

# Pakistan: “Military’s predation is an institutional feature”

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**Today, we face a state of military hegemony: political, economic and intellectual control. There is not a single young scholar who is not on the military’s payroll or network. Shahbaz Sharif used to instruct the police to facilitate Hamid Gul’s Varan bus service.**

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*A dissident’s job is always fraught with dangers. In case of Pakistan, the risks involved in criticizing all-powerful Khakis and their proxy Taliban hardly need an elucidation. Still, dissident voices keep tormenting military establishment. Ayesha Siddiqua is one such ‘tormenter’. In an interview with Viewpoint, she candidly exposes the Khaki myths painstakingly built by indoctrinating outlets. Read on:*

**Tell us about yourself.**

**Ayesha Siddiqua** - I was born and raised in Lahore which probably explains my madness. I grew up in a Lahore which was really a cultural and intellectual hub. Being the only child of a writer-mother - Jamila Hashmi - I was dragged around by her to all sorts of places like the Pak Tea House, Writer’s Guild and others. Grew up seeing some of the top intellectual icons of our country. I went to Cathedral High School which was then the only co-ed educational institution. Later, I did my graduation from Kinnaird College, Lahore and Masters in Political Science from the Punjab University as an external student because I had by then joined the civil services. In 1992, I went to the UK to do my Ph.D. in War Studies from King’s College, London. One of the first books my mother gave me to read was Maxim Gorky’s autobiography. Right across my school was People’s Publishing House that sold translations of some of the most fantastic literary works from the then Soviet Union. I still return to Gorky when I am lost. I read almost all Russian authors, English literature and some French authors. I was raised to become a fiction writer but I probably didn’t have the balls for that. I still desire to be one because great fiction makes great people.

**If one goes by WikiLeaks and reports frequently appearing in global media, the ISI is patronizing Taliban. In your book, *Military Inc.* and numerous other articles you have written, military appears as a conglomerate with financial and industrial interests. Don’t you think GHQ’s Afghan and Kashmir policy is in contradiction with its economic interests?**

In fact, these policies constitute the foundations on which the empire stands. It is the narrative through which everything else is sold. Contrary to the propaganda that military is the only surviving institution of the state, it is also a victim of the politics of its echelons. There are factions within the military: some support the west and other the Islamists. There is not one policy but several policies. But at a glance, the sense of being a nuclear weapon state gives the army a certain confidence to

engage in misadventures. But more than everything else, dependence on non-state actors is built into its own tactical narrative. This means that it will not give up its claim on either Kashmir or Afghanistan. These two issues are essential in the process of militarizing the society and the societal mindset, which, in turn, is necessary for military's predation. Today, we face a state of military hegemony: political, economic and intellectual control. Today, there is not a single university in Pakistan or a young scholar who is not on the military's payroll or network. They open shops called think-tanks for their young clients. A journalist, who does not take directions from the military, is a rarity in today's Pakistan. Institutionally, this outreach is done through the ISPR and the ISI. But there are other informal channels as well such as the army chief himself. Recently, heard a top Pakistani journalist claim in a private meeting that the military intends to fight the Taliban because he had heard that from the army chief with whom he had about six private sessions. The national security narrative built on and around the Kashmir and Afghanistan issues is critical for establishing military's hegemony.

**Every time ISI is accused of patronizing Taliban, we are told about over 2000 soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in 'war on terror'. What explains this contradiction. Who is army patronizing, if it is patronizing, and who it is fighting back?**

The army only fights those militants who have gone astray but the policy is to continue supporting non-state actors. Over the past couple of decades or more, the army has developed an operational dependence on these forces. The animosity with India is ideological and so there will always be the need to build and sustain elements having blind faith in destroying the enemy and not question the narrative. The Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and certain factions of the Taliban are considered friendly and dependable. However, there is no real plan to ensure that they all stay strictly in control. For instance, there are elements from within the friendly forces that go astray and launch an attack. Army's own men dying helps build the narrative that it is under attack and so deserves sympathy and support of the people.

**The Viewpoint was told by an ISPR spokesperson: "As for as the defense budget is concerned it's total Rs. 450 billion which makes almost 17 percent of the total budget whereas propaganda is more than 50 percent goes to military" . Is it really 17 percent or is it some twist here?**

Under Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz the government introduced cosmetic changes such as de-linking military pensions from the main defense budget. There are about Rs. 100-150 billion that are not included in the budget. This is one problem. But then there is the overall share claimed by the military in national resources that would put the percentage at a much higher level. There is a need to monetize the military's commercial ventures and the state assets that they utilize for financial purposes to arrive at a correct figure. The defense budget calculated to the older formula (pensions and all other hidden items included) make it over 25% of CGE. The hidden items also include expenditure used on military but drawn from civilian head of expenditure. A calculation of defense expenditure based on their overall share of national resources would take the figure even higher.

