

# Pakistan's Faults Worsen Its Faultlines: Unfolding Situation and Possible Scenarios

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## Introduction

The predicament that Pakistan finds itself in today is clearly of its own making. A combination of the 'magnificent delusions' (to use the evocative title of Ambassador Hussain Haqqani's book) that it has harboured about being the leader, even the sword arm, of the Muslim *Ummah* (despite its people being treated extremely shabbily in the Islamic world) and a quest for security that was driven more by paranoia of, and prejudice against, India, have resulted in unintended consequences that threaten the very existence of the Pakistani state. In other words, strategic overreach (punching way above its weight) coupled with perverse religiosity (especially in affairs of state and its ideology) have brought Pakistan to a pass where all its latent faultlines are virulently manifesting themselves. In the process, both the nation and the state are coming under immense pressure. The trouble is that there is no concerted effort to set things right by reorienting, resetting and reinventing both strategy and ideology. Worse, there is as yet no evidence that there is even the realisation about what exactly needs to be done, forget about how to do it. Ad hoc measures, tactical tweaking of proven disastrous policies and a stubborn resistance to undertake rescuing policy and political reform are only worsening the already bad situation.

Most, if not all, the faultlines that exist in Pakistan are not unique to that country. Many of these are actually present in one form or another in other countries of the world as well. But while other countries try to factor in these faultlines in the process of nation building and reduce their potency, Pakistan has followed policies that have not just brought them to the fore but also made them erupt. Cosmetic attempts to paper over the faultlines haven't achieved much success, even less so because the higher policy objectives of the infamous 'establishment' – a euphemism for the military dominated cabal that decides the policy and direction of the Pakistani state – have consistently undermined even these feeble efforts.

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## **Faultlines**

Broadly, the faultlines in Pakistan can be classified under four or five heads: political, social and religious, economic, ethnic and security. Each of these can be further broken down into more specific heads. The political faultlines include civil-military relations, centrists versus federationists versus separatists, moderates versus extremists (in terms of the role of religion in running the state), constitutionalists versus agitationists. The social and religious faultlines encompass the sectarian divide between the Sunnis and Shias, the intra-sectarian divide among Bareilvis, Deobandis and Salafists, and the inter-Biradari and inter-tribe divides. The ethnic faultlines include those between provinces – Punjabi versus Baluch versus Pakhtuns versus Sindhis – and those within provinces like Sindhi versus Mohajir in Sindh, Seraiki versus Punjabi in Punjab, Hazara versus Pakhtun in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluch versus Pakhtun in Baluchistan. The economic faultlines also include the growing divide between the various classes and the rising inequality of income and economic opportunities because of concentration of wealth and power. The immiserisation of a large population and the economic hardship and distress that this inflicts on large sections of the population is an explosive fault-line that has manifested itself on and off in various forms. Finally, there is the security and administrative faultline which includes the declining capacity of the state to provide public goods to the people, the emerging disconnect among state, non-state and quasi-state actors, the atrophying of state institutions and the growing power and influence of private groups and militias. Many of these faultlines overlap each other; equally important is the interplay between these

various faultlines and how they derive sustenance from, and influence, each other.

All these faultlines are in the play today and will complicate any and every effort to combat the most serious threat to Pakistan's security, namely the Taliban/Islamist insurgency. Take, for instance, the civil-military divide. Among other things, one of the main reasons why the civilian government was reluctant to use the military option in North Waziristan was that it would lead to ceding of space to the military. For its part, the military used the opportunity to refurbish both its image and its dominance over the security policies in the country. What is more, the recent tension between the civilian government and the military over the issue of the former military dictator General Pervez Musharraf, relations with India, the peace talks with the Taliban and the military's strong-arm tactics against the Geo TV network was seen as a green light by political opponents like Imran Khan and the Canada-based cleric Tahirul Qadri to destabilise the government and demand either mid-term elections or a complete overhaul of the political and constitutional set-up. Even if all the plans of the opposition to force the government out come a cropper, the civilian government has been so weakened that it will now survive only if it subordinates itself to the military and accepts the dyarchy in which the military calls the shots in foreign and security policy and the civilians handle the municipal functions.

