

Abolishing the State-Society Divide

Multiple developments in Pakistan's recent polity has generated a debate about the weakness of the State and its ability to enforce its writ. One such development was Pakistani State's negotiations with Tehreek Taliban Pakistan, a loosely connected group of Pashtun militants, who had fought the Pakistani State for more than a decade. Another such development was the Pakistani State's decision to ban Tehreek Labaik Pakistan only to reverse the ban and enter in to agreement with the group and allow it to operate as a normal political party. In both cases, liberal intellectuals criticized the State for being weak in the face of powerful and organized groups. The argument was that the State did not have the political will to stand up to pressure and cowed before political pressure generated by organized movements.

The critique of State weakness does not end here. Liberal intellectuals have criticized State officials, political leaders and rulers for not using State power to challenge what they consider to be powerful narratives which challenge the secular basis and the secular ideals on which the current Pakistani State is built. Such criticism is premised on the sensation that the society is getting organized around the idea that Islam should play a central role in politics and running of the State. Such a powerful and increasingly widespread support for Islam's political role is seen as "threatening" for the functioning of the State and is considered a problem. The society is getting radical and the State must cure the society from its radicalism. From Musharaf's "enlightened moderation" to madrassah and educational curriculum reform to de-platforming radical Islamic groups even if they are non-violent to National Action Plan, increasingly the State views the society as problematic and State officials have sought to change the society in their own image.

Such a view of the State is however deeply problematic. Liberal intellectuals view the State as a rigid institution with certain non-negotiable characteristics. Consider the insurgency which erupted in Pakistan's Pashtun areas along the Pakistan Afghanistan border. Liberals and State officials portrayed the insurgency as a regressive movement which challenged the principle of State's monopoly on violence and gave rise to violent non-state actors. This was an erroneous representation of the reality. The fact was that the Pashtun insurgency which emerged in Pakistan's north west frontier areas was a rebellion against Pakistani State's foreign policy which was subordinate to American policy in the region. Pashtun tribes simply refused to accept Pakistani State's subservience to America and rebelled against the State which sought to force them in to submission to American agenda for the region. That the insurgency calmed down after change in American policy for the region from military operations to political negotiations and eventually the tribal areas settled down after America left the region only serves to prove this point. Here the deeply erroneous view of the State held by liberals and Pakistani officials becomes evident. The State's authority or writ is not an absolute principle which can be enforced through the use of force. Rather, the State's authority and writ are actually representative of a political consensus. The writ of the State is in its essence a political phenomenon. The writ of the State is deployed in the service of a political consensus. If the State implements a political consensus which is rejected by the masses, the State's authority and legitimacy ceases to exist. In such a case the writ of the State cannot be enforced through the use of force.

The example of Tehreek Labaik Pakistan is similar. The TLP rejected the State's foreign policy which prioritized economic interests over the sanctity and protection of RasulAllah's (saw) honor. Islam demands that the honor of Prophet Muhammad (saw) be protected at all costs. Islam does not accept freedom of speech nor does it give anyone any right to insult our beloved Prophet Muhammad (saw) rather such individuals and States, who dare to attack Islam's sanctities, should be held accountable by Muslim rulers. Pakistani State's refusal to stand up to the blasphemous French State and its refusal to expel the French ambassador created a legitimacy crisis for the State. The State was not implementing the political consensus held by the society. In such a scenario, the State simply cannot enforce its authority or have its way.

Here it is worth asking some deeper questions about the conception of the State. Can the State have ideals and values separate from the society which it seeks to govern? Is the State a separate institution from the society or is it a mere expression and extension of the society? Does the State have a mind of its own, separate from the society, or is the State a mere enforcer of what the society has already decided?

The State in its reality is the executive arm of the society and is an extension and expression of it. The society develops a political consensus amongst itself regarding the ideals and values around which it will organize itself as a political community. These ideals and values then form the basis of governance and the society establishes governance structures and institutions rooted in these ideals and values. The State does not have a mind of its own. It is a mere enforcer of a political consensus. It is a mistake to see the State and society as separate; they are but one entity.

The current State-Society divide dates back to colonialism. When European colonialists destroyed the Ottoman Khilafah, they established foreign nation States in Muslim lands. These States were built on ideals and values of Western societies and were in essence foreign implants in Muslim lands. They remain to this day as a legacy of European and Western colonialism. Because these States were built on ideas borrowed from foreign societies, they came to see Muslim societies as having different values and ideals and sought to change Muslim societies according to the foreign Western ideals and values. It is this clash between State and society which has caused stagnation and decline in the Muslim World. The Muslim World will revive when this State-Society divide is abolished and when an organic and natural Islamic State, the Khilafah, emerges from Muslim societies which represents the political consensus of the Muslim masses which seeks to be governed by divine law revealed by Allah (swt).

﴿وَأَنِ احْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَاحْذَرْهُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنُوكَ عَنْ بَعْضِ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ﴾

“And rule between them by that which Allah revealed to you and do not follow their whims, and beware (be on the alert) that they may deviate you away from even some part of what Allah revealed to you”. [TMQ 5:49]

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