**A big justification for big defence budget is " due to India's hegemonic designs". When Pakistan went nuclear, we were told by government as well as military hawks that no body could cast an evil eye on Pakistan anymore. Why this big defense budget when we have The Bomb? And don't you think the ever increasing budget contradicts the logic behind The Bomb?**

Since we follow the US-USSR example, there is no evidence that non-conventional defense reduces the need or the size for conventional defense. The nuclear deterrence causing budgetary reduction formula does not work for us at all because we have not gone into a phase of sustainable confidence-

building measures or given up the military option for resolving disputes with India. The example being Kargil crisis or the attacks by non-state actors originating from Pakistan. Due to India's superior or quantitatively stronger position to push Pakistan up the conflict escalation spiral, buying major weapon systems to stave off threat of a war imposed by India in a nuclear environment becomes necessary. Our defense budget will never go down unless we change the politics of our rivalry with India.

**Army claims to have a superb system of internal accountability. It is said many officers go home on minor corruption charges. That's why, they say, this organization is still intact and takes over the country with out bloody revolution. Your comments.**

The organization does not survive because of its superior accountability but due to its mafia-style accountability. This means that while those at the top and at responsible positions are not touched, others who are not so well-connected are kept in line with this narrative of accountability. Firstly, the accountability system is flawed. It is one organization whose manpower (Department of the Auditor-General of Pakistan) conducts both internal and external audit. To give one example, I have served both as a military accountant and a defense auditor. Am I likely to point out issues with spending that I had approved during my tenure as part of the Military Accountant-General's organization? Second, the defense budget has over 20% wastage which is due to procurement of weapons and other items, incorrect human resource planning and a negative teeth-to-tail ratio. This means the military spends more on non-essentials than essentials.

**In one of your articles you claimed a general in Pakistan is worth 500 millions. Can you compare it with the costs incurred by an Indian general?**

The worth of an Indian general is much less because they do not get to make all the properties that Pakistani generals do. To give one example, when general Musharraf retired he had 8 properties on prime location and his legal net worth runs into millions of rupees. And I have not even begun to calculate the worth of his off-budget wealth. The interesting part is that military acquires land at cheap rates. There are stories after stories of ordinary people being forced off their land or forced into selling their land at cheap rates which is then developed using state infrastructure and sold at higher rates. It is worth pointing out that there is a thin line between public and private spending on defense. There are hundreds of cases pointed out in defense audit reports whereby military's commercial ventures draw upon state resources.

**Also, according to an ISPR spokesperson: "There are two types of service setups. One is command and other is staff. From Major General to Lieutenant General there is total 10 years of service, 3 to 4 for command and rest is staff. On staff you only get 90000 to 100000 Rs. Salary, 5 to 6 people of staff. A staff car and driver and one house. One house servant". It does not sound 500 million. Your comments.**

It is not just the pay of the generals which is counted as part of their worth. The lands they acquire as part of their being in service is included. Also, the money spent on acquisition and development of the golf courses, residential colonies, housing schemes, etc. An exact calculation may push up the figure even higher.

**Military has been accused of land grabbing and making quick bucks out of real estate business. But privately many officers say: well! bureaucrats, judges, journalists, police officers, all get residential houses and plots who only single out military officers. Your comments.**

The military economy, as I tried to point out in my book "Military Inc", is part of the elite economy.

The Pakistan military does not predate alone but in partnership with other actors. The fact that judges, journalists, and bureaucrats are also allowed similar facilities is so that military personnel can say 'but they do it too'. The other point worth attention is that while others do not engage in such land-grabbing so frequently, the military has an institutionalized system to do so. There is no justification for giving away land to any select group.

**Also, we are told that not every general has made fortunes. Only the ones enjoying power under military dictatorships have benefited. Others have not. What is your opinion?**

It is a false assumption that no one has made money. Lt. General (retd) Amjad is considered as one of the honest generals. However, he also made his 'legal' millions selling the land acquired through the army. Having said that I agree there are always those who make less money than others. However, military's predation is an institutional feature. It is no longer about personalities. Every military regime opens up newer facilities for the officer cadre. The problem is that these perks are legalized and so we generally don't look at these as theft of national resources. There is not a single general who has not benefitted. Be it the Islamist General Hamid Gull or the pro-democracy Lt. General (retd) Talat Masood, they are all beneficiaries. They benefit under military rule and also under civilian rule. Ask some reasonable police officer who would be willing to tell you how Shahbaz Sharif used to instruct the police to facilitate Hamid Gull's Varan bus service. In fact, the retired military officers are as much a part of military incorporated as serving.

**Adnan Farooq**

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\* Adnan Farooq did his Masters in Political Science and has worked with daily The Nation, Lahore and daily Jang, Lahore. He has also volunteered for Milieudefensie, Amsterdam. Friends of the earth, Europe, on environmental issues. He has been working with ON FILE, an Amsterdam-based publication run by journalists from all around the world. He studied Conflict Resolution at University of Amsterdam and is living in Paris. He is the editor.