

The military profession - the other view

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GIVEN our novel system of current governance, one would have thought the article "The Military Profession" by Prof. Mozammel Huq (The Daily Star Strategic Issues, Saturday 14 July) might deal in broad brush terms with civil-military relations in Bangladesh like Morris Janowitz's Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait (of the US military) or S E Finer's The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics.

It's disappointing to find it does neither. Instead, the article is full of generalizations, with Prof. Huq citing not a single author or example to support his observations.

His generalizations can be broadly classified into: military as a pressure group; "crisis" spawning military intervention; military intellectualism; and greater support for military professionalism.

PRESSURE GROUP

First para, last sentence reads: "But to believe that the military are not an effective pressure group on the organs of government is to commit a political error."

It's self-evident that the military is a pressure group. But so are other bodies e.g. chambers of commerce, trade unions, monolithic political parties (e.g. Chinese Communist Party or CCP).

The question is the quality of the military's pressure. In PRC, the CCP through the Central Military Commission chaired by Hu Jintao (CCP Secretary General) exercises oversight over the armed forces. In the US, the self-serving machinations of the military-industrial complex, highlighted by Eisenhower in January 1961, is well-known and spills over into politics. But in neither PRC nor USA does the military run the show.

In some non-western societies, military pressure is delicately balanced or absolute. In Saudi Arabia, the well-equipped National Guard (SANG or White Army) is the royal family's private army, with 125,000 soldiers recruited from loyal tribes compared to 70,000 for the Saudi Army. The extreme case of absolute power is Pakistan which, like Prussia,

is essentially an army with a state.

Prof. Huq does not explain what he means by "political error." Just because the military is a pressure group with guns does not mean that society has to kowtow to it.

One reason is that military may not be any more adept at articulating national issues and crafting solutions than civilians. In fact, it's likely to do a lot worse. Civilians by training and temperament get experience over time in dealing with the core issues affecting a nation. The Services don't have this opportunity. Their education rightly is focused more narrowly on refining their professionalism in arms.

Pakistan is a living proof of how brass hats can make a royal mess of things when running a country. Argentina, Brazil, Burma, Chile and Indonesia are other examples.

In para 4, Prof. Huq describes the military to be "...a very special pressure group because of the vast resources it controls." This is stating the obvious.

The Pentagon's annual budget of over US\$400 billion means that military contractors like Boeing, Lockheed lobby hard for their projects and influence politicians by funding.

But it's inconceivable that the Pentagon will ever mount a coup. The same can be said about the Indian Army. The US and Indian armies can concentrate on professionalism instead of having the added burden of running the country.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Army over the years has infiltrated all organs of society and become a mighty economic machine (see Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy - Ayesha Siddiqi) to the detriment of its professionalism.

This suggests that when civilian institutions are robust, the military can be kept subordinate to civilians. But when the military takes power, they have little interest in reforming weak civilian institutions since this will undermine their own interests that they facily identify with the national interest.

RESPONSE TO CRISIS

In paras 2 and 3, Prof. Huq talks about the response of the "military in a developing country ...faced with a crisis" that caused it to take "political



control" leading to "transformative role for the military." Here again, no examples are given.

The question is the origins of a crisis. In Pakistan, the military led by FM Ayub aided and abetted the political crisis in the mistaken notion that it could provide national salvation instead of the actual disintegration resulting 13 years after the first martial law of 1958.

The 1980 Turkish coup led by Gen. Kenan Evren , ostensibly in response to social unrest of the 1970s and parliamentary instability, was supported by the US. CIA Ankara station chief Paul Henze cabled Washington saying, "our boys have done it."

In Chile, Gen. Pinochet ousted Allende in a bloody coup with active US encouragement and backing.

There, the crisis resulted from Washington's visceral intolerance of a socialist regime in Latin America.

But the US has not always had its way. Despite CIA's efforts to topple or kill him since the 1950, Fidel Castro has survived. Uncle Sam is unhappy with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and undoubtedly exploring ways to unseat him.

These examples show that ambitious generals encouraged by powerful external forces are not above playing an active role in fomenting a crisis that serves as a pretext for a coup.

