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## **Sleeping with the Enemy:**

### Pakistan's Military Industrial Complex and Existential Crises of National Identity

*by Patrick J Christian*

In a May 2011 Wall Street Journal article, reporter Bret Stephens suggests that Pakistan is undergoing existential crises of national identity. The truth of this observation is sobering because Pakistan is at the heart of two very different, but deadly conflicts; an inter-state contest of nuclear will with India and an intra-state conflict in Afghanistan. Understanding Pakistan's existential crises of identity may well be the only way that the international community will keep these two separate conflicts from spiraling out of control into the next multi-continent war.

In a recent visit to Pakistan, US Secretary of State Clinton and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mullen emphasized the need for Pakistan to subordinate religious fundamentalism and identity defining border disputes to international rules of law as conditions for American assistance and economic support. What both US policy makers and Bret Stephens miss is that Pakistan's conflict with India and involvement in the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan are only the most visible threats facing the South West Asia region. In many ways, the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and the Pashto's homelands constitute the seeds for the next regional multi-state war. The Punjabi and Mujahir identity conflict with India is a visible issue that deeply affects the mindset of the Punjabi dominated military officer corps. The fact that Pakistan's military is almost completely populated by ethnic Punjabi's who collectively constitute a closed and powerful politico-socioeconomic order is far less visible. What has become in effect a military class within the democratic state of Pakistan is rejected as essentially foreign by key segments of Pakistani society. In Balochistan, the Pakistani military is battling a decades old insurgency with more US funded weaponry and material than is used to fight the Pakistani Taliban. Historic Balochistan includes 45% of Pakistan's national territory and most of its natural resources, plus significant chunks of Iran and Afghanistan; factors that create the conditions for a regional multi-state war. The Pashtun people of Pakistan and Afghanistan are intricately caught up in competing objectives of ethnic nationalism and universal Islamic fundamentalism and their struggles have a disproportionate affect on both countries' chances of security and stabilization.

#### ***The military and its industrial complex***

The final element in Pakistan's caustic national brew is the structure and nature of Pakistan's military industrial complex, a wholly owned subsidiary of that country's British trained officer corps. With vast land and industrial holdings in their Punjabi homeland as well as in the occupied territories of the Baluchi and Pashto peoples, the Punjabi military social order is perhaps the single most powerful and cohesive organization in Pakistan and few outside that order fully comprehend its true size and nature (International Crises Group, 2003). Despite the

firm tone of the Obama administration, the US is entirely dependent upon Pakistan for both stabilizing the border with India and managing the continuing Islamic insurgency growing out of its Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These areas are the heartland of the 40 million strong Pashto tribal federation which straddles the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. With the majority of the Pashto nation living on the Pakistan side of the divided tribe, any solution to Afghanistan's conflict will necessarily require Pakistan to stabilize itself internally as a precondition to stabilizing its external relations with Afghanistan, India, and Iran.

### *Existential crises of national identity*

Understanding Pakistan's existential crises requires understanding the cultural, ethnic and identity divides which tug at the national identity that the civilian governing elites struggle to develop. Pakistan is actually four national identities that are folded into one internationally recognized political state and overlaid by a fifth population; that of the refugee. The four national identities are all associated with historic homelands. The Pashto tribe of 40 million people lives in the SW – NE mountain range along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan with approximately 28 million in the former and 12 million in the latter. The Punjabi Indo-Aryan ethnic group consists of 105 million people and lives in the NE part of the country straddling the border with India. The 75 million Punjabis on Pakistan side share significant similarities with the 30 million Punjabis on the Indian side, creating a failure in large group identity definition resulting in onset of negative definition of identity (Volkan, 1986). The Sindhi people are currently estimated at a density of 51 million living primarily in the Sindhi province which they share with large numbers of Mujahir or Muslim Urdu speaking immigrant refugees from India who replaced the Hindu Sindhi population during partition. Finally, the Balochi population shares their Balochistan homeland with Pashtun immigrants, the nearest socio-ethnically related population to them. The fourth and largest province of Pakistan, Balochistan, constitutes about 8 million inhabitants who live a fiercely independent tribal existence and have waged a war of succession for the last several decades. These five ascribed large identity groups compete with two other constructed identity groups for national prominence and dominance over Pakistan's future; the military and the mullahs. Nearly every issue creates a merging and diverging of group interests in a multi-group contest over power, dominance and identity that leaves the normal democratic process and structure in continuing disarray. Promises made by one group are quickly broken by another; apologies made in one campaign are appended in the next. The chaos that ensues passes for organized democracy beset by radical Islam and pressure by an existential Indian enemy.

