the government to resolve the difficulty peacefully and maintained that using violence against the people would damage the military's cohesion.

The government was eventually ordered by the Islamabad Supreme Court to use force to clear the protesters, deploying about, police and paramilitary troops for this action, but without success. Following the failed police intervention, the military attempted to broker peace with the protestors, but without following the orders of the civilian government. The military's subsequent actions revealed open support for the Islamist agitators against the govt, leaving no option for the latter but to surrender. Major General Faiz Hamid, the Director General of the Counterintelligence wing of the ISI, signed the agreement as representative of the military Chief; Maj. Gen. Azhar Naveed Hayat Khan, the Director General of Pakistan Rangers in Punjab, a paramilitary which had been ordered to clear the protest site, distributed cash to anti-blasphemy protesters who ostensibly needed it to shop for tickets for the trip home; and therefore the final sentence of the agreement thanked General Bajwa for 'saving the state from an enormous catastrophe'. Such effusive praise for his role as mediator triggered genuine concern among moderate politicians, as conceding to the stress of bigoted protesters could only strengthen the Islamist forces in Pakistan that consider themselves above the law. No independent investigation was conducted into the nexus of Rizvi and Pakistani military officials.

5. CHALLENGES OF MAINSTREAMING

Pakistan's system of state oscillates between patrimonialism, semi-authoritarianism and quasi-democracy. The military remains Pakistan's most powerful institution, using both populism and democratic cover to legitimise its dominance, while civilians are left with little option but to depend upon the military to remain in power. This 'hybrid' sort of government brings to the fore the potential contradictions of interactions between authoritarian and democratic elements in Pakistan. Seen during this context, the military-mullah axis is prime to the dominant role of the military in Pakistani politics.

Instead of reversing Pakistan's ideological orientation rooted in Islamism, efforts are made to 'mainstream' militant Islamist and terrorist organisations by conferring upon them the status of political parties and allocating them party symbols in order that they might contest general elections and be amalgamated into the society. This legitimising of radical Islamist and militant groups has provided them with an oversize awkwardness over the mainstream political parties.

This mainstreaming has gained momentum and therefore the General Elections witnessed an unparalleled participation of radical Islamist parties, a number of which are overtly militarised. The 'good' jihadists belonging to the rabidly anti-Indian terrorist organisations, Lashkar-i-Tai-ba (LeT) and therefore the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), whose leader Hafiz Saeed had formed a party referred to as the Milli Muslim League (MML) in August, are mainstreamed through the electoral process, in line with the policy of mainstreaming. When the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) prevented the registration of the MML as a political party, its candidates were simply fielded to a registered party, the Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek (AAT). In November, Musharraf openly declared his support for the LeT and JuD, asserting that the 'LeT and JuD are both excellent organizations of Pakistan' because he has 'always been in favour of pressuring the Indian army in Kashmir'. Musharraf even hinted at the likelihood of forming a political alliance with the JuD for the elections, though nothing came out of it.

In order to avoid pressure from the US, the Pakistani military merely pretends to require action against internationally designated terrorist groups, as demonstrated by Saeed's treatment over the years with kid gloves. The LeT has been allowed to continue its activities under multiple guises, and although Saeed was placed under confinement several times, he was never sentenced thanks to an alleged lack of evidence. Thus, Nawaz Sharif's disapproval of the Pakistani army's mainstreaming of jihadists are often seen because the explanation for his removal by judicial coup. Referring to the LeT's involvement within the Mumbai terror attack and therefore the failure to prosecute Saeed, Sharif remarked following his removal that 'militant organizations are active. Call them non-state actors, [but] should we allow them to cross the border and kill people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can't we complete the trial?' That Sharif's government orchestrated operations to cleanse south Punjab of sectarian terrorist groups under the aegis of the National Action Plan (NAP), then took up Saeed's case with the military establishment, are often cited as key factors in his ousting, Saeed's release from house arrest and therefore the LeT's permission to contest the overall elections. The military threatened many journalists who were considered on the brink of Sharif and cracked down on some news channels, asking them to scale back their reportage of the military's involvement in politics.

Immediately before the overall elections, Pakistan's National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA) removed the ban on Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) and unfroze the assets of its top leader, Ahmad Ludhianvi within the last week of June. The irony of this decision was compounded by the very fact that removal of the ban on Ludhianvi was taken immediately following Pakistan's placement on the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The ASWJ's candidates contested the elections under the banner of the Pak Rah-e-Haq Party (PRHP). Even the mainstream candidates couldn't resist the temptation of soliciting the support of radical extremist parties. The previous Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi sought ASWJ's electoral support. And Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, who is linked to the fear group Harkat-ul Mujahideen (HuM), also announced support to the PTI candidate in Islamabad.