In para 3, Prof. Huq states intriguingly: "Despite... past... involvement... in management issues of the state, which did not always go well in many countries, the military has been able to

maintain varying degrees of heroic posture, pro-people stance and long public service tradition." In the absence of examples, these tall claims are worthless.

The example of Pakistan, Bangladesh (Ershad), Thailand, Indonesia and other countries show that such involvements worsened things and created more problems than they solved.

Detoxifying the military's involvement from politics is hard even after civilian rule is restored e.g. Indonesia. This contradicts the Professor's claim that the military "...exercise their influence on political matters with considerable restraint." (para.5, second sentence).

The Turkish general's comments on Abdullah Gul's nomination for

President show the residual but substantial influence of the military, even though the last martial law government gave up power in 1983. But it did so in a manner that Turkish scholar Ergun Ozbudun described as "... a textbook example of the degree to which a departing military regime can dictate the conditions of its departure." The military in Ankara continues to wag the Turkish political dog but more discreetly since 1980.

Prof. Huq makes the unusual assertion that "Very few nations have succeeded in both adequately solving the political problems of civil-military relations and maintaining a healthy, constructive political freedom." (Para 9). There are plenty of countries, mainly western societies, which have done so. In these countries,

civilian supremacy over the military is unchallenged.

The record of countries in the developing world is less encouraging. But even here progress is happening e.g. South Korea. Bangladesh overthrew military dictatorship in 1991 but has regressed with the declaration of Emergency in January '07 in the wake of increasingly problematic civilian rule. That's why the current interim regime by default enjoys public support. Dismounting from the tiger will require considerable dexterity.

MILITARY EDUCATION

One of Prof. Huq's more interesting assertions is the "growth of a new intellectualism among military professionals..." (causing) the military profession to become more dedicated to the development of a critical capability" (para 7). He does not elaborate "new intellectualism" or "critical capability."

If he's using these terms to mean the military keeping abreast of latest developments in warfare - in other words, improving the military education of the officer class - and strengthening the military's faculty for making sound judgments about conflicts, then this is no big deal. It's what all good and professional armies do, or should do. The German General Staff established in 1814-copied by other countries-emphasised military history and education.

But if Prof. Huq implies that "intellectualism" and "critical capability" equip military professionals to run affairs of state-even where civilian performance is poor-then he's treading on contentious territory. Whatever proof exists e.g. Pakistan, proves the opposite.

In Bangladesh, it's probably correct to say that institutions like Staff College and NDC do a good job in training professionals for war. But whether this skill is transferable to running a country is debatable and delusional to think so.

GREATER ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO MILITARY

Prof. Huq advocates more resources for the military. In para.10, while pointing out that "modernization of the

agencies of the civilian government is a continuous process," the focus "also needs to be on the military profession...enabling it to develop into a fully professional force."

Fair enough, as a statement of principle. But how to achieve this balance, given the competing claims on the exchequer's limited resources, is a problem facing all societies? The devil's obviously in the details but also depends on the nature of civil-military relations.

Under a strong civilian authority, the military like other government agencies e.g. education, infrastructure, health et al can ask for much but ultimately must accept what parliament allocates. But even then, the military budget can be quite hefty: the Pentagon's budget is greater than the next 20 countries combined.

Sometimes, allocations by civilians are done for considerations other than strategic. Thus, it's arguable that the Awami League's purchase of MIG-29s in 2000 and the Korean frigate in 2001 were as motivated by kickbacks as strengthening national security.

Where military influence is stronger, it usually gets more money for operational use or benefits e.g. Ershad. His retirement from politics is good riddance to bad rubbish.

Prof. Huq's clinching argument for more resources is the dubious proposition that "Political leadership should understand that a professional military is one of the best safeguards of democracy." (Para. 11, last sentence). He must be joking. Our experience as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis suggests otherwise.

The jury is still out on how our current crop of generals will behave. Preliminary indications are not entirely positive, e.g. their self-promotion in May '07.

One can legitimately argue that this was unnecessary - a few months delay would not have mattered-and counter-productive-tarnished the services' perceived and projected image of probity. It wouldn't be surprising if our real and nominal defense budget goes up in the coming years.

