



## **The Secular State is the Core Strategic Interest of America in the Muslim World which it seeks to protect through the Global War on Terror**

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 2017 DAWN reported a statement from ISPR which quoted Pakistan's Army Chief as condemning the death of American troops in a Taliban attack. **"Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa offered heartfelt condolences on the death of two Special Forces soldiers who died in the incident (the terrorist attack on the United States forces in Kandahar)," the ISPR said in a statement. Gen Bajwa noted that Pakistan because of facing "similar trial of blood in fight against common threat of terrorism" well understood the anguish of the bereaved families of the soldiers killed."** The condemnation was rare and surprising given the vehemently anti-American sentiment prevalent in Pakistan generally and which dominates its armed forces in particular. The statement was aimed at appeasing opinion in the American policy circles which had been very negative towards Pakistan as indicated by statements from multiple high ranking American officials and discussions amongst American foreign policy and National Security elite. Although one could argue that the statement from Pakistan's most powerful man pointed towards his conviction that he needs to align with America and accommodate her interests and perhaps also highlights where the loyalties of Pakistan's military elite have lied as opposed to the evidently anti-American inclinations of the institution of armed forces as whole, let us take a step back from political analysis of the operational strategies of America and her allies and analyze the strategic context of what is happening in Afghanistan, why is it important to America from a strategic perspective and how this relates to American policy towards Pakistan and the Muslim World and how does America view the Muslim World and the global war on terror from a strategic angle.

Strategic perspective or interests are generally understood to mean long term perspective or interests. This is a crude or general meaning of the term but can be accepted as being true but vague. A more accurate meaning would imply a structured or framework based interpretation of national interests where a state seeks to shape regional or global realities by making other states follow a certain pattern in international relations which is predictable and which sets a course or direction in regional and international relations which inevitably fulfils the interests of the state shaping the reality. In other words strategic interests can be understood to be foundational interests on whose basis other interests are achieved. America's alliance with Japan and South Korea is a strategic alliance which enables America to control the affairs of North East Asia. European states relationship with their former colonies is a strategic relationship which enables them to secure their interests in regions where these former colonies exist. NATO was a strategic alliance which safeguarded the security interests of America and Europe against an expansionist Soviet Union.

General Bajwa's surprising condolence with America over the death of US troops in Afghanistan highlights a strategic dilemma for the Muslim World. Understanding this dilemma will help us understand US foreign policy's strategic viewpoint and interests in the Muslim World. What is surprising about General Bajwa's statement is its boldness and lack of caution and perhaps a bit of recklessness with regards to the prevalent public opinion in Pakistan, the armed forces of Pakistan and the Muslim World in general which views America as an enemy of Muslims and Islam and which is overwhelmingly seen as an occupying force in Afghanistan. General Bajwa was compelled to give this statement because he was coming under extreme pressure from America to do more in the war on terror initiated by US President George Bush and which continues 16 years since. However General Bajwa is similarly under considerable domestic pressure from within the armed forces and the society at large which wants him to be defiant of the US which is seen as an enemy of Pakistan, Islam and Muslims. The strategic dilemma for General Bajwa as the current occupant of the office of Chief of Army Staff and the Pakistani state in general, is this

tension faced by the Pakistani state between foreign and domestic pressure which are pulling the state in two opposite directions. Increasingly in recent years and at least for the last two decades, at the heart of American strategic interests in the Muslim World, is the concern about how states in the Muslim World in general as well as in Pakistan emerge from this tension which threatens to tear apart the state in the Muslim World and replace it with something totally new.

