

# Pakistan: Wherever you look the army

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**Zia did not only Islamise his army. He also commercialised, merchandised and industrialised it. He was damn successful on this front too.**

The Pakistan Army is a successful state within a failed state. It is the most organised, largest and successful political party: with over half a million 'paid' full time members, it has ruled Pakistan for 32 years. It is the biggest conglomerate: running over 20 different business concerns. It is the feudal lord with largest estate.

The rise and rise of Pakistan army is very much a consequence of Cold War politics. When Pakistan was founded, the red threat at home was not big yet it could not be neglected. After all, some commies in collaboration with their sympathisers inside the military had attempted a coup in 1951 when the newly created state was only four years old. Also, in East Pakistan Marxist booklets were in great demand at college campuses. On 22 June, 1954 when Pakistan's foreign minister Zafar Ullah Khan met Foreign Operations Administrator Stassen in Washington, a concern shown by both sides was the leftist inclination towards communism amongst the student body in East Pakistan, encouraged according to Governor Stassen by the even more left-wing West Bengalis in India'. As soon as red threat would become eminent, Khakis were needed to quell it [1].

Besides, the Khaki services were required in Middle East to guard the oil wells. The Middle East despots imposed by London in post-First World War period and sustained by Washington from Second World War onwards, carefully avoided an indigenous working class and army. The colonels' coup in Iraq and Egypt had scared the Sultans and Sheikhs so much that they would prefer Pakistani troops and infidel green berets to defend their oil wells.

Ambassador Hildreth sent a report to State Department on 10 July 1954 to set the goals for new client state called Pakistan: It should 'develop as a free nation, politically stable, economically sound, anticommunist in ideology, capable of defence against aggression and participation in the defence of the area' [2].

The political stability in Pakistan was achieved on 7 October 1958: first martial law was proclaimed. The civilian government earlier this year had announced general elections following a year of political instability marked by mass protests and industrial unrest. The general elections might lead to 'democratic instability'. To pre-empt any political instability, the Khakis imposed martial law. The first military dictator, Ayub Khan, told his subjects: 'We must understand that democracy cannot work in a hot climate. To have democracy we must have a cold climate like Britain' [3]. It remains the best intellectual contribution from Pakistan in the field of political science.

Faithful khakis before conquering Pakistan did not forget their old British masters either. After briefing or debriefing from USA, a day before the declaration of first martial law, khakis intimidated old British masters too. The British High Commissioner, Alexander Symon, was so terrified of recent working class upheavals in Pakistan that he suggested his boss in London to destroy the record, which indicated prior knowledge of military coup:

*'It seems to me that it be as well – for one cannot be sure of what may happen here in 2, 5 to 10 years from now – for all the papers held in this office which indicate that we knew in advance to be destroyed.[...] Incidentally, while I know thcliat the American Ambassador knew before hand, the president has assured me that Langley does not know that I knew' [4].*

The US media as usual lent the necessary public justification for 'political stability'. *The New York Times*, five days after the coup, editorially praised the democratic intentions of Gen. Ayub on October 12.

In a year's time, Eisenhower visited Pakistan (December 1959) to dispel any doubts if there were any. He was the first US president to set foot on its South Asian colony. His successors kept the tradition he set. All US presidents happen to have visited Pakistan when it was some military dictator in charge of Pakistan . Last time it was G.W. Bush received by Musharraf at Islamabad airport.

Ayub Khan set in motion a process of one-sided economic development. The development benefited (in)famous 22 Families of Pakistan. An era of khaki plunder had also begun. Big feudal estates were allotted to generals, brigadiers and colonels. Ayub himself was ridiculed as richest ruler of a poorest country. A student revolt that began on 7 November 1968 spread rapidly. In March 1969, the self appointed Field Marshal of a strong army surrendered before unarmed students and workers. However, in violation of the constitution he himself had drafted, power was handed over to another general: Yahya Khan. Yahya as Brigadier had been instrumental in executing the first military coup on October 7, 1958.

This profligate dictator is a myth in Pakistan 's history. A 'myth' of profligacy. An infamous womaniser, he was famous for drinking himself to a stupor. Many jokes used to make rounds across Pakistan about his lust for silver screen celebrities.