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“Lal Masjid” showdown: Lessons for Bangladesh

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AS the drama in "Lal Masjid" in Islamabad was unfolding with murderous details live into our living rooms, I was wondering about the lessons we might have for Bangladesh. Lal Masjid incident was not an end in itself, but as predicted, the beginning of cataclysmic violence and bloodshed in Pakistan a country already

had been patronized by the military leadership for decades until about six months ago when they grew too big for their shoes. It was an irony that the seed of religious militancy was planted and nurtured in Pakistan by a General Gen. Zia-ul-Huq; the ideology is now in full bloom and threatening the very existence of another General Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

Lal Masjid incident once again

spirit of armed 'Jihad', to make Islam victorious in the apocalyptic struggle against the West that according to them has already begun. That the militant ideology has considerable support was evident in the street demonstrations all over Pakistan following the mosque raid and the call for 'Jihad' against Musharraf's government from the Taliban sympathizers in NWFP. Now that open military confrontation between the

South Asian Muslims, follow Sunni Berlevi or Sufi traditions, the centre stage has already been seized by the money-rich, fire-brand Wahabi or Salafi traditionalists. While the peaceful, mystic Islam is on the wane, the militant Islam is on the rise not only in Pakistan, but around the globe. In Pakistan, the Berlevis are increasingly being marginalized by the Wahabis, known locally as Ahle-Hadith. There are regular

change focus from the scene in Pakistan to that in Bangladesh. What do we see? As we survey the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh, we shall see many trends common between the two countries.

The rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh is of recent origin, in common with most of the Islamic world. In 1971, when Bangladesh emerged as a new nation, the Founding Fathers' dream was a nation-state based on Bengali nationalism, secular and democratic in its character, with a socialist economy. The constitution of Bangladesh adopted in 1972 had proscribed the use of religion for political ends. Therefore, parties such as Jamat-e-Islami were declared illegal. However, since the August '75 changeover, there has been steady rise of Islamic political forces in Bangladesh. Post-75 Governments found the religion-based political parties ready to lend support to the new regime. The basic character of the constitution was amended by a series of Presidential proclamations in 1977-78. 'Secularism' as a state principle was dropped and ban on the use of religion-based political activities lifted. Islamic religious parties resurfaced again. Throughout the late 70s and 80s the military rulers and their allies found Islam as a comfortable platform to thwart movements and agitation by democratic secular forces. For example, in 1982, while the country was in the grip of popular movement against the autocratic rule of Gen Ershad, he amended the constitution and made Islam the state religion. This was a crude attempt to divert the attention of the agitating populace. Friday was declared a weekly holiday; use of Islamic religious symbols in public life became more visible. Islam was used by the ruling elites to further their political aim. The policy of courting Islamist parties continued even after the restoration of democracy in 1991. The two major political parties, namely the AL and the BNP, which had been in power since 1991, had been courting the Islamist parties to keep them on their sides. The BNP-AL in-fighting only strengthened them. Their power reached its zenith in 2001 national election; they formed an alliance with the BNP, won a landslide victory and then became a partner in the Government. We have witnessed during the last six years how the major political parties tried to woo the Islamists on their sides in order to reap benefit in the polling booth. Principles were shamefully sacrificed at the altar of power. The consequences have been bad.



tethering on the edge of massive disorder. Could such an incident happen here? What must we do to prevent a similar incident here? These and many such questions are lurking in my mind.

Watching the two 'Maulana' brothers declaring 'Jihad' against Gen. Musharraf's Government, reminded me of Bhindranwale episode - the Sikh militant leader, allegedly propped up by late Indian Premier Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who in the end became her nemesis. One would also recall Rajib Gandhi, who reported to have initially fraternized the LTTE, but in the end, LTTE snapped back to claim his life. The lesson here is very clear appeasing or nurturing terrorism never pays; in the end, it comes back to haunt the perpetrator. The Maulanas, operating only a mile away from the Headquarters of the powerful ISI of Pakistan,

laid bare the danger of militant Islam and its nursery the madrasas. Admittedly, vast majority of nearly 12000 madrasas in Pakistan are not militant, but about 1500-2000 madrasas that the Pakistani government identifies as militant in their curriculum and outlook, are enough to create serious law and order situation in that country. Although these madrasas were initially concentrated in the NWFP, but as Lal Masjid had exposed, militant madrasas are now scattered across the country. Their students are drawn not only from the poor and destitute, but an increasing numbers hail from urban middle class and immigrant families of the West. The parents who send their wards, and the students who enroll, are very clear about their goals. It is to imbibe themselves in the true spirit of Islam, in their view, the

military and Taliban supporters has begun, the conflict is likely to be long and bloody.

