

Feelings of revenge will not end with Osama's death - The Left view from Pakistan

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In the first four days after Osama Bin Laden's assassination, the mass reaction in Pakistan is very mixed. In Punjab there is a general sympathy towards Osama, however not many are expressing it openly. In Sindh, the responses differ in different cities. For example, in Karachi there is more active commiseration for Osama and condemnation of the American attack.

Surprisingly, not much happened in Khaiber Pakhtoonkhawa, where Osama was killed. Similarly Baluchistan responded meekly against the killings. However the reaction against the attack on the compound in Abbot Abad is growing wider and it will spread to other areas. Many religious fundamentalists fled Afghanistan and took refuge in Baluchistan and Khaiber Pakhtoonkhawa. They ruled those provinces from 2002 to 2008.

This fundamentalist rule occurred while General Musharraf was playing a binary game with American imperialism. On one hand, he joined the “war on terror” coalition while on the other he depended on the fundamentalist’s growth to receive more for military and economic support from the American imperialism on the name of fighting the fundamentalists. During this period, Osama Bin Laden must have crossed into Pakistan.

The May 2011 attack took everybody by surprise; people were bewildered and speechless. No one expected such a brazen act so soon after the release of David Ramond, the CIA operative who killed two Pakistanis in broad day light earlier this year in Lahore. In contrast to the mild reaction to Osama's assassination, the mass reaction to David Ramond's murders was so strong it put the government in a defensive position. With this attack it seems that American imperialism has advanced its conquest of Pakistan.

Religious political parties like Jamaat Islami and Jamiat Ulemai Islam are silent about the killings

and atrocities committed by Al-Qaida, but they slam Americans for their “violation of Pakistan sovereignty.” Hard liner Jamat Dawa of Hafiz Saeed is the most active religious fundamentalist consoling Asama Bin Laden and offering Nama Jenaza, (the prayer upon death of a Muslim) in some areas. It will not be long before these parties organize the sympathy toward Osama and take the streets against the attack.

Bourgeoisie parties like the Pakistan People’s Party, Pakistan Muslim League Q and Pakistan Muslim League N support the American action, seeing it as a great victory against the rise of religious fundamentalism. The government has not yet come up with a coherent explanation. Instead, various officials make contradictory statements.

Pakistan and U.S. Governmental Alliance

Over the last year the Pakistan and U.S. government have cemented their relationship. This can be seen through more exchange visits among intelligent officials and in the number of visas provided to CIA agents. The government also gave Washington a free hand for launching drone attacks, abandoning the pretense of condemnation that was practiced during the initial phase of the attacks. It seems that Washington has known Osama Bin Laden was in Pakistan.

All along the U.S. government has provided political backing to a very fragile PPP government. Without hesitation the government acted on the advice of American imperialism, the IMF and the World Bank. The U.S. government could not have a better partner than this government, which is led by the most corrupt and anti-people elements. Further, Washington seems to have blessed bringing the Muslim League Q — which shared power with General Musharraf - into the government. On the very day Osama was killed, 14 ministers from the PMLQ took their oath and joined what one newly inducted federal minister called a “drowning boat.”

The open violation of Pakistan sovereignty by sending the U.S. Navy SEALs to take out Osama Bin Laden will not worsen the relationship between the two ruling classes. Notice that Obama and his aides have not uttered a single word against the Pakistani government. On the contrary, they have praised the mutual sharing of intelligence.

A Joint effort

The attack on the Osama group has been a joint effort of Pakistan and American intelligence agencies. General Kiani, who has headed the army since Musharraf was president, is the former head of ISI. He has a long history of working closely with American imperialism. Back in 2007, he was the one who began negotiations with Benazir Bhutto for sharing power with Musharraf. As Benazir put pressure on General Musharraf to resign his position with the military, General Kiani took over. Under his watch, the Pakistani military establishment began to break their traditional links with the religious fanatics, launching military operations against them. The fanatics fought back, targeting military headquarters and killing top military officers.

