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# OPINION

## View from Across the Border: We are Our Worst Enemies

Mohammad Shehzad\*

*Time has come for Pakistan to compete with India in good things like education, healthcare, art and music and democracy. The truth is that India was never our enemy. We have failed ourselves. We are our own worst enemies.*



If 22 December 1939 was the 'Day of Deliverance' for the Muslim League<sup>1</sup>, 29 November 2022,

when General Qamar Javed Bajwa retired, was the day of deliverance for the Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI)! Imran Khan considered Gen Bajwa his nemesis and responsible for the fall of his government in early 2022.

If General Bajwa, after his retirement, has become yet another 'closed book', General Asim Munir, the new Army Chief, is a 'sealed' one at the moment. If we go by Imran's narrative, a hefty tome can be written on Gen. Bajwa that can be

summarized in Ghalib's one line: *Hooway tum dost jis kay, dushman uska aasman kyun ho!* (If you are someone's friend then why would heaven be his enemy?)

Bajwa did to the Pakistan Army what nobody could have ever dreamt of doing. A statesman like Jinnah even could not have stripped the Army of its 'holy cow' status in Pakistani society. The snakes he reared have all come back to bite him and cast aspersions on the army he led for six years. He has left, making his institution the butt of public ire.

The supposed *lèse-majesté* by Gen Bajwa is now being talked

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about widely thanks to Imran Khan's repeated assertions in his rallies and by his committed cyber-disciples in the social media. People have, in the past, chanted the slogan *Ayub Kutta Hai* (Ayub is a dog) in the streets but nobody had ever labelled him as a 'traitor' or used similar terms for the Army *per se*. Today, Imran and his supporters are calling Bajwa, a traitor.

General Ayub had some 'leftover conscience' in his blood. He stepped down and lived in infamy till his death. Bajwa's name, on the other hand, was paired with the animal that no Muslim would have even as a pet. The same 'tribute' was paid to some of his senior generals including the army as a force. Bajwa's 'Brutus', Imran Khan, (IK) has been singularly responsible for all this.

Fuel to the fire has also been added not by Bajwa's enemies but by people who might not have been love with him, but considered it their duty to defend him. When his \$60m corruption scam was broken by Fact Focus (FF), the finance minister of Pakistan Ishaq Dar, crony and relative of Nawaz Sharif who was himself a victim of Bajwa's political engineering, declared Bajwa's tax-returns (that FF had uploaded on its website) as doctored and ordered an enquiry to probe how and why such personal information was leaked.

This has made Imran's task even easier. He has gone on denigrating his previous benefactor. Even if Imran might not have been against the army *per se*, his open invectives against Bajwa was indirectly tarnished the image of the military as an institution, which has always been regarded as a 'holy cow' in Pakistan.

The incumbent government has even filed First Information Reports (FIRs) against the politicians/activists/bloggers who are mentioning the names of the Generals in their speeches and writings. The cyber-crimes-wing of Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) even outperformed everyone else. It took screenshots of thousands of social media post that were defamatory/derogatory, compiled a thick document and in a jiffy, it has appeared in everyone's cell phone. Those looking for the smear campaign against Bajwa and his men need not waste time now. It is all there, ironically delivered by agencies seeking apparently to protect him.

Never in Pakistan's history, the DG ISI was compelled to address the journalists live not to boast of victories against India or Taliban but to save face and assure the nation that political wheeling and dealing by the Army was all for the welfare of the

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people of Pakistan and the glory of Islam. In the same breath, he also assured us that in future the Army will be 'apolitical' (a quiet admission that the army was 'political' until now). Bajwa had also stated this in his parting speech. Did we ever witness such a spectacle in the last 75 years? We never saw the Army on the back foot like this, not even in the wake of the 1971 debacle.

But give the devil his due. Bajwa admitted before demitting office that his hybrid-regime in the form of Imran Khan's government was a fiasco. It earned the Army a bad name. That is why, he decided (in the twilight of his career) that the Army should be 'apolitical' – at least for the time being.

If the Army becomes apolitical, who would take charge of the politics and governance in the country? The members of the parliament? Now look at their intellect and their preparedness. Reacting to an awareness campaign about breast cancer through automated phone call messages, one of the lawmakers – Syed Mehmood Shah – says that the word 'breast' incites the sentiments of the youth and spreads obscenity in the society and thus the campaign must be stopped! He raised this in a session of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunication.

The former climate change minister Zartaj Gul of PTI said on a TV channel that COVID-19 contain 19 points which are applicable to any country under any condition. The former ISI chief Lt-Gen Javed Ashraf Qazi was the education minister in Musharraf's cabinet. He was hellbent on enforcing "40 *siparas*" (chapters or parts of Quran) on school kids through *Islamiyat*, while the Quran consists of only 30 chapters!

Punjab's chief minister Chaudhry Pervez Elahi says that if the students will not read Quran in schools, they cannot become doctors and engineers. He is the same politician who had earlier said in a public rally that his party (Pakistan Muslim League, Q) will elect General Musharraf as President-in-uniform not once but 100 times! Imran Khan set up a spiritual university last year saying that science cannot be understood without practising spirituality.

How could the army remain apolitical when it has a dominant presence everywhere? The Fauji Fertilizer Company is the largest taxpayer in the country from the manufacturing sector! The best housing societies in the country are developed by the Army under the Defence Housing Authority! When

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the civilian people are faced with natural calamities like earthquakes/floods, the Army or their kids (jihadis) are the first ones to help them, not even waiting for (leave alone, coordinating with) the civilian government to respond.