A retired Inspector General of Police in his memoirs records:

*"The Shahinshah of Iran , on a state visit, was getting late for his departure but the President would not come out of his bedroom. A very serious protocol problem had arisen but nobody could enter his bedroom. General Ishaq, Military Secretary to the President, requested Rani (one of Yahya's lovers) to go in and bring him out. When she entered the room, she claims she found the most famous female singer of the country XXXXXXXXXXXX. Even Rani found it abhorring. She helped the President dress and brought him out' [5].*

The students who humbled field marshal were not ready to vacate streets until General Yahya announced the general elections. The election results however were not acceptable to khaki janta. The East Pakistan had voted en masse for separatist Awami League. Consequently, the Awami League had emerged as the largest party. The transfer of power to Awami League meant handing it over to East Pakistan . This was not acceptable to Punjab . Instead of relieving power to East Pakistan, Khakis launched a mass genocide of East Pakistanis.

The non-martial race of East Pakistan took up arms to resist. Aided by Indian intervention in December, the non-martial race humbled the troops from West Pakistan led by 'Tiger Niazi'. Yahya's troops surrendered at Dacca's Platoon Maidan on December 16, 1971. This has been the lowest point of Khakis in Pakistan 's history.

Defeated, humiliated and demoralised generals handed power over to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the truncated Pakistan. Yahya was put under house arrest while some of his generals were sent on early retirement. Bhutto had the chance to harness Khakis. He did not. He was a Bonapartist.

Bonapartism never pays. It costs. It cost Bhutto his life. But to Pakistan it cost much more. In less than seven years, Khakis were back. And needless to report: with tacit US approval.

Now from July 5, 1977 had started a period of military dictatorship that would stretch over 11 years. This was the Military's third term in power. These eleven years brutalised the state and society alike. The new khaki dictator General Zia ul Haq was son of a mulla. His father was employed as Imam Mosque in British Indian army. Zia's religious background helped him play on an entirely new pitch: Islam. Just seven years before he launched his Islamisation in Pakistan, he was sent in 1970 to Jordan at the head of Pakistani troops to crush Palestinian uprising there. Neither was he so fond of his Muslim brethren when as a young officer of British Indian army, he went to Indonesia at the end of Second World War.

He participated in the war between Indonesian resistance guerrillas and British army. In this war, 2000 Indonesians were killed. Zia was part of this British genocide of Indonesia.

The armed forces particularly air force and navy had continued with British traditions of westernised culture in post-independence period. Zia ensured to cap western traditions. A ban on alcohol was strictly implemented in officer's messes. Prayer times and fasting months began to be observed at cantonments. A cadet on passing out from kakul military academy or a grey hair soldier retiring from army service would get Maulana Maudodi's Tafseer as present.

Tableeghi Jamaat was allowed to proliferate military bases. The religious thought also made its way to the Staff College. He himself signed a forward to Brigadier S K Malik's book *Quranic Concept of War*. In his note, Zia wrote:

*"The professional soldier in a Muslim army, pursuing the goals of Muslim state, CANNOT become 'professional' if in all his activities he does not take on 'the colour of Allah' [6].*

Seven years following his death/murder a group of army officers led by Major General Zahir ul Islam Abbasi tried to prove that he had taken on 'the colour of Allah'. On the morning of 26 September 1995, police on his way to Rawalpindi from Tribal Areas arrested one of Abbasi's aides. In his car, police found a cache of recently purchased kalashnikovs and rocket launchers. Abbasi and his 'professional' soldier comrades were 'pursuing the goals of Muslim state'. They had planned a coup. The plan was to storm the GHQ during a meeting of the corps commanders, kill the participants, arrest the political leadership and impose Sharia. Abbasi had planned to use militants from Harkatul Ansar, to storm the GHQ. In his draft speech, he intended to declare himself army chief and Amir ul Momineen. Besides declaring Pakistan a Sunni Islamic state, he wanted to ban films, music, interest payments, contraception and photographs of women. He wanted to run the country with the help of an assembly of mullahs whose decision would have been a final word.

His failed coup attempt was in line with Pakistan army's tradition. The colonial style top-down army structure has so far ensured that no coup attempt by junior officers succeeds. There have been five coup attempts by junior officers of Pakistan army. First time, it was in 1951 when few army officers and leaders of communist party planned a coup. Second time, it was in 1973 when some army officers revolted against Bhutto. Pro-democracy army officers during Zia's autocratic regime made two attempts. First in 1980, and then, in 1983-84. And the last was in 1995 by Abbasi.

