**Pakistan and the Pakistan army**

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Lately, I’ve stopped writing my regular OPED, given the extreme partisan single minded views generally expressed by readers and the absence of a pluralistic approach to a sane dialogue.

Admittedly I do not subscribe to a ” on the one hand and on the other hand” type of journalist jugglerly to try and keep everyone happy, keep the money from my employers or media house flowing, but have very harsh, unvarnished and forthright views, untainted by any external vested interest, other than my own biases!

However earlier today a friend’s comments on an article on the Pakistan Army written by a certain Aqil Shah in the Foreign Affairs Weekly, a fairly reputable publication of the Council of Foreign Relations, supposedly a reputable and objective think tank by western standards, but completey blind, subjective and bankrupt, intellectually, morally, when it comes to commenting on China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel etc, prompted me to pen these words.

Many of us, either out of ignorance or deliberate malice and anger or our selfish interests driven by our political affiliations or our family’s political involvement with a certain party or our business interests and ties to a certain politician or affinity to the same baradari or ethnicity that a certain political leader belongs to or because we are financially rewarded to pursue a seditious agenda, will continue to lsmbast the Pakistan Army!

While we need representative and transparent governance this Westminster type of Democracy is not for us!

Mentally we are still slaves of our legacy, culture, family, castes, baradaris, vested interests and greed!

We couch our criticism in holier than thou protestations of democracy,  human rights, freedom of speech, anti militarismetc, complete with what appear to be highly researched pieces, such as Aqil Shah has done or what Hussain Haqqani, pens!

We will run down Pakistan, PM Imran, the Army at every opportunity.

We will highlight PM Imran’s weaknesses his errors, his decisions, his missteps, but nary a word from us about the loot and plunder and corruption and havoc and destruction wreaked on Pakistan by Nawaz Sharif, Bhuttos and Zardaris.

We will criticise the Army overtly and covertly.

But let me say this with no ambiguity, ifs and buts. Despite the past military coups, and with all its acts of omission and commission, thank God for the Pakistan Army!

Aqil Shah belongs to that insidious category of Pakistanis or former Pakistanis, self styled intellectuals, mostly living overseas who love to bash the Pakistan Army, a much fashionable thing to do to make themselves relevant and appear authoritative to their handlers.

Aqil has highlighted completely fabricated issues related to the so called Baluch insurgency fuelled and funded by India, deliberately quoting highly questionable statistics, highlighting the actions of a most subservise, seditious organization like the  PTM as a supposedly genuine voice of the exploited.

He and his fellow cohorts use Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto’s anti army and anti Imran tirades as evidence of a fascist Pakistani state run rampant! Misguiding people inside and outside Pakistan!

Pakistan has many “Aqil Shahs”

The SAATH Forum is full of them. People who deliberately and knowingly promoted India’s massive 15 year long disinformation campaign against Pakistan as unearthed by  EUDisinfoLab, which undertook the investigation and published an extensive report!

These people have sold their souls and intellect to the West or India or Israel or to vested political interests like the Sharifs or Bhuttos and in my opinion belong to the same category as the likes of HussainHaqqani, Gul Burkhari, Aqil Shah etc and their fellow conspirators in the Saath forum.

Sadly, they are actively supported in our own media by people who are or were mainstream TV Anchors and OPED writers.

Or supported by what were once reputable newspapers, one run by a family whose senior members were part and parcel of our military regimes and one of whom with publicly acknowledged ties to the CIA!

All above media persons and media houses pretending to be intellectually objective, patriotic, well meaning but highly subversive and cunningly poisonous!

While there is much that is wrong in our country now and in the past, and much remains to be done, here’s my assessment of how things will play out if people like PM Imran are in government and sensible cool heads like Gen. Bajwa head the Army.

Not necessarily these two but people with their kind of approach!

Lets put some facts on the table.

The military is still the most powerful and privileged institution in Pakistan. And yes it has acquired influence much beyond its mandate.

And, yes, in the past it has been responsible for most of our political mess.  Absolutely! Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Zardari are all consequences of military takeovers!

But today it is the most effective, most disciplined, most meritocratic and relatively least corrupt government institution, compared to other Pakistani public sector institutions.

Thankfully but strangely and paradoxically it has survived the rape of other Pakistani civilian state institutions by the likes of Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Zardari, because it took over the country! What a paradox!