The civilians need the army for chores like checking electricity theft, enforcing lockdown during COVID, desludging water channels, providing security to public processions during Moharram and polling stations during elections and conducting census, etc. Such lucrative jobs can corrupt even the Pope. So what if Bajwa allegedly made \$60m; he was dragged into more serious businesses i.e. crafting a new doctrine— 'hybrid regime'!

Let bygone be bygone. A clean slate is now available to the new army chief. He ought to take lessons from the consequences of his predecessor's interventions in politics and stay away from it. The politicians should also grow up and stop acting like babies. Instead of rushing to the GHQ or the Supreme Court for settling their childish squabbles and their scores with one another, they should assume responsibility for their own fate.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. The TTP scourge is back. The second generation of the

Taliban is in the arena of jihad. We had a new army chief on 29 Nov and the development was welcomed by the TTP leadership with calling-off of the June ceasefire. The next day (20 Nov), it carried out a suicide attack in Quetta that killed one policeman and three civilians. Twenty-four people were injured.

The TTP has now vowed to carry out more attacks all over Pakistan. How can you fight them? Seasoned journalist Najam Aziz Sethi analysed it brilliantly in one of his shows. A gist of his analysis is in order here:

If you fight them, they will migrate to Afghanistan. Do you have the guts to chase them there? A superpower like the US could not do it. When it attacked them, they migrated to Pakistan. When it killed them inside Pakistan with drones, the clerics staged rallies telling the people about how fragile is Pakistan's sovereignty. The 2011 Salala Attack resulted in the closure of Nato supplies and Hillary Clinton had to apologize. So, with what strategy Pakistan should fight TTP? Of course, it would require a long-term, a sustained, much calibrated one, but it is impossible to develop such a strategy without reforming the country. A reformation that could give it an identity which sensible

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nations enjoy. Ceasefire or truce failed in the past. The TTP is clever. It reaps the benefits of such truces and accords and reneges on its words.

A clique of sycophantic journalists, anchors and analysts have become self-appointed 'mentors' of General Asim Munir and are busy telling him about the things he should pay attention to immediately. All of them are unanimous in their findings; he should remain 'apolitical'.

How can the army be apolitical when every political party has just one agenda, i.e. how to ridicule, belittle and discredit its opponent in every forum – talk shows, twitter battle or live rallies. Since this is a 24X7 duty of every politician of Pakistan today, there is literally no time for healthy debates, for improved and consensual legislation, economic reform, addressing critical issues related to climate change, governance, economy, education and health. The opposition does not attend parliament debates; the ruling party or parties do not show any sensitivity to public debate while framing their policies. If the Generals are crooked, are the politicians any better? The accountability system has failed because *hamam mein sab nangey*

*hain* (everyone is naked in the public bath).

The Army can be 'apolitical' in terms of not resorting acting political engineering to run down any politician and crown lunatics like Imran Khan. The right place for such characters is in the asylum. It can stay 'apolitical' by discouraging the culture of 'extensions' that successive army chiefs either sought or accepted. It can be 'apolitical' by staying away from the media creeps who have outperformed the cockroaches and mosquitoes in terms of numbers.

Foreign, defence and security policies cannot be left to the politician alone. They should be educated about a lot of things: Covid19, breast cancer, true meaning of Quranic precepts etc. They should learn that the best doctors and engineers are there in the US or in Europe and they did not come from schools where divine scriptures are imposed as compulsory textbooks. They should be told that science and spirituality are not antithetical to each other.

Pakistan has sacrificed more than 83,000 lives in the war on terror which is still going on. We will continue to sacrifice more lives. Add up the loss of life in the three wars we fought against India. The figure



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will not cross 10,000. So, by now, the Pak Army should have learnt that Kashmir cannot be liberated through wars, *Jihad* or the non-state actors. Moreover, the UN Resolutions on Kashmir are redundant now. They have outlived their utility. The ground situation today has vastly changed which makes the resolutions inoperable. There is a need for striking a pragmatic bargain, much like what Musharraf had initiated, rather than continue with our past rhetoric on Kashmir and India. There is a value in dismantling the structure of mistrust and hostility and build peace and reconciliation brick by brick. Reconciliation with India will prove beneficial for the people of both the countries and if at all we care about the Kashmiris, it will be the most beneficial for them at the end of the day.

The Indian leadership must also protect their country's secular credentials or it will become impossible for the liberal voices in Pakistan to advocate peace between the two countries. Much of what is happening in India do have an influence on the way the narrative is

being spawn in Islamabad. It must be understood in India that developments in India have their impact on civil-military relations in Pakistan and on the overall socio-political dynamic in the country.

Pakistan cannot progress and fight existential problems like terrorism, rising intolerance in the society, poor governance, failed economy, ethnic-sectarian-linguistic divisions and climate change without having friendly ties with its neighbours. The current situation is so bleak – imagine, the Taliban, we had fathered and used for strategic gains in the neighbourhood, are turning against us! Imran Khan's follies have annoyed Saudi Arabia, antagonised the US and confused the Chinese about our real intent. Iran too is unhappy. We should not be a pariah in the international community.

Time has come to compete with India in good things like education, healthcare, democracy and art and music. The truth is India was never our enemy. We have failed ourselves. We are our own worst enemies. Should one repeat Ghalib again? ■

### Endnote

1. On this day, the members of the Congress party who were part of the Central and provincial governments resigned protesting the Viceroy's decision to make India join the Second World War without duly consulting Indians. The Muslim League considered it an occasion to celebrate because the Congress went out of power.

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## **Note for readers and subscribers**

*We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.*

*We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the footnotes. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, (Ms Word 2003 format) also. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.*

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