**Apocalypse Pakistan**

**Is this multi-pronged assault on Pakistan a part of a grand strategic design to coerce it into specific policy options?**

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Pakistan faces multipronged existential threats and appears to be hurtling headlong into a bottomless, squirming quagmire. Pervasive political discord is severely polarizing its socio-political spectrum. Political and institutional disharmony at the state level is crippling its normal functioning. National politics has degenerated into a ruthless war for survival and is being fought on all possible fronts - in public and social discourses, in print, electronic, social media, and in the courts of law. Every effort is being made to eliminate political opponents, by hook or by crook. Political parties and institutions appear to be at loggerheads and unable to work together. Unrelenting terrorist attacks emanating from Afghanistan continue unabated, especially in KP and Balochistan which are already reeling under socio-political unrest. Pakistan’s economy continues to totter precariously on the edge of imminent insolvency. An uncertain political environment is causing a massive brain drain and a relocation of industry abroad. The ever-rising cost of living has made life intolerable for the people. The IPP conundrum defines today’s Pakistan; the ruthless, remorseless, heartless, savage exploitation of this nation’s resources by its so-called elite!

Is this multipronged assault on Pakistan a part of a grand strategic design to coerce it into specific policy options regarding its geopolitical alignments, independence, security, economy, strategic assets etc? Or is it a direct result of our so-called elite’s abundant inadequacies, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, incompetence, greed, and obsessive compulsion to amass unlimited pelf? Ominously, is it both, and does the latter enable and facilitate the former?

Pakistan however, must adopt a two-phased policy, in the correct order, to emerge from this self-inflicted, debilitating imbroglio. First, the government in power must bring about political stability immediately and amicably. Thereafter, a whole-of-the-nation effort must be made to revive the economy. A politically stable and economically vibrant Pakistan will overcome the other existential threats, especially terrorism, from a position of superior, decisive strength.

This necessitates a massive paradigm shift in our national politics. Pakistan must reset its priorities. No ego, person, or party is bigger than Pakistan itself. National interests must supersede personalities, party interests and institutional biases/preferences. The parliament needs to be made fully functional and assertive. Political sanity, good common sense and an unwavering pursuit of national interests only must define our politics and statecraft henceforth. All politicians must agree to a Grand National Dialogue in the form of an All-Parties Conference. They must unite and work together to “make Pakistan great again”. It is imperative that Pakistan’s elite rises to the occasion and does not fail it in its hour of trial. All politicians, parties and institutions need to collaborate to pull Pakistan back from the edge of the precipice - they have no other option! The current state of affairs is unsustainable for Pakistan which is facing a multitude of existential threats; a lack of visionary, statesman-like leadership at the national level being the most critical one!

Furthermore, Pakistan needs to come up with a whole-of-the-nation response to the wave of terrorist attacks as a prerequisite to its economic resurgence. The attitude of the Afghanistan/TTA government is extremely intriguing. Does the TTA facilitate the TTP’s bloody terrorist attacks to kill Pakistanis as a reward for its support to it against the US-led ISAF? Is its inherent ill-will towards Pakistan rearing its head, yet again? And/or is it also a tool in the grand strategic design to keep Pakistan constantly destabilized, maintained in (un)controlled chaos and rendered acutely susceptible to the diktat of the powers that be? Is its facilitation of RAW and other hostile intelligence agencies against Pakistan intended towards attaining that sordid end-state too? Or portentously, is it all of the above?

Pakistan must adopt a two-pronged policy with Afghanistan/TTA. It should try to develop a politico-economic stake for it to have good relations with Pakistan. It should engage it diplomatically, give it continuous support in regional-international fora, and facilitate smooth bilateral, and international trade, development of trade corridors, etc. On the other hand, Pakistan must take swift, prompt, and punitive measures against each terrorist attack, going boldly to the border whenever, and wherever required. No terrorist attack must go unpunished. It may opt for brain warfare instead of body warfare - start targeting the command levels of the terrorists instead of their foot soldiers! A steady loss of commanders will have a sobering effect on their penchant for violent terrorist activities. Furthermore, terrorists tend to generally attack our static installations like check posts, depots, office buildings etc. Pakistan’s military must wrest the initiative back from them, move out of static installations, dominate the land/battlefields and force them into a form of battle they are not accustomed to, equipped and/or trained for. Superior air and ground mobility, protection, communication, firepower - both direct and indirect, longer-range weapons, timely and accurate intelligence, etc are inevitable for success against the TTP and others of its ilk. The vertical/air element too must come into play with short-range missiles, drones - armed and unarmed, and helicopters including gunships and fighter-bombers coming into play. Pakistan must take the battle to the terrorists from a position of overwhelming strength and force them into a reactive mode. Pakistan’s battle-hardened, professional military has done it earlier and can do so again!

There is a dire need for Pakistan’s ruling elite to take a “political pause” and (re)consider the disastrous implications of its unscrupulous, endless lust and thrust for absolute power; the existential threats are getting menacingly exacerbated, in the meantime. As a state, Pakistan appears to be unravelling rapidly. A literal Apocalypse stares it in the face! It must be forestalled. It is thus imperative that a well-crafted, whole-of-the-nation effort is launched to halt and reverse Pakistan’s inexorable descent into unmitigated disaster!

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