If Pakistan's borders contained only the Punjab and Sindh provinces, the nation would still be locked in a cold war confrontation with India because of how Pakistan and India identify themselves and each other. For India, the border between Pakistan is a partition created by British perfidy which now separates two peoples; Punjab and Sindh and that sent the Mujahir into Diaspora in the north. The nature of Indian society is primarily Hindu, which is an absorptive culture and religion. Despite having been born in India for example, Buddhism is a minor element of larger Hindu society, reabsorbed as it was back into the perpetually changing whole. In its deepest core, Hinduism threatens absorption of even Islam through its more mystical sufist expressions that characterize the Muslim ummah of both Pakistan and India. For the Muslim Punjabis, Sindhis, and Mujahirs of Pakistan, such absorption threatens annihilation and extinction as they are left with diminished ability to show why they are separate from mother

India. From their culture, language, and ethnic expression, these peoples seem one with their southern neighbors, divided only by their Islamic faith even as Hinduism threatens absorption of that last remaining identity marker - Islam. Unable to achieve optimal distinction (Brewer, 2001) between them, Pakistan's Punjabis, Sindhis and Mujahirs work to create and highlight differences between themselves and their southern relatives in a vast movement of differentiation (Horowitz, 1985). This goal has become nearly an element of Southern Pakistani culture in and of itself; the degradation of India and all things Indian, or the 'anti-India' as Pakistanis are sometimes called by observers.

The natural identity differentiation between Indian society and the austere Pashto-Baluchi peoples actually helps to fuel the identity crises of the Punjab, Sindh and Mujahir. The southern groups share deep similarities with India's culture including genealogy, language, caste and sociological psychological structures. The very intensity with which Punjabi and Sindhi Muslims decry caste society provides an indication of its enduring strength in Pakistani society despite nominal Islamic rejections of such un-egalitarian institutions. The northern groups share little, if any similarities with Indian society. Pashto and Baluchi society is a geologically and geographically austere life cycle amply rooted in the psycho-sociological structures of early Islam. Highly patriarchic in nature, there is little friction between them, so different are they in markers of identity and historical narrative. It is not surprising that the Punjabi based military and Punjab-Sindh-Mujahir dominated governing elite are battling social insurgencies in both Baluchistan and the NWFP/FATA home of the Pashto tribal federation. The stark differences between Pashto and Baluchi with Indian do not create competition in any important physical or psychological forum, and since they are in separate political states, there is simple indifference between them of the existence of one to the other. The difference between northern Pakistanis and India's identity is not lost on either themselves or on southern Pakistanis. In a social psychological process called meta-contrast (Tajfel, 1982), the very sharp differences in identity expression that southern Pakistanis' perceive relative to their northern Pakistani neighbors creates a crises of insufficient identity definition with their Indian neighbors to the south.

This hole in the large group identity of the Punjab-Sindh-Mujahir majority becomes a potent weapon for use by Pakistan's two constructed identity groups (military and mullah social orders) that use this shortfall to maintain political power in a complex shared relationship. The Pakistani military should not be misunderstood to be a subset of the Pakistani executive branch, but rather an institution unto itself that is self sustaining even outside of official government salary. The military system of Pakistan is similar to those self contained structures that ruled many of the South American countries for centuries after independence from colonial Spain. Such self contained military systems own and operate businesses such as agrarian production, transportation concessions, shipping and receiving, and government contracting. To be sure, all such businesses have civilian boards of directors and company officers who are not active members of the military; they are retired. Stock ownership is usually vested in the families of military officers in direct proportion to rank, years of service and position within the military that supports the businesses. A forensic review of how such a military industrial system is created and sustained can begin with the requirements for development, security and organization which military officers, current and retired, excel at respective to their civilian counterparts. The point of this is to lay the foundation that the Pakistani military is not just in the business of defending Pakistan from its neighbors and guaranteeing domestic order. The prime function of the Pakistani military is deeply intertwined with the state structure of Pakistan and its survival as an industrial, class based society with the various ethnic groups rank-ordered in dominance and ability to

garner larger shares of political, economic and industrial power. This rank order is essentially Punjabi, Mujahir, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi in that order which roughly corresponds to the demographic numbers of each group. What the military social order works to prevent however, are uncontrollable coalitions that may undermine such simplistic versions of demographic real-politics such as secular based, left-of-center coalitions. This is where the alliance with the other socially constructed identity group arises; that of the Mullahs.