The dominance of the military impacts both domestic and foreign policy. Set in its thinking, the military is unlikely to do a strategic reset on either India (unremitting hostility which requires military build-up plus use of asymmetric or proxy warfare to keep India unsettled and balance India's conventional superiority) or Afghanistan (use of 'strategic assets' like the Afghan Taliban, Gulbadin Hekmetyar and Haqqani network to influence and even control the affairs of that country). In order to achieve these objectives, the military has to give these organisations and their affiliates like the Sunni terrorist outfits like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba/Jamaat-ud-Dawa (LeT/JuD), Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM), etc. space to operate. This means that any clean-up operation which is launched against rogue or recalcitrant *jihadist* groups is by definition selective and must leave the 'good' *jihadists* untouched. That the 'bad' *jihadists* invariably come out of the ranks of the 'good' *jihadists* and that even the 'good' *jihadists* might have their own agenda that might not necessarily be entirely in line with that of the military establishment but, in fact, could be quite divergent is something that is either not sufficiently thought through or is glossed over for

short-term tactical gains and advantages. This is precisely what has created the existential challenge that Pakistan confronts today.

In the domestic sphere, the military needs the support and street power of both mainstream and fringe religious parties and groups to keep the civilian government under pressure. The military's backing has strengthened these parties far beyond their popular support and has bestowed upon them a virtual veto over the direction that the polity and society take. These parties stand as a bulwark against any progressive or liberal legislation, which, in turn, has opened the field for extremism and intolerance to sweep through the society. The result is substantial support and sympathy for the radical, if also rogue and recalcitrant, Islamist groups which are taking on the Pakistani authorities both militarily and ideologically. A stage has been reached where a slothful and inefficient state is unable to match the narrative of the Islamists.

Despite the threat that Islamism poses to the state, it is tolerated and even encouraged because it serves as a potent tool in the hands of the military establishment against ethnic nationalism. The Pakistani establishment has always been very suspicious, even hostile, towards ethnic nationalism. It sees Islamism as an effective counter because of its emphasis on Islamic identity which overrides all other identities. Since the Islamic identity is part of the ill-defined and half-baked 'ideology' of the country, it is acceptable as opposed to the ethnic identities, which raise the spectre of separatism. Increasingly, the *jihadists* like the LeT/JuD and Sunni terrorists like the Sipah-e-Sahaba or its new *avatar* the Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ) are being encouraged to spread their wings in provinces like Sindh and Baluchistan where ethnic nationalism remains a source of worry for the Pakistani state.

But the Islamic antidote is only making things worse. On the one hand, it is giving a free run to the Islamists who also pose an existential threat to the state. What is more, the sectarian orientation of many of these Islamists is deepening the already existing sectarian divide. Massacres of Shias in Baluchistan and tit-for-tat target killing between the sects in other parts of the country have already resulted in hundreds of deaths. Within the Sunni fraternity, the more numerous but also marginalised Barelvis are trying to meet the challenge posed by the more well-organised and well-armed Deobandis and Salafis. On the other hand, the heavy-handed and ham-handed treatment meted out to ethnic nationalists has only hardened attitudes. The Baluch belt of Baluchistan is in the throes of a full blown insurgency and the alienation of the Baluch with Pakistan is almost complete. In Sindh, there are stirrings of an incipient insurgency. But Pakistan's

worst nightmare is the possibility of a Pashtun nationalist resurgence, partly as a result of the mass displacement and ill-treatment of people during military operations and partly because of the Taliban insurgency and Pashtun assertion on both sides of the Durand Line. The ethnic divisions are also reverberating in places like Karachi, interior Sindh and other parts of the country.

These myriad divisions have a major law and order dimension, but also an economic dimension. The economic climate has deteriorated precipitously because of kidnapping, extortion and large scale disturbances, especially in Karachi which is the economic and commercial capital of Pakistan. With business confidence being shaken, investment has fallen to historic lows and capital flight has been taking place. This has impacted growth and creation of jobs, which, in turn, has led to growing inequalities which fuel their own malcontents. The economic crisis has forced Pakistan to seek hand-outs from countries like Saudi Arabia and China. But this money – the Saudis have given \$ 1.5 billion grant and the Chinese have plans to invest anything between \$ 30-50 billion on the Economic Corridor – has come with its own riders. The Saudis are believed to be seeking Pakistan's involvement in Syria on the side of Sunni militias, and in Bahrain, where the Sunni minority ruler is trying to keep the 80 percent Shia majority in check. The Chinese are believed to be insisting that Pakistan clean up some of the terror hubs, namely North Waziristan, where Chinese Uighur terrorists receive sanctuary and training. The result of these pressures is that, on the one hand, it will worsen the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide in Pakistan and, on the other, it has forced Pakistan's hand in North Waziristan, without adequate thought or preparation on handling the fallout.

