

Syria and Pakistan: The Issue of National Sovereignty

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The colonial rulers did indeed divide to rule, and they still do. That is why the media likes to project the predicament of Syria in sectarian terms.

America's allies in the region, Turkey, Jordan, and the Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were mobilised. They armed and financed a group of militants. They infiltrated Syria from Jordan and Turkey not only to topple Assad's regime but also to frighten the genuine and peaceful opposition off the streets. Contradicting their stand against Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Americans have been financing and arming the organisation in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Egypt. They have also terrorised the minorities out of these countries so as the fragmentation of the Middle East becomes an accomplished fact.

Pakistan is as much affected by what happens in Syria, as Syria is in Pakistan. Supporting the writ of the Syrian government on its territories is also supporting our own sovereignty.

On the Eve of August 14, Dilip Hiro wrote in Yale Global: The Syrian imbroglio is a sectarian one, produced by a mix of age-old conflict between Sunnis and Shias, and an old imperialist policy of divide-and-rule. The 1947 partitioning of British India into India and Pakistan eased communal violence dramatically. ... The Britain conceded a homeland for Indian Muslims....In Syria, a viable solution lies in partition. (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/partition-solution-syria>)

I disagree with Hiro.

I met my Pakistani husband in Syria, and in Pakistan I lost him. Syria linked our destinies. I fleeing the ravages of the Lebanese civil war and he escaping a despotic general that killed his father and oppressed his people. We both come from countries that were suffering the aftermath of partition, a colonial legacy.

There were no British casualties amongst the one-and-a-half million who died when the subcontinent was divided. All those killed and maimed were Indians. It looked more like the Indians had conceded to Britain rather than Britain conceding to the Indians, as Hiro asserts. Since then the two new nations have fought four wars, have two unresolved disputes over water shares and over Kashmir. They have built two nuclear arsenals that they have drawn at each other. I can hardly say this is the evidence of what Hiro whimsically calls eased violence.

One wonders if Hiro thought to ask the Baloch, Sindhis, Punjabis, Kashmiris, Bengalis, the people of Junnagadh and Hyderabad, the Biharis, if they felt independent since Partition. The

14th of August remains the day of Partition and not of Independence. The two words are not interchangeable. Partition is an example not to follow.

On the 14th of August we must observe decades of further subjugation. Only the rulers of the two nations have a reason to celebrate, because on that day the British had bestowed on them their separate fiefdoms. Under them the subcontinent drifted into a state of underdevelopment, injustice and inequality. As a consequence, today the governments of India and Pakistan have lost their writ over vast tracks of their lands.

The colonial rulers did indeed divide to rule, and they still do. That is why the media likes to project the predicament of Syria in sectarian terms. The people came to the streets in Syria like the rest of the Arab world seeking freedom and democracy. But the Arab Spring took the Americans and their allies by surprise. They never imagined that the oppressed, hungry and dispossessed people of Asia would rise against their oppressors. They supported and placed despotic rulers. They armed their police, to crush any local uprising.

Based on Prof Raymond Wheeler's 1930s study of the effects of the weather cycles on human behaviour, American scientists blamed the uprising in the Middle East to the hot weather. To them Mohammad Bouazizi of Tunisia set himself on fire not because he was hungry but because of solar activities.

Two centuries ago, famines ravaged India during a period of recurring droughts. India's wheat was dispatched to Manchester to feed the cheap labour of industrial England. Indians were so starved that they ate their dead and their babies. Imperial scientists like Norman Lockyer declared that black spots on the Sun's surface, and not the free market, caused the Indian starvation. Nothing, it seems, has changed in imperial minds.

When the Egyptians went to the streets, the United States supported undemocratic Hosni Mubarak till the end. They changed tactics when the people's demonstration persisted.

In October 2011, six months after the start of the Syrian uprising, the American ambassador to Syria, Robert Stephen Ford, was attacked with eggs, tomatoes, and pebbles as he provocatively visited an opposition lawyer in downtown Damascus. People spontaneously gathered around his vehicle and threw at him whatever was at hand. A woman interviewed by the Lebanese channel Al-Jadeed said, "We don't want his democracy because it has become a knife with which they are cutting our throats".

Such displays of people power are not acceptable for Americans. The Arab revolutions had to be derailed. America's allies in the region, Turkey, Jordan, and the Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were mobilised. They armed and financed a group of militants. They infiltrated Syria from Jordan and Turkey not only to topple Assad's regime but also to frighten the genuine and peaceful opposition off the streets. Contradicting their stand against Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Americans have been financing and arming the organisation in Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Egypt. They have also terrorised the minorities out of these countries so as the fragmentation of the Middle East becomes an accomplished fact. Such fragmentation will divide the region into small sectarian and ethnic entities in perpetual strife. It will weaken the resistance of the Arabs against Israel, America's thorn in the side of the Middle East.

The Americans cannot afford to have democratic regimes in the resource-rich developing countries. If the people are empowered the Americans and their economic institutions won't

be able to bully the rulers into signing on the dotted line of IMF and WTO agreements. Where will they get their cheap outsourcing from, their oil, their raw material, and their food?

I was in Lebanon in 2006 visiting my ailing father when Israel invaded, destroyed, and killed in the southern part of the country. Condoleezza Rice brazenly announced from Israel that the pains of Lebanon are the “birth pangs” of the new Middle East. Rice’s New Middle East is a greater Middle East that will stretch till Asia Minor. It also includes a New Pakistan, a smaller Pakistan. It is a quest to control the diminishing natural resources.

The destruction of Lebanon’s infrastructure incurred a death toll of more than a thousand civilian, 30 percent of which were children, the displacement of one quarter of the Lebanese population, a devastating oil spill that spread over a distance of 170 kilometres, the damage to two world heritages, Tyre and Byblos, and an economic loss of over \$1.5 billion dollars. To Rice that was the beginning of a “creative destruction.” This war is known as the Israel-Hezbollah war in which an organic Lebanese organisation, Hezbollah, aborted the birth of the “new Middle East.” With support from their Syrian and Iranian neighbours, the Lebanese people were able to successfully resist the Israeli aggression. My father lived another day to watch his people accomplish what the armies of the Arabs could not in more than six decades of Arab Israeli conflict.

Pakistan is as much affected by what happens in Syria, as Syria is in Pakistan. Supporting the writ of the Syrian government on its territories is also supporting our own sovereignty. Today Pakistan and Syria are suffering aggression because their people have been denied the right to govern themselves since their independence. The popular leaders, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Hafiz al-Assad took the fight against imperial hegemony upon themselves. The people were indeed behind them. But history is loud and clear today that the fight against injustice is neither one man’s fight nor one nation’s, it is the fight of the whole human race. Give people freedom and they will defend it.

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