Zia did not only Islamise his army. He also commercialised, merchandised and industrialised it. He was damn successful on this front too. Today the military enterprises account for nearly three per cent of the country's GNP. The Pakistan army runs five major business groups. The biggest....or rather, country's biggest...conglomerate is Fauji Foundation. Established in 1960, the Fauji Foundation has assets worth Rs 10 billion. Originally meant for charity, it runs, sugar mills, chemical

plants and fertiliser factories. It owns a gas company and power plants. It runs 800 educational institutions and 100 hospitals.

Next comes Army Welfare Trust. It was established in 1977. With assets worth Rs 17 billion, it runs Askri Bank. The Trust owns mills and plants. And not to forget its lucrative real estate business. The Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) is a road construction company and since 1966, it has got projects worth half a billion dollars. The National Logistics Cell (NLC) is a transport fleet comprising over 2,000 vehicles. The Special Communication Organisation provides telecommunication services to the people of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir [7].

Researcher Ayesha Siddiqi points out that these foundations are a burden on the economy in three aspects: (a) since these are categorised as welfare institutions for armed forces, they do not pay taxes although marginal taxes were imposed in 1992 (b) these organisations employ serving military personnel whose wages are paid from defence budgets (c) they represent monopolistic tendencies thus availing business opportunities not available to others [[*Pakistan's Arms Procurement And Military Buildup, 1979-99: In Search of a policy* by Ayesha Siddiqi-Agha Great Britain p:85]].

Encouraged by the khaki success on the corporate front, junior partners: air force and navy also decided to tread the same path. The Pakistan Air Force established its Shaheen Foundation in 1977 and Navy launched in 1981 its corporate venture: Bahria Foundation.

In the post-Afghan War scenario, Pakistan army lost its international importance. Washington did not need it the way it was needed during the cold war. It was therefore a big pressure on Islamabad to reduce its defence budget. Meantime, when Zia exploded in air on August 17 1988, the Khakis decided to let Pakistan have a democratic pause. The civilian regimes were under immense pressure from IMF, World Bank to down size everything from railways to military. Reduce defence spending and improve the debt retirement, ordered the IMF, World Bank. The civilian regime could neither refuse IMF, World Bank nor annoy the military with cuts in its budget. A middle way was sought: adjusting military personnel in public sector. In the name of down sizing and right sizing, workers were laid off. Only to be replaced by khakis. Generals were appointed from university chancellors to chairman of cricket board. What legendary Punjabi poet Ustad Daman remarked back in 1960s was even true for 1990s:

*Pakistan dian moojan i moojan*  
*Jidhar weekho foojan i foojan*

(Now each day is fair and balmy  
Wherever you look: the army)

Nobody protested? At least my teacher Mehdi Hassan did. He was my teacher at Punjab University's Mass Communication department. When I was a student there, a retired general was appointed as Vice Chancellor of the university. Mehdi Hassan submitted an application to the vice chancellor requesting that he be appointed as Lahore 's military commander. The stunned vice chancellor called on Mehdi Hassan and asked: how come you can be appointed as military commander without any experience or qualification?

'Why not?', replied Mehdi Hassan. ' If Lahore 's military commander can be appointed as university's vice chancellor without any experience or qualification why a university teacher cannot be appointed as Lahore 's military commander?'

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<http://www.viewpointonline.net/wherever-you-look-the-army.html>

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## Footnotes

[1] *The White House & Pakistan Secret Declassified Documents, 1969-1974*. Selected and Edited by F S Aijazuddin Oxford University Press, Karachi 2003 p:6.

[2] [ibid.](#)

[3] *Clash of Fundamentalisms* by Tariq Ali paperback edition Verso, London, New York p:183.

[4] *The British Papers Secret and Confidential India, Pkaistan, Bangladesh documents 1958-1969* Complied and Selected by Roedad Khan Oxford University Press Karachi,2002 p:40.

[5] *The Ultimate Crime : Eyewitness to Power Games*, Qaumi Publishers Lahore, 1997 p:97.

[6] Cited in *Pakistan eye of the storm* by Owen Bennet Jones Yale University Press publications USA, 2002.

[7] [Ibid.](#)