Polarization in Army ranks

As a result, there is a polarization in the military between the officers and the ranks. Top military officers have formed close relationships with their American counterparts. They are in control of vast assets and maintain a more liberal way of life. But the lower ranks are still religious, sympathetic to fundamentalism and the religious parties and still hold to anti-Indian and anti-Western feelings. Because of this polarization, Washington hesitates trusting the ability of the army

and intelligence agencies to carry out vigorous prosecution of its war on terrorism.

Religious terrorism will not end

Despite the big blow of Bin Laden's death, Al-Qaida and other religious extremist terrorist groups will grow. In his excellent pamphlet, "Why Marxists oppose individual terrorism," Leon Trotsky remarked, "The most important psychological source of terrorism is always the feeling of revenge in search of an outlet." The feeling of revenge does not end by with Osama's death. Both his murder and the throwing of Osama's body into the Arabian Sea will not put an end to terrorism. In fact, religious terrorism will grow as a result of American imperialism's actions. A certain portion of Muslim youth who are looking for ways to oppose American imperialism may be attracted to terrorism. New terrorist groups will form.

This does not mean that the religious fanatics can capture power in Pakistan. The Pakistan military is a brutal force and they have demonstrated several times how much violence they will use once their power is threatened. The Pakistan army will work hand in glove with Americans to ensure that the fanatics do not take over Islamabad nor get their hands on the country's nuclear technology.

The threat of individual terrorism by fanatics with a world view is not confined to one country. They are not so much like IRA who fought in the name of national liberation but more like the Red Brigade, who fought an ideological war but was successfully crushed because it had a very narrow social base.

Al-Qaida and others religious fanatics are exploiting the religious feelings of millions of Muslims. Although these fanatics represent several different trends and sects within Islam, nonetheless they have been able to lay down a mass social base in several countries.

Al-Qaida is no doubt one of the most successful terrorist organizations the world has ever seen. They have survived over two decades and successfully planned and struck targets several times. They have a brigade of suicidal missionaries who are ready to go heaven by killing themselves and others. Despite their main leader's murder, there are no sign of their demise. However acts of individual terrorism have their own limits.

The limitations of individual terrorism

State terrorism cannot be separated from individual terrorism. Both have the same nature and direction; both give rise the same consequences. However, the act of state terrorism can have lasting positions and takes refuge on several issues.

The Al-Qaida most successful act of terrorism on 9/11 has not benefited Muslims and the lives of the millions of Muslims one of absolute misery and sadness. It has satisfied the soul of the few fanatics like Osama but damaged the souls of the millions. Imperialism responded to the attack with barbaric fury.

Commenting on the situation in Russia after the killing of a minister in 1911, Leon Trotsky, one of the main architecture of the Soviet Revolution wrote the following,

"Whether a terrorist attempt, even a 'successful' one throws the ruling class into confusion depends on the concrete political circumstances. In any case the confusion can only be short-lived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them."

The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function."

"The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy. (Leon Trotsky, November 1911)

Would the killing end religious fundamentalism?

Examine the following 2009 quote from U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, about Washington's past support to the Mujahidin in Afghanistan:

"Let's deal with the ISI [Pakistani Intelligence Agency] and the Pakistan military and let's go recruit these mujahedeen.... it wasn't a bad investment to end the Soviet Union but let's be careful with what we sow... Because we will harvest," Hillary Clinton, 23 April 2009

Over the last 10 years, both Washington and the fanatics are harvesting what they have sowed. One act of revenge leads to another.

Religious fundamentalism cannot be defeated by force. The war and occupational policies of American imperialism present examples of failure, not success. The lesson is clear: "You cannot kill ideas." Instead there must be a political fight to expose the real meaning of religious fundamentalism to the lives of ordinary people.