### *Sleeping with the enemy*

Fundamental Islam in Pakistan has little basis for existence prior to the past half century. The mystical Sufism practiced by India's Muslims allowed them to share many of the cultural traditions and festivals of India's Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists which eased conversion to Islam. The differences between mainstream Pakistani Sufist Sunni Islam practiced by Sindhis, Punjabis and Mujahirs and puritan Arab's is significant and the resulting contrast of such societies place them much closer to India's culture than that of the Arabian Peninsula. By contrast, the Islam of the austere tribes of Balochistan and Pakhtunkhwa was dominated by the demands of ethnic and linguistic identity and a historical narrative based in physical competition for survival in austere environments. Concepts such as universal Islam based on the acceptance of Hilm, or patient forbearance and rejection of violence as a part of human life found little acceptance in such harsh society. The life cycles of subsistence based tribes revolve around a tight web of patriarchic social control as daily starvation, thirst, and exposure require the disciplined cohesion of all members to avoid physical extinction. Exactly the types of tribal centric ingroup identity definition that the Prophet Mohamed tried to overcome with the Arabian tribes in the 7<sup>th</sup> century are flatly rejected as they risk tribal extinction. The fundamental Islam of the Taliban in Afghanistan was born in the Madrassas and Mosques of Pakistani Pashto society. This new adaptation of the fundamental Islamic message was the anti-thesis of Muhamed Asad, one of the authors of Pakistan's first constitution which worked to push Islam into modernity and away from fundamentalism. The new version was refashioned to fit the requirements of a tribal society seeking moral authority to turn back the tide of modernity and the social dis-cohesion and discontinuity made possible by expanding sociocentric societies. This new(er) version cast off the requirements of trans-tribalism, and concentrated on maintaining deeply paternalistic, pre-modern structures that supported austere communal life and maintained the balanced placement of both tribal chiefs and ulema political leaders.

These new versions of fundamentalist Islam survived and grew by identifying and exploiting niche markets within the four social groups of Pakistan and by strategic adaptation to the requirements of the Punjabi military social order which maintained control over the elements of national power in Pakistan. The adaptations that the ulema made in their messages put out in mosques and madrassas found deep acceptance within the Punjabi Officer Corps because they carefully avoided problematic issues such as land reform, wealth distribution or classification of society into privileged or unprivileged sectors. One of the two most influential Islamic parties, the Jaamat-I-Islami (JI) was founded by a religious scholar named Abul A'ala Maududi, and supported nearly every military initiative over five decades of operation. In the austere tribal areas of NWFP and FATA, the Ulema crafted Islamic doctrine which supported and strengthened the tribal structures and kept them focused away from nationalist autonomy and towards support for an Islamic neighboring state of Afghanistan. In the relatively prosperous states of Punjab and Sindh, fundamentalist leaders concentrated on the lower castes/classes with their creation of hospitals, schools and public service providers winning away political support

from mainstream secular parties which were the common enemy of both Mullah and Military (International Crises Group, 2003).

The activist Mullahs operating in Punjab and Sindh also used the lack of identity definition as a potent weapon against the Pakistani ruling elites, offering a clear and convincing Islamic identity supported by public works funded by the military industrial complex and social welfare activities funded by systems of Islamic tithing and taxing outside of government control. Vestigial traditions of caste inherited from Hindu culture allow for massive social groupings of poverty stricken Punjabi's, Sindhi's and Mujahirs that fall outside political representation. These lower caste cast offs have become the breeding ground for universal Islamic fundamentalism mixed with the implementation of an Islamic social net that competes with secular versions such as Abdul Sattar Ehdī's foundation. The Islamic identity that leaders of Pakistan's religious parties offer serve to antagonize and exploit the existential crises of identity found within the Punjab and Sindh provinces. This exploitation comes most often in the form of challenges to the one identity marker that provides the necessary separation between Pakistan's Punjabi, Sindhi and Mujahir communities and those of India; Islam. Mere participation in the Muslim ummah is an insufficient identity marker to separate out the Punjabi-Sindhi-Mujahir society from their Indian counterparts to the south because there are nearly as many Muslims in India as there are in Pakistan (120M versus 175M).

Behind support and mentoring of the emergent Islamic parties of Pakistan and their spread throughout Pakistani society via their ubiquitous madrassas; behind the pandering of the Pashto tribal elites as an effective methodology to prevent them from developing their own nationalist ideologies of autonomy; behind the manipulative suppression of Punjab and Sindh's secular mainstream by the use of identity, religion and economic pandering; behind the brutal suppression of Balochistan's secular nationalism and the exploitation of its massive natural resource base; behind the creation and employment of the Taliban movement and army operating in Afghanistan lies the actions and power of the Pakistani Military and their subsidiary industrial complex. Such a powerful complex holds the economic and industrial development of Pakistan hostage to its own survival and will not willingly give up its power, position and legacy without a fight. As the existential crises of Pakistan mounts, the ability of the military to keep the warring segments together without a unifying ideology will become impossible. When this happens, according to Abdul Sattar Ehdī, the people of Pakistan "shall rise like mad men and pull down these walls that keep their future captive. Mark my words and heed them before you find yourselves the prey instead of the predator" (Osborne, 2011). If this is what lies in store for the Pakistani military industrial complex, perhaps US policy might be well served to refrain from becoming too close lest they be pulled down with them.

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