

Nuclear Pakistan's Comprador Cowardice. The Imbecilic Republic ... of Pakistan

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Pakistan's prime minister, Shahbaz Sharif, declared the 28th of May as a public holiday. Indeed, the House of Sharif, the family in control of one of the two dynastic political parties (the PML-N) of Pakistan, chose to remind the population that this was the day, in 1998, when Pakistan openly launched tests of its nuclear weapons.

This was done in response to India's nuclear test which was undertaken a few weeks before. Though the prime minister of the time, Nawaz Sharif, brother of today's Shahbaz, wanted to remain in the good books of Washington, Pakistan's rulers, especially the military top brass, felt it was absolutely essential to respond in kind to New Dehli's brazenly dangerous act.

Islamabad was willing to face the repercussions of its behavior. Immediately, the US slapped devastating sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Pakistan's ruling elite employed a nationalist narrative that attempted to affirm the country's sovereignty.

The reality was that – as in the case of most of these imperial sanctions – the only people who would have to endure and survive (or not) such Western economic warfare were the already disenfranchised and exploited, the vast majority of ordinary Pakistanis. Elites in politics and business would continue to enjoy lavish lifestyles. The rulers deployed the rhetorical rigmarole of 'Pakistanis willing to eat grass' in order to defend the country's nuclear program. What this camouflaged and obfuscated was the fact that those already so impoverished were already on the brink of 'eating grass,' and that they would be the ones who would continue to do so after American sanctions on the country. The already comfortable would continue to eat their five-course meals – on the backs and blood of the social majorities.

Nevertheless, the hoopla invoked about this day by the current prime minister is just one more attempt to obtain a minimal level of legitimacy in a country that mostly detests this regime installed by Pakistan's generals. This sentiment is not only found in ousted and jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's political party, the PTI – but also among other vast sections of society, of whatever ideological orientation. The population at large has had enough of the political musical chairs of either the House of Sharif or the House of Bhutto-Zardari – the latter being the family controlling the other major dynastic political party in the country, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

The celebration of the day of the nuclear tests by Sharif and the generals is meant to be a 'show of strength' of a country whose rulers are desperate to demonstrate how they can stand up to any power trying to interfere in – and violate – Pakistan's sovereignty. At least, that's what they want the country's people to believe. In reality, such asinine theatrics conceal the colossal cowardice of the country's military and civilian elite.

The fact that this clownish military-civilian regime prioritizes conveying its military prowess because of its nuclear tests in 1998, is not only absurd, but scandalous and criminal at this juncture. Pakistan has the world's fifth largest population, and sixth largest military, nuclear armed. It seems that this regime, like others before it, loves to showcase its ostensible military strength via such meaningless gestures. And in this period of Israel's genocide in Gaza, enacting a public holiday advertising the nation's armed forces' capability and gallantry reveals the shameful and tragic embarrassment characterizing the country's rulers.

There has been a serious and necessary question over the past few months of what concrete actions can countries, particularly those of the Muslim world, undertake to assist in halting Israel's savage assault on Gaza. The legitimate popular criticism and condemnation of Muslim rulers' unwillingness to act beyond mere rhetorical flourishes – is palpable throughout the world of Islam.

Putting aside the valid claims of the pre-existing criminality of the Pakistani military top brass, the nation's – and indeed, the world's – population is absolutely irate that the enormous size and strength of the nation's soldiers and officers are not deployed by the generals even as a warning that Islamabad will confront Tel Aviv in some way as long as this genocide continues. How difficult would it be if Pakistan's armed forces, joined by perhaps others as well, merely announced that the country will be leading a protection force for the suffering people of Gaza? Even the hint of such a force would make Zionist actors think twice before continuing their butchery.

Alas, Pakistan's generals remain fairly consistent in their worldview: facilitate (as best possible at any given time) imperial hegemony, and be more than willing to position and utilize the country's troops to murder its own population – carried out abundantly in provinces such as KPK and Balochistan. The military high command had little qualms in submitting to the 'War on Terror' and losing tens of thousands of its own soldiers within the country's own borders.

When one indulges in an even cursory and preliminary conversation with ordinary Pakistanis, it becomes obvious how incensed they are at Israel and Pakistan's spineless rulers. In fact, the indignation – even among those sections of the population that face repression inside the country – is reaching levels wherein many are speaking of a 'people's army' to intervene to defend the Palestinians from Israeli slaughter.

Until the generals and their civilian pals in the House of Sharif and House of Bhutto-Zardari use the country's armed forces for something useful, like protecting a besieged population, they will correctly be ridiculed. But even a minimal moral-ethical impulse may be too much to ask the nation's vicious elites. The country is now seen as a 'paper tiger' that has miraculously been able to degrade such a huge country to a joke, a basket case, and a banana republic.

Sadly, to many, the Islamic Republic has become the 'Imbecilic Republic'...of Pakistan.

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