Otherwise it would have gone the same way as did our police, our bureaucracy and our judiciary! Completely destroyed, ineffective and dysfunctional!

Picture the nightmarish scenario of the Pakistan Army being like our Police!

So It is important to see their influence on a spectrum, starting from Ayub, Yahya, Zia, Musharraf to recent times such Gen. Kayani, Raheel Sharif and now Gen. Bajwa.

Clearly the institution does not exercise the same overt clout it did in the past.

Covert? Of course, yes.

But significantly diminished as compared to Gen. Musharraf’s Martial Law followed by Gen. Kayani, Raheel, or even Gen. Bajwa’s first tenure!

The slope of both overt and covert control from 1958 to 2020 is considerably diminished.

However given the near destruction of all other public sector institutions and the Army’s relative effectiveness it has filled the power and governance vacuum!

This is the natural law of power. Wherever there is a vacuum the most powerful force will fill it and claim it.

Also any well meaning civilian government or PM, like Imran, by default will seek their help in non military areas because of the near non existence of civilian institutional capacity.

The BIG QUESTION?

Will the Army willingly and voluntarily relinquish its hold on areas not directly under its mandate?

\*My assessment\*.

Yes, only if the civilian institutions are strong and effective. Again a principle of power where a civilian institution starts to claim back its space as we are seeing in the battle between the Superior Judiciary and the Military!

But the Judiciary in my opinion, is a massive organization driven purely by the petty and finanvialself interests of its members and pretending to be a defenders of free speech and judicial independence!

In my opinion, our Superior Judiciary has much greater responsibility for our current mess than are our military coups as they spinelessly endorsed every military takeover from 1958 to 1999.

They also have the scar of carrying out Bhutto’s judicial murder.

Today it’s run like a personal fiefdom of a small clique of judges not answerable or accountable to any state institution, appointing people at whim to superior judicial appointments with no system of meritocracy or accountability in the lower or superior judicial system!

This is unacceptable!

In my opinion it’s an archaic, fossilized institution, preying on the innocent, especially the poor and the illiterate. It needs to be completely uprooted and established anew to deliver prompt and fair justice!

Will politicians be able to exercise independent decisions without the Army’s covert influence?

Yes, if the majority are honest, well meaning, patriotic and committed like PM Imran, not corrupt, servile and slavish like Nawaz Sharif, Zardari and their Rasputin like Machaivellian courtiers

All of them continuously attempting to bring the Army under their direct control not to “regain civilian supremacy” over the “military” as they hypocritically proclaim from the safe havens of London, but to remove the biggest hurdle to their loot and plunder!

Having said that, it is my considered view that our current governance model, disguised as democracy, is completely unsuitable to our culture and needs.

While we need representative and transparent governance this Westminster type of Democracy is not for us!

Ours is a system which is systematically hijacked and raped by the “garbage in garbage out” electoral process which recycles the same corrupt politicians back into power. Imran is a singular exception to make it to PM.

Our model has failed. It is directly responsible for our military coups and for the rampant loot and plunder and systematic destruction of our institutions by the likes of Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Benazir and Asif Zardari.

We have to evolve a hybrid model closer to our culture and ethos, as China has evolved a system which works for them!

If somehow we could, I would love to see our entire youth undergo the same rigorous training that our recruits and cadets undergo in our military institutions to instil a sense of discipline, patriotism, pride and above all, collective social responsibility.

The last our biggest challenge in an ill disciplined, selfish, self-cantered society with near total absence of collective social responsibility!

Let our Pakistani Nation become a “Nation at Arms” physically, intellectually and emotionally, not just to defend ourselves militarily, but to raise ourselves up, economically, technologically, culturally, morally and with integrity and attain our rightful place as a great country and become a truly welfare state!

And if anyone thinks that the likes of Nawaz Sharif, Asif Zardari and what they represent or their biological offspring, with nothing to their credit, except their leeches like supporters who use them to remain relevant, and religious charlatans and blackmailers, like FazlurRehman, posing as political leaders, will help us get there, they live in Cuckooland!

Despite all our challenges and the imperfections, we see in governance, it is my considered opinion that we haven’t had a better opportunity than now under a civilian government, with Imran as PM and Bajwa as Army Chief to initiate and redress this imbalance of power between the Army and other state institutions, and begin the serious task of rebuilding our civilian state institutions and Pakistan!