Pakistan had very few madrasas until the 1980s. A few madrasas that they had were attached to mazars or mosques, whose sole purpose was to produce Imams or preachers. Most of these madrasas were of Berlevi or Sufi variety emphasizing on mystic and spiritual aspects of Islam. The Afghan Civil War in the '80s changed all that. The war saw huge growth of madrasas all across Pakistan, aided and abetted by the Gulf Arab and CIA money. These madrasas became the recruiting centres for the 'Mujahids' in the Anti-Soviet 'Jihad'. How these madrasas metamorphosed into Taliban, and later into Al-Qaeda recruiting centres, are all part of current history. Although the majority of Pakistanis, like the rest of the

confrontations, often bloody, between the two groups. Also, to counter growing number of Sunni madrasas, the Shias have opened their own madrasas. The Shia-Sunni clashes, unheard of in the pre-1980 Pakistan, are now regular features that threaten the very fabric of their nationhood. Gen Musharraf's effort to reform the madrasas have mostly failed. The madrasas just chose to ignore all government directives. Very few ever registered, the curriculum remains unchanged and the offer of government aid package was ignored because money flows in from private sources anyway. Why to take Government money and then follow their dictates when one could easily survive on voluntary donations the logic is simple and straightforward. So the madrasas in Pakistan continues to remain outside state control and supervision a state unto itself. Now, let's

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Pakistan under cloud

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THE fundamentalist challenge from the citadel of Lal Masjid in the heart of Islamabad had come to an ominous end. The unreliable figures of casualties that vary widely do not rule out women, children and foreign nationals. Targeting soldiers at Waziristan, Sawat and elsewhere that has taken over 100 lives in fewer days, was the start of bloody revenge by the terrorists that would invariably invite retaliation and cleansing from the security forces. In many ways, Lal Masjid showdown symbolizes the end of the uneasy peace into a full-blown war against terror. The war zone is already spreading out of the harsh mountainous terrain along Durand Line that draws much of the Pak-Afghan border. After six years of careful ambivalence, has Pakistan been finally sucked into a high intensity war on terror?

Immediate beneficiary is the Musharrif regime that came under cloud due to thoughtless dismissal of Chief Justice Iftekhar Mahmud Chowdhury, which craftily engineered into a movement for restoration of democracy. If the departure of the President is a remedy, Pakistan should be bracing itself to sacrifice the General. At this hour, however he symbolises both the problem and hope for Pakistan. By condensation of depressive factors, the shaken president is showing a lot of staying power. How Pakistan is going to tackle the impending consequences of the Lal Masjid episode is the immediate concern. The bigotry of Abdur Rashid Gazi that cast him and his followers into rubbles of the Lal Masjid seminary has forced democratic movements spearheaded by the lawyers into the back burner. Barely hanging in with dangers looming around him, President Musharraf is in no way secure, but his presence is more pronounced.

Ever since Pakistan overambitiously nursed the Taliban to take over fragmented Afghanistan, the fundamentalist forces have been incubating to assault the surrogate mother. The continuing threat and the Lal Masjid episode is an indication that the army of the fundamentalist is ready. Since Pakistan is slowly but surely steaming towards a protracted war from within, it is difficult to jettison Musharraf at this critical hour.