The rise of political Islam

The rise of political Islam is linked to the growing weakness of left parties in the Muslim world. On the one hand, during the 1990s, after the fall of Soviet Union, Socialism seemed to have failed. On the other hand, populist, anti-imperialist, mass-based parties such as Bhutto's Popular Party also loss credibility. Religion seemed to be the only available anti-imperialist platform. In reality religious extremists such as the Taliban and Al-Qaida in no way represented an alternative against imperialism. They themselves exploit, oppress, and kill those who do not share their beliefs. They believe in the physical elimination of political opponents. They are not a progressive force fighting against imperialist hegemony but an extremely right-wing reaction. They want to forcibly turn the clock of the history backward. Religious fanatics are the new fascists.

Religious fanatics and the imperialist powers provide each other with justification for escalating violence. This is a never-ending cycle.

The growth of religious fundamentalism is also a response to the complete failure of the civilian and military governments in Pakistan to solve any of the basic problems of the working class and peasants. Successive regimes have been unable to end the grip of feudalism, the repressive and exploitive nature of Pakistani capitalists and their humiliating treatment of workers, the repression of the country's smaller nationalities and exploitation of their natural resources.

The failure of the civilian government

The Pakistani ruling class has failed miserably to bring about any democratic norms. As a result, when civilian regimes have been overthrown by military dictatorships, the vast majority of the masses did not offer resistance. Today the policies of the civilian government are dominated by American imperialism and institutions such as the IMF and World Bank that dictate misery for the people of Pakistan. War and economy misery along with daily suicidal attacks have left the population in a fearful state. The general psyche has become one of an uncertain future. Hope vanishes. Clearly the Pakistani government must change its political and economic priorities. It must end corruption and cut its ties that bind it to American imperialism.

The confusion among the Left was at its height after 9/11. There were those advocating cooperation with NATO forces against the religious fanatics, saying there was no need to build an alternative. "Religious fanatics are fascists and NATO is powerful enough to eliminate them" was the argument put forward. "NATO is doing our job. A military solution is the only alternative; we must keep quiet, close our eyes and cooperate with the Americans. There is no need to build the antiwar movement involving the masses" was the line of argumentation.

On the other side, to reinforce the central paradigms of the dominant actors of the conflict, the problem was presented as "Us vs. Them," "The Battle of Good Against Evil," "Crusades against Islamic terrorism," "Civilization versus Chaos." The state, the media and liberals, hand in hand with some progressives, were able to dominate the discussion.

What should we do?

The killing of Osama by the Americans opens a new era of conflict. The groups and individuals linked to Al-Qaida as well as other terrorist religious fundamentalists will use the incident to mobilize people in support of their reactionary agenda.

We have to oppose U.S. imperialism, the fundamentalists and the complicity of the Pakistani government with both of these forces. In this debate, we have come forward with our own position on imperialism, the capitalist state and religious fundamentalism. We have to expose their propaganda and dead-end solutions.

- We call for a comprehensive and wide-ranging political and economic strategy to fight the fanatics. The Pakistani state must end its all forms of support to religious madrassas. At least 10 percent of the national budget should be spent on education; education must be free [through] university level for all Pakistanis. The state must delink itself from religious practices and provide an institutional alternative to madrassas.
- We call for an end to subservience to the economic policies of the IMF and World Bank. The government must serve the interests of workers and peasants.
- We call for an end the ties to U.S. imperialism and the war machine.

The rise of religious fundamentalism is a direct result of governmental policies of a ruling elite and its dependence on American and other imperialist forces. A fight against imperialism and colonization and neo-colonization must have the main priority of all our propaganda, with no concession to the fanatics.

An alternative has now been presented by the great Arab Spring. The era of suicidal attacks, bomb blasts drone attacks and other violent means are far less effective than the mass upsurge of the

great Arab people against dictators, and dictatorial regimes. The Arab way of fighting back will ultimately start brings a confidence among the masses to go all the way from changing regimes to a Socialist alternative.

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