The Pakistani State like other states in the Muslim World is an unnatural state, a creation of European colonialism after the end of Muslim rule in the subcontinent and the destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate. Being unnatural means that it does not have roots in the masses. It is built on the legal, cultural and political experience of Western Europe which imposed its model of governance in the colonies it controlled. The State in Pakistan does not draw on, rather it seeks to fight Islamic historical, cultural, political and legal experience which the masses are accustomed to and which they own and aspire to be the basis of their political governance. The state in Pakistan survived for so many decades because for the most part since its creation the Islamic character of the society was dormant and the Muslim masses in Pakistan as in other states in the Muslim World had not recovered from the shock of colonialism and their demise from power and prestige at the global level. As the Islamic revival project found its roots in the Muslim World and gained strength, the Muslim World returned to asserting her Islamic identity and civilization. This struggle within the Muslim World continued for decades where the Islamic revival project went through a purification process where it has now reached its pinnacle and threatens the secular state which was introduced unnaturally to Muslim lands by European colonialists. Already several states in the Muslim World have collapsed giving way to chaos and widespread death and destruction. Although the situation is painful and full of despair for many Muslims, from a strategic perspective, it is giving nightmares to the West. Because it was the secular state which secured Western interests in the Muslim World and its collapse means the collapse of a foundational interest and the collapse of a framework or institution which systematically enabled Western powers to dominate Eurasia in general and Middle East in particular.

The secular state with all its components, the Westernized political, military and intellectual elite, and its enablers the international law, international institutions and the Western powers themselves not only served to secure Western interests directly through laws and policies which enabled economic plunder and military oppression of these lands at the hands of the West but it also served as a platform to suppress the Islamic revival project and the emergence of an alternative model of governance rooted in Islamic history and civilization. For anyone who understands the functioning of a state the dominant narrative being discussed in Pakistani elite circles and which found expression in state policy with the name of National Action Plan should make him or her deeply uncomfortable. How can a state prescribe that majority of the masses are radicalized and it needs to de-radicalize them? Isn't the state reflective of a deep foundational consensus of the masses about the governance principles which should organize their affairs? The National Action Plan envisaged the state acting in a totally opposite manner. Instead of the state reflecting a foundational consensus of the people regarding its features and general governance principles, the state was attempting to reshape the people's opinion about how society should be organized. It was as if the state already had a basis on which it was built and it felt that the basis which the masses aspire to contradicts the basis the state is standing on. Thus a secular state attempted to change the Islamist masses by declaring the society as radicalized. This was the most glaring evidence of the unnatural nature of the Pakistani State and reflects the tension which was identified earlier. Another example of this tension was the upheaval faced by the Pakistani state in the aftermath of 9/11 when the state expectedly chose to side with America in her attempt to occupy Afghanistan. The violent upheaval in Pakistan's tribal areas against the Pakistani state's foreign policy was the most explicit rejection of the secular state and indicated that a segment of the population is willing to openly challenge the secular consensus which governs the state in Pakistan. Yet another example was the response of the society in terms of mourning the death of Salman Taseer, the secular governor of Punjab

who was gunned down for challenging the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. While his last rites hardly attracted anyone apart from a few secular activists, Mumtaz Qadri, the man who killed him had one of the biggest funerals Pakistan had ever seen despite blanket media blackout ordered by the state. This tension between the secular state and the masses has been building in Pakistan and the Muslim World for quite some time and has increased massively as the Islamic revivalist currents have strengthened in recent years.

The war on terror was launched by the neo-conservatives in America as a preemptive war in response to widespread Islamic revival which was beginning to become visible across the Muslim World. While Western policy makers were full of jubilation at the end of cold war, many had overlooked the unintended consequences of the Afghan War. A much comprehensive cultural, intellectual and political movement for Islamic revival was already underway when the Afghan War against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was launched. While the West interpreted the demise of the Soviet Union as the victory of Western Civilization over the Communist World, the Muslim World had a very different interpretation. It was they who brought down one of the Super Powers of the World. This confidence complemented the Islamic revival project. Some other factors including a demographic change within the Muslim World and an increasingly greedy and openly imperial and colonial foreign policy of the Western World helped accelerate the Islamic revival project. The strategic imperative of the Islamic revival project was that the Western World, especially America started to fear that the survival and continuation of the secular state in the Muslim World was not a given. The Taliban regime, which was a crude mix of Islamic orthodoxy, Pashtun tribalism and secular state principles was only the latest example of "Islamization of the State" projects underway in a number of states in the Muslim World. The intellectual charisma and cultural superiority of Western civilization within the Muslim masses, which had provided an inertia to the secular state for its existence and survival in the Muslim World, was waning and was being replaced by strong anti-Western and anti-colonial emotions towards the West. The vast organized militant network within the Muslim World, a legacy of the Afghan War against the Soviets, provided America the perfect excuse to intervene preemptively in the Muslim World on the excuse of dismantling this militant network. The strategic imperative of the War on Terror was thus not the dismantling of the militant networks in the Muslim World, that was its operational strategy, it was to safeguard the secular state and hence the foundational source of Western influence in Muslim lands.