The threat of a fundamentalist regime is more a international concern than a national concern of Pakistan. Nuclear Pakistan with a fundamentalist regime is the worst scenario the West can conceive. They will do everything including forced entry to cut Taliban style assault on Islamabad. Following the bitter experience of Iraq, if shy of direct intervention, the West may opt for precision bombing to neutralize the nuclear capability. Such decision is fraught with greater danger. How much of Pakistan remains after that is an open guess. Leave Pakistan aside, the entire region will be balkanized. If Pakistan goes, military action on neighbouring Iran on the nuclear facilities will be an unstoppable logic. Intervention in Pakistan and Iran in succession after Iraq and Afghanistan will be misunderstood as civilizational war against Muslims. With emotions high and battle cry for jihad, many national boundaries will dilute, pulverizing the entire Muslim belt; many liberal regimes, monarchists and dictators would collapse. That is what Bin Laden is waiting for somewhere in the caves of Pakistan-Afghan wilderness to raise his sail high on hatred. Like horror movies, this hypothetical discourse is frightening for a sensible mind. There is no doubt superior technology can win the battles in Pakistan and Iran only to lose the war to the hate mongers and suicide bombers. Compromise with the terrorists may not be possible but vigorous engagement with the rest remains a viable option.

President Musharraf in uniform cannot satisfy democracy lovers. Firing of Chief Justice Chowdhury has given the ignition to the democratic movement. The Chief Justice may be a popular symbol of protest but he has neither the experience nor an efficient organisational support to give a

serious try to lead Pakistan out of the looming dangers. He can at best be a very transitional political entity to pass the baton. Pakistan Muslim League is fragmented and only good enough to ride a bandwagon. Compromise is most unlikely between Nawaz Sharif and the General. Pakistan People's Party is weakened due to bickering from within, desertion and lack of vitality due to long absence of the charismatic Benazir Bhutto. Corruption charges will not let her come back from self-exile without a compromise with the regime that she would be aiming to dislodge. Musharraf has been in this game long enough to ignore the potential danger of politically activating Benazir.

Apart from institutional loyalty from the army, his only political hometown is Karachi, the commercial hub of Pakistan. Recent killings on a failed visit of Justice Iftekhar is a barometer to read how deeply the mohajers are attached to the general. While interior Sind is the strongest base of Benazir, urban cities of Karachi and Hyderabad are of Musharraf. Making Benazir Prime Minister under a compromise can be destabilizing for the urban-based mohajers of Sind. Even a general cannot ignore his only popular base in politics.

Musharraf's problems within military are also brewing. Nine years is too long for a chief; aspirants in uniform are getting restless to taste the command of the army without the shadow of Musharraf. Seepage in the military is hardly visible until the dam bursts. Ayub Khan's diary - fake or real, truly tells how the loyal Yahya pulled the carpet from under the tottering regime. Expecting unconditional loyalty from a new Army Chief under trying political conditions is doubtful. It is not without purpose that Musharraf feels the uniform is his skin of the vulnerable self. How long he can delay a full-fledged Army Chief is more important than how long he can continue as the President.

Baluchis and Pathans are deeply religious and emotional; traditional blood feud is in their culture. Taking hard military stand against the increasing menace of terrorists will be tantamount to declaring war against the fierce people of Frontier and Baluchistan. Killing ailing Nawab Bugti of Baluchistan was a blunder demanding toll in blood. Pakistan cannot afford too many blunders in those sensitive provinces. Increasing menace of Taliban - al Qaeda combine, that has gone on the offensive in Afghanistan outreaching fortified Islamabad must have alarmed everybody. It is an expanding torrent. Guns, violence and opium are proliferating in and around Afghanistan. Pacification front has callously betrayed precipitated decisions on war against terror. May it be Indo-China, Iraq or Afghanistan; The West is not showing the acumen in understanding the East. Feedback of the sycophants is confirmative and encouraging too; but independent minds are not necessarily the fundamentalist sympathisers. Most of the failures of the West are due to preference of the stooges over the independent minds. Loyalty needs a new definition among the Muslims.

Seven years ago, when General Musharraf came to power democracy lovers were not impressed. Ever since, a viable alternative had been on the agenda. Afghanistan, Iraq, war on terror following 9/11 leads nowhere, not even highly priced Bin Laden is traceable. Complex war on terror has made interest of Pakistan and the General synonymous in the Western minds. Only choice is between him and another unfathomed one from the barracks. Until a viable political alternative is built, President Musharraf may be an unwanted reality in Pakistan.

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