While the political observers are still analysing how the PTI's triumph goes to change Pakistan's political landscape, there's concern over the strong performance of radical religious parties. Though the MML, which had fielded quite candidates in provincial and state elections under the platform of AAT, didn't garner enough votes to win a seat in national or provincial legislatures, however, it might still remain politically active. The ASWJ had also fielded many candidates within the elections. However, the TLP, which fielded over candidates across the country, has been the most important winner among radical religious parties and has emerged because the fifth largest party after the elections. Throughout the election campaign, the mainstream segment of Pakistani media termed the TLP as a spoiler. The electoral outcome released backs that theory. The TLP received over two million votes from across the country, and therefore the chunks of votes it received spoiled PML-N's prospects in additional than a dozen constituencies. The increase of the TLP also represents the assertion of the Barelvis. In November, Rizvi, who represents the Barelvis, was again successful in staging a hugely-attended protest near the boundary be-

tween the federal capital Islamabad and therefore the garrison city of Rawalpindi against the publication of Prophet Muhammad's cartoons in France forcing the govt to sign a humiliating deal.

As argued by Husain Haqqani, Islamic ideology is exploited by both Pakistan's rulers and Islamists as a 'weapon amid weakness' for generating religious frenzy 'through falsehoods and rumors, which are systematically deployed as vehicles of policy'. He further notes that 'periodic outbreaks of protest over insults to Prophet Muhammad and Islam are hardly spontaneous...The Islamists first introduce the objectionable material to their audience then instigate outrage by characterizing it as a part of a supposed worldwide conspiracy to denigrate Islam'. The mullah-military collaborative venture has made it possible for the military to take advantage of the novel religious constituency in executing its foreign and domestic policies. However, the military's incorporation of the preferences of Islamist radicals into its Kashmir policy has also forced the previous to tolerate intense sectarian impulses at the domestic level. The notion that the doorway of radical, militant Islamist forces into electoral politics are often mitigated by anything but de-weaponisation and de-radicalisation is illusion.

The pressing concern within the secular world is with understanding whether Islamic radicals are gaining ascendancy as a result of some socio-cultural changes across the Muslim world or are being merely exploited by the ruling elites as a tool to execute 'realpolitik'. This concern becomes more pronounced in Pakistan's case because the evidence points to the military's historical penchant for using the country's territorial space as a secure haven for Islamic fundamentalists. The ruling elite of Pakistan must, therefore, redefine state institutions in terms which may keep Islamist ideology out of the state affairs. Rather than pursuing a utopian aim of converting Pakistani citizens into pious Muslims, the military-dominated Pakistani state must focus its energies on educational reforms, while eliminating hate speech in electoral politics, and withdrawing government patronage from religious parties.

6. CONCLUSION

The infrastructure of jihad created by al-Qaeda, encouraged by the Taliban and condoned by Pakistan's security establishment has led to the assembly of jihadist cadres policing everything considered un-Islamic in Pakistan whose socio-political fabric has been torn apart by this creeping 'Talibanisation'. Whether desirable or not, whatever happens in Pakistan inevitably affects India, and therefore the whole South Asian region. Attempts are being made in Pakistan to mainstream the Islamist parties, many of them banned, into the political process. Theoretically speaking, there's nothing wrong altogether sections of Pakistani society to get entangled within the electoral process, but groups that have an extended tendency of undermining the democratic process through sustained violent actions got to hand over violence before political doors are opened to them. Because the article has argued, the Pakistan army seems keen to offer radical elements a bigger political role because it features a vested interest in weakening the civilian governments led by mainstream political parties. Keeping the military-mullah nexus in good humour is imperative for all political parties wishing to remain in power.

With Pakistan's increasing radicalization, more problems for India and Afghanistan are likely to follow. Having mobilized public opinion against mainstream political parties, Islamist militant groups are starting to overshadow mainstream political parties and dominate political process in Pakistan, with the military's overt and covert backing. Recent developments are testimony to the very fact that Pakistan's military now openly supports the entry of radically religious and militant groups into electoral politics. If groups just like the TLY rise in prominence, Pakistan's internal dynamics could dramatically change. Radical Islamist parties might not be ready to garner sufficient votes to make a government but their campaigns in cities and towns across Pakistan would spread their ideological agenda supported jihad.

The military's reluctance to dissociate itself from domestic politics, and therefore the sense of impunity among the religious right-wing groups threaten political and social rights of Pakistanis also as regional peace. Support for extremist and jihadist groups operating in Kashmir and Afghanistan by Pakistan's security establishment is well established; but a military-backed Islamist militant government, with volatile nuclear capabilities, wouldn't only increase internal insecurity but also increase regional tensions. The military would have unprecedented freedom to pursue its dangerous foreign policies and domestic group action in Baluchistan and Pakistan-held Kashmir. If the mullah-military alliance is allowed to fester and further entrench itself in Pakistani politics, there'll be greater possibilities for regional tension and non-secular violence.

It is thus clear that allowing 'good' jihadists and militants to maintain their capacity while bestowing political recognition on them is sure to cause greater destabilisation and set the stage for future conflicts. The Pakistan Army would be advised to refrain from rummaging through a narrow anti-India prism and exclusively pursue military dominance, and instead bear Pakistan's long-term needs for security, stability and economic prosperity in mind.

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