## **Scenarios**

With Pakistan having undertaken the long demanded and much awaited operation in North Waziristan Agency which was by all accounts a veritable witches' brew of Islamist terror groups, there are serious concerns about the fallout of the operation on Pakistan. Asides of the fact that what was being touted as the 'mother of all operations' has so far proved to be quite a cake-walk (which makes many believe that it is something of a 'phony war' in which most of the terrorists were allowed a 'safe passage' out), there are three possible scenarios that could unfold as a result of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. These are as follows.

**Utopian Scenario:** The statements of the Pakistan Army that it will target all terrorists are genuine and serious. The Pakistani establishment (civil and military) has realised the monumental follies of their past ways and will do whatever it

takes to set things right. There will be no fiddles in Afghanistan (i.e. no more 'strategic assets') and there will be no export of terrorism to India or any other part of the world. Pakistan will end all duplicitous double-games and undertake a complete overhaul of its strategic and ideological orientation to re-emerge as a modern and moderate state.

**Pakistan will use both its nuclear status as well as the *jihadist* threat to present itself as 'a country too dangerous to fail'.**

**Pragmatic Scenario:** While the political and military establishments realise the blunders they have made, they have also come to the conclusion that they just can't put the *jihadist* genie back into the bottle. Notwithstanding the grand statements of eliminating all sorts of terrorists, the Pakistani state will follow a three-prong approach: establish control and eliminate groups where possible [for instance, in North Waziristan, and against Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders like Mullah Fazlullah]; adjust to Islamist groups where necessary (for instance, with 'good' Taliban like the Haqqani network and breakaway factions of the TTP like the one led by Khan Said); exploit and use the *jihadists* where desirable (for example, continuing to use the LeT against India). The caveat will be that even where the Pakistani state adjusts with, or utilises, the *jihadists*, it will try and make sure that these groups operate under some kind of supervision and control. There will be no more any 'no-go' areas for the Pakistani state. In some ways, this scenario is a reset to the time when Pakistan started the *jihad* factory way back in the 1980s and later against India in the 1990s.

**Business-as-Usual Scenario:** This is a variant of the pragmatic scenario. Under this, the Pakistani military establishment remains unreconstructed and unreformed in its use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. Not only does it have no compunctions about its past policies, it remains convinced that these policies were appropriate and yielded dividends. In other words, it continues to harbour delusions about the effectiveness of *jihadist* policies, and continues with the old game of using *jihadist* proxies. But it also tweaks these policies so that some of the problems that emanated from the proxies becoming autonomous are addressed. Under this scenario, asymmetric warfare will continue to be used against India and Afghanistan. Internally, the *jihadist* groups will continue to gain space and support, but the military will keep splitting them if they become too big or independent.

Out of the three scenarios outlined above, the Utopian Scenario can be safely ruled out. There is absolutely nothing on the ground in terms of action that would lead anyone to believe that Pakistan is indeed serious in cleaning up its act. The

fact that terrorist groups like the JuD and JeM and overground supporters of terrorists like the Jamaat-e-Islami are allowed to run relief camps for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from North Waziristan is a strong indication that the *jihadist* option hasn't quite been junked. What is more, apart from displacement, there is no real damage that has been caused to the 'good' Taliban/*jihadists*. In fact, there are reports that they had been given early warning to vacate the areas they controlled and were either asked to move to Afghanistan (where the next stage of the war is building up post 2014) or to safe camps in Kurram and other Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) agencies. None of the other building blocks of moving away from the policies and practices of the past, which include among other things, curriculum reform, strangulating the finances of *jihadist*/Islamist groups, changing the rhetoric on India, altering the public discourse to promote progressive and liberal values and creating an effective counter-narrative to the *jihadists*, etc. has been undertaken. Nor for that matter is there any move to implement these measures. In all likelihood, therefore, the Utopian Scenario is only being sketched by the Pakistani establishment to mislead the international community.

What is more likely is that there will be a combination of the Pragmatic and Business-as-Usual Scenarios. Pakistan will try and retain control of areas it had lost. It will try and get a firmer grip over the *jihadist* groups and their networks. It will play them off against one another in order to increase its own leverage against them and keep them in check. There will be no serious or sincere effort to move away from the policies of the past. Pakistan will use both its nuclear status as well as the *jihadist* threat to present itself as 'a country too dangerous to fail' and derive the rents from the rest of the world for keeping this 'international migraine' in check. Of course, the faultlines listed above will only worsen with the continuation of this policy framework, and Pakistan will continue to become more and more unmanageable, until finally, one day, something will give. What that will be and how the cookie will ultimately crumble is something that India needs to watch out for because the fallout and spillover of both the continuation of Pakistan along its current disastrous path, as well as its collapse, will be on India.

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