This strategic interest of America is easily discernible in Afghanistan as well as a number of other states in the Muslim World where the secular state has collapsed altogether. In a testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday, 4th May 2017, General Raymond Thomas, Commander of US Special Operations Command, when pushed by Senator John McCain said: **"he believed the critical factor in Afghanistan was the US commitment to "a sound enduring state" there, which he said, was "not described effectively" in the past. "I think our new strategy is going to establish that definition," he added"**. Announcing his new policy for Afghanistan and South Asia, US President Donald Trump on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017 referred to the US withdrawal from Iraq as a mistake which resulted in the collapse of the Iraqi State and vowed to not repeat the same mistake in Afghanistan. He said: **"And, as we know, in 2011, America hastily and mistakenly withdrew from Iraq. As a result, our hard-won gains slipped back into the hands of terrorist enemies. Our soldiers watched as cities they had fought for, and bled to liberate, and won, were occupied by a terrorist group called ISIS. The vacuum we created by leaving too soon gave safe haven for ISIS to spread, to grow, recruit, and launch attacks. We cannot repeat in Afghanistan the mistake our leaders made in Iraq."** In Syria America has pushed to secure the secular state as is evident from the Geneva I and II conventions where a political compromise is floated as a solution to the Syrian crisis. Such a compromise would see the government and opposition sharing power, the security apparatus being retained and new elections being held to choose a new head of the Syrian government without radically reshaping the features of the state with the allowance of rewriting the constitution. In Libya, Yemen and Iraq America and European

powers are engaged in a similar exercise to rebuild or reinstate the secular state after its total collapse.

The top American strategic interest in the Muslim World is to safeguard the secular state, prop it up and prolong its life and suppress any alternative models of governance rooted in Islamic history and culture. For it is the secular state which has guaranteed Western influence in Muslim lands. America pursues the same strategic interest in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is a discussion within American policy makers which warns against putting too much pressure on Pakistan for fear of it resulting in the collapse of the secular state in Pakistan as American policy makers are aware of the tension between the secular state and Islamist masses within Pakistan.

In Afghanistan America pursues the same goal. Here the unnatural nature of the secular state is all too obvious because without US military and economic support the Afghan state born out of the Bonn process would probably collapse in weeks if not days. The presence of the secular state in Afghanistan helps America achieve its other strategic objectives as well. America seeks to project power in South Asia through military bases in Afghanistan and it seeks to avoid a perception of defeat in Afghanistan which will hurt its global prestige and may precipitate its decline as a defeat in Afghanistan precipitated the demise of Soviet Union.

Islam recognizes that in the process of state building, the authority lies with the people. Prophet Muhammad (saw) therefore strove to win the masses in the Arabian Peninsula through an organized campaign of political and intellectual effort which sought to create tensions between the masses and existing state or authority structures. This tension was built by convincing the masses and winning them over to a superior form of political organization based on Islam and politically and intellectually working for the demise of existing state or authority structures by severely attacking and exposing them as flawed. Once Prophet Muhammad (saw) was able to create a political movement which rendered the existing state or authority structures as unnatural he sought help from people of power to remove the unnatural state or authority structures and replace them with a new state. Thus Prophet Muhammad (saw) was able to establish a state in Madina with the help of powerful tribal leaders of Aus and Khazraj who removed the tension existing between the masses and old state or authority structures. Today the only way forward for resolving the strategic dilemma of Pakistan and the Muslim World is for the people of power, the Armed Forces of Pakistan, to remove the unnatural state structure, the secular state, and establish in its place the state of Islam, the Khilafah (Caliphate) on the method of the Prophethood (saw). This will end the foundational strategic interest of America in the Muslim World and would mark the start of a new era of dominance for Islam and Muslims.

Allah (swt), **﴿إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ﴾** **“We will indeed make victorious our Messengers and those who believe in this world’s life and on the day, when the witnesses will stand forth”** [Surah Ghafir 40:51].

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