**A house divided**

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The exposure of India’s Srivastava Group by EU Disinfo Lab seems to have come as a surprise to many Pakistanis. I wonder why? Anyone who has observed the sustained assault on Pakistan on the Internet can plainly see how India has played its cards. The Indian propaganda machine has been constantly at work on the Internet and not just on Internet but in universities, think tanks, sponsored news articles, blogs and even books. Professors and so-called academics have been coopted to write articles and books against Pakistan. World-renowned “Public intellectuals” like Bernard Henry Levy, Christopher Hitchens, Thomas L Friedman and others were hired guns of this push.

This goes back further than 2005 by the way. I first heard of an organized Indian attempt to malign Pakistan as far back as the late 1990s from an Indian Muslim journalist. Pakistan came too late to the game, if at all it turned up.

Instead of countering threats of a more fundamental nature, Pakistan’s idea of fifth generation warfare is to crackdown on dissent and freethinkers within the country. As President Abraham Lincoln famously said “a house divided against itself cannot stand”. Pakistan is precisely that house. There is too much that we have done to hurt this country ourselves that we become easy targets for propaganda. This is because it is hard to separate fact from fiction. Pakistan does persecute minorities, it does attack dissent and civilian democratic governments have been undermined repeatedly. The fact that it is a theocracy does not help. It routinely alienates patriots. Such a country can always be painted into a corner and be subject to horrendous criticism. Not long ago Pakistan was described as the most dangerous country on earth. This is bunkum but our image was so badly tarnished the world believed our enemies and their jaundiced narrative.

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We continue to take wrong turns, which make us the laughing stock of the world. In 2012 we blocked YouTube. It took us four years to unblock that treasure trove of information. Now the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has served notices to Google and Wikipedia threatening legal action for failing to implement our antiquated and anachronistic laws. Let us see how that works out for PTA. What is PTA going to do? Ban Google and Wikipedia if they fail to comply. These are not TikTok or PUBG who were willing to roll over. Pakistan needs Google than Google needs Pakistan. It goes for Wikipedia also. Can Pakistan afford to shut down a treasure trove of information?

Coming back to the propaganda against Pakistan, there is no smoke without fire. The treatment meted out to Ahmadis, a forced minority in this country, is woeful. It goes for other minorities as well. Yet the Federal Minister for Narcotics has the gall to declare that minorities have equal rights in Pakistan. In gender parity we are so far behind the world that at our current pace it will take us 96 more years to achieve gender parity. For a long time we allowed our soil to be used by militants and terrorists who also targeted Pakistan itself. Every failing and fault in Pakistan is fresh ammunition for our enemies. The surest way to answer our critics is to fix us. We must jettison the theocracy and remodel ourselves on Mr. Jinnah’s vision. We must allow for unfettered freedom of speech, expression and press unencumbered by bad laws unsuited to the 21 st Century. Every person should have the right to profess and propagate his religion and in the alternative not have a religion at all. These are basic fundamental human rights that we have signed onto through UN’s Human Rights Declaration as well as other covenants
and treaties.

If we can somehow dismantle the theocratic superstructure and become a modern liberal democracy with sovereignty vested in people and people alone, we might be able to deliver on those fundamental rights, which have been promised to citizens of Pakistan in the Constitution, in a real and meaningful way. The road to this lies through an unbroken democratic process without any unconstitutional interventions. Every government, even this current government, should be allowed to complete its term for the continuity of the democratic process.

All institutions of the state must realize what their constitutional limits are. The military must stay in the barracks. Mr. Jinnah had told officers of the Pakistan Army that it is the civilians that make policy and it is the job of the military to follow policy. Similarly judiciary should not bother itself with making laws. The sovereignty to the parliament must be respected and the will of the legislature must not be undermined by SROs and subordinate legislation such as framing of statutory and non-statutory rules by any authority or the federal executive.

A secular democratic state based on a viable social contract in form a constitution that treats every citizen equally will never lend itself to the kind of propaganda that we have been victims of for the last two decades. Much precious time has been lost and we must act quickly. All roads lead there but we should get there as soon as possible to avoid burning our hands any further. Let us not give our enemies the ammunition that is used against us. Let us fix ourselves before it is too late.