

Pakistan: tensions revealed over state sponsored terrorism

Azad Hazeem Tue, 16/05/2017 - 12:56

Azad Hazeem

On October 6, Dawn, one of Pakistan's biggest English language newspapers, ran a story that has thrown the leaders of both the civilian government and the military into turmoil ever since. The article, by Cyril Almeida, reported on rifts between government and military representatives at a closed National Security meeting. The main issue was Pakistan's growing international isolation as a result of the activities of different terrorist organisations operating from within the country. According to Foreign Secretary Chaudhry, it was not just that relations with the United States and India were deteriorating but that China, which is today Pakistan's principal imperialist patron, had also raised growing concerns.

It was reported that General Akhtar, the Director General of the main security agency, the ISI, who was heading the military participants, asked what steps were to be taken. Chaudhry replied that the principal international demands were for action to be taken against three fundamentalist organisations; Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network. All three organisations were created with the help of the ISI, the first two in order to boost Pakistan's influence within the legitimate Kashmiri liberation struggle, the third to secure Pakistan a position in the scramble for influence in Afghanistan. Tensions were reported to have erupted after Akhtar said that the government should arrest whoever it deemed necessary and the Punjab Chief Minister, Shahbaz Sharif, retorted that, whenever the government had tried, the secret service had intervened behind the scenes.

Shortly after Dawn's publication, the government issued a statement calling the story an 'amalgamation of fiction and fabrication'. Nonetheless, pressure from the military led to the creation of a committee of inquiry that has been working on an as yet unpublished report. Cyril Almeida was temporarily put on the Exit Control List and the Information Minister, Rasheed, was fired because the government felt that the article should have been censored in the first place.

The abuses against Dawn journalists and the attacks on the freedom of press after the incident were justified by the rulers on the grounds that the meeting was about 'issues of national security'. We agree that these are issues of national importance and security but, with Pakistani citizens dying once again after the Pthankot incident on the border and people of all beliefs being killed, at home and abroad, by the named organisations, isn't it the right of every Pakistani citizen to know what information the Pakistani states holds on all this? If they are matters of national importance, shouldn't every democrat call for all citizens to be informed about these crucial issues?

In fact, there was nothing very surprising about the leaked information itself. That the Pakistani state makes use of Islamist and terrorist organisations as proxies for its domestic and foreign policy is an open secret. The same is true for US and Indian demands to stop support for the Haqqani network that is active in Kashmir. That China is suspicious about this strategy owes less to its commitment to democracy than to

its own foreign policy and the fear that such organisations could take root within the Muslim population that is repeatedly protesting against discrimination in Xinjiang province.

What caused the turmoil was the public revelation of frictions between the governing party, the Pakistan Muslim League ? Nawaz, PML-N, and the Generals. It is certainly noteworthy that representatives of the PML-N openly blamed the military for the situation, and even more significant that the reports of the dispute found their way into the public domain. The most likely aim was to create pressure on the military and give leverage to the PML-N. That, however, should not fool anyone into seeing this as a conflict between the forces of democracy and those of dictatorship, or between secularism and terrorism. As the prime minister himself, Nawaz Sharif, reportedly pointed out, ?policies pursued in the past were state policies and as such they were the collective responsibility of the state?.

In reality, what angered the Generals was that their grip on power behind the scenes had been exposed publicly, rather than any policy differences between those at the meeting. On this, at least, Sharif should be taken at his word, both sides are responsible for Pakistan?s problems. The rise and existence of terrorist organisations is the fault of the whole capitalist elite, civilian billionaires like Nawaz and high ranking Generals alike. While they have been leading a deadly war against national minorities under the label of the ?war on terror?, they have both abused the freedom of press and opinion.

The restrictions on Dawn in the past month, and the publication of the latest PM?s directive, confirm this as much as the abuse against social bloggers like Salman Haider, Waqas Goraya, Aasim Saeed, Ahmed Raza Naseer and Samar Abbas or political activists like Wahid Baloch, who are simply the most recent representatives of thousands of missing persons.

If the civilian PML-N government is really the champion of democracy, why is it not taking steps to end the abuse of all those who are calling for social and democratic rights across Pakistan? Simply because that would not be in the interests of the capitalists that they really represent. They are not concerned about democracy or citizens' rights, what they want are more relaxed international relations that will allow a smoother implementation of their business interests, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, programme and other foreign direct investments.

The Generals, on the other hand, fear a loss of their economic privileges if they lose their political position, which is dependent on the continued climate of war in Afghanistan and with India. Both sides are happy to maintain a climate of fear in which the press does not report about the crimes of the rulers, where social activists are abused, national and religious minorities oppressed and striking workers and protesting peasants are shot dead. Equally, they are both willing to exploit religious fanaticism if they deem it useful.

While it is true that the Generals might wish for an even more rigid regime and we clearly have to oppose all moves in that direction, no one should place any hope in a Nawaz Sharif who takes the Turkish government as his role model. Instead, all progressive forces in Pakistan should oppose not only the current restrictions on Dawn but the entire system of press censorship.

But, while defending all journalists and editors against every attack, whether from the civilian government or the military, we also cannot rely on media that are owned and controlled by different business interests to faithfully report the reality of life for the majority of Pakistan's people. The working class movement, trades unions and political parties in particular, needs a press of its own, independent of the bosses not only financially but politically.

One of the key tasks of a genuinely independent press would certainly be to campaign against government and military sponsorship of terrorist and fundamentalist organisations, but that is only one part of the

broader fight against the brutal war being waged against the people of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Waziristan under the label of the 'war against terror'.

What is needed is a united movement of Pakistan's oppressed classes, the rural and urban poor, peasants and most importantly its huge working class to fight through mass mobilisations for social and democratic rights. If socialists could take the lead in such a movement then two things would become clear very quickly; that the fundamentalists are not a movement of liberation but of despair, be it in Kashmir, Balochistan or elsewhere, and that both Nawaz Sharif and the military will oppose such a movement together with the capitalists, both domestic and international, and the landlords who grind the majority into the dirt every day.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/pakistan-tensions-revealed-over-state-sponsored-terrorism>