

TARIQ ALI

## THE COLOUR KHAKI

*Now each day is fair and balmy,  
Everywhere you look: the army.*  
Ustad Daman (1959)

ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2001, General Pervaiz Musharraf went on TV to inform the people of Pakistan that their country would be standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States in its bombardment of Afghanistan. Visibly pale, blinking and sweating, he looked like a man who had just signed his own death warrant. The installation of the Taliban regime in Kabul had been the Pakistan Army's only foreign-policy success. In 1978, the US had famously turned to the country's military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq when it needed a proxy to manage its jihad against the radical pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. In what followed, the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence became an army within an army, with much of its budget supplied directly from Washington. It was the ISI that supervised the Taliban's sweep to power during Benazir Bhutto's premiership of the mid-nineties; that controlled the infiltration of skilled saboteurs and assassins into Indian-held Kashmir; and that maintained a direct connexion with Osama bin Laden. Zia's successors could congratulate themselves that their new province in the north-west almost made up for the defection of Bangladesh in 1971.

Now it was time to unravel the gains of the victory: the Taliban protectorate had to be dismantled and bin Laden captured, 'dead or alive'. But having played such a frontline role in installing fundamentalism in Afghanistan, would the Pakistan Army and the ISI accept the reverse command from their foreign masters, and put themselves in the forefront of the brutal attempt to root it out? Musharraf was clearly nervous

but the US Defence Intelligence Agency had not erred. In the final analysis, Pakistan's generals have always remained loyal to the institution that produced them—and to its international backers—rather than to abstract ideas like democracy, Islam or even Pakistan.

The country's fifty-five year history has been a series of lengthy duels between general and politician, with civil servants acting as seconds for both sides. Statistics reveal the winner: while elected representatives have run the country for fifteen years, and unaccountable bureaucrats and their tame front men for eleven, the Army has been in power for twenty-nine—leading some to suggest that the green-and-white national flag might be re-coloured khaki.<sup>1</sup> It is a dismal record, but the Pakistan high command has never tolerated interference from civilian politicians for too long. The last elected leader to believe he had the Army firmly under his control, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had to be disabused of the notion. In 1977, on the orders of General Zia—an erstwhile favourite whom Bhutto had promoted over the heads of five, more deserving, superior officers—the prime minister was removed from power and hanged two years later.<sup>2</sup>

After Zia's sudden death in 1988, power alternated between Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (1988–90; 1993–96) and Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League (1990–93; 1997–99). By 1998 it looked as if Nawaz Sharif—probably the country's most venal politician—was forgetting the lessons of Bhutto's fall. The rickety economy was facing collapse as the Southeast Asian financial crisis swept the region, exacerbated by US sanctions imposed after the 1998 Indo-Pak nuclear tests (Clinton later intervened to soften these on the grounds of US national-security interests). The Chief of Army Staff, General Karamat, called for a National Security Council to be set up to take charge of the situation, with the Army playing a major role. Nawaz Sharif sacked him in October 1998 and installed Musharraf as COAS instead.

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<sup>1</sup> Khaki: Urdu (Persian) *khāki* dusty, f. *khāk* dust. A. Dust-coloured; dull brownish-yellow. B. A fabric of this colour employed for field uniforms. In India, used for uniforms of the Guide Corps under Lamsden and Blodson in 1848, by troops in the Mutiny of 1857, and in the Afghan campaign of 1878–80: OED.

<sup>2</sup> Zia-ul-Haq, who masqueraded as an Islamist, had been trained in Fort Bragg and was a favourite of the US DIA. He had seen active imperial service in Jordan during the Black September of 1973, leading mercenaries to crush a Palestinian uprising on behalf of Tel Aviv and the Jordanian King. He was assassinated, together with the US Ambassador Arnold Raphel, when their military plane exploded in the sky in August 1988. The 'terrorists' were never discovered.

Six months later, under Musharraf's command, the Pakistan Army launched its Kargil offensive, capturing strategic heights in Indian-held Kashmir. Nawaz Sharif came under immediate US pressure and, in July 1999, ordered the troops to withdraw—snatching diplomatic defeat from the jaws of military victory, in the eyes of the high command. Nawaz Sharif, clearly counting on Washington's support, tried to instigate moves against Musharraf within the Army, while complaining in public that he had not been consulted about the Kargil move. The following October, while Musharraf was on a visit to Sri Lanka, Pakistan TV announced that the COAS had been sacked. Flying home, his plane was denied permission to land. Either while circling Pakistan airspace with dwindling fuel supplies, or after his final touch-down, Musharraf gave the order for Nawaz Sharif to be put under arrest. Announcing that he had been 'compelled to act, to prevent the further destabilization of the military', Musharraf suspended parliament and the constitution, appointed himself the country's 'Chief Executive' and established a governing National Security Council. (The Clinton administration ensured a smoother fate for Nawaz Sharif than Bhutto had endured, whisking him out of prison to enjoy a comfortable exile in Saudi Arabia.)

### *Liberal applause*

Initially, there was some rejoicing both at home and abroad at the Pakistan Army's fourth coup in as many decades. To the popular delight at getting rid of Nawaz Sharif was added the innovation of a military take-over in the face of apparent White House displeasure. This, coupled with the pseudo-modernist rhetoric of the new ruler, encouraged a wave of amnesia. It was as if the institution that had dominated the country's political life for so many decades had ceased to exist—or undergone a miraculous transformation. Liberal pundits in New York and Lahore lost their bearings, while in the *London Review of Books* Anatol Lieven decried Musharraf's administration as being 'the most progressive Pakistan has had in a generation'.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of the citizens were more sceptical—indifferent to the fate of their politicians, and with few illusions as to the character or role of the Army.

Like his uniformed predecessors, Musharraf immediately promised to end corruption, reform the countryside, tax the middle-classes, eradicate poverty, educate the poor and restore real democracy. The Pakistani

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<sup>3</sup> 'In Pakistan', LRB vol. 23, no. 22, 15 November 2001.

road to absolutism is always paved with such intentions. Why were so many liberal commentators deceived? Partially it was sheer desperation. In the face of the appalling performance of elected politicians during the nineties, they were ready to grasp at straws. They were also taken in by Musharraf's rhetoric, replete with admiring references to Kemal Atatürk, and by his relatively untypical socio-cultural background. Unlike most of the military high command, Musharraf was not of Punjabi stock. He had no links with the traditional landed elite that has dominated the country, nor was he on the payroll of a heroin millionaire or close to some tainted industrialist. His family, educated and secular, had left Uttar Pradesh during the Partition of 1947 to find shelter in the Land of the Pure. After her son's rise to fame, his mother had casually revealed in the course of a newspaper interview that, in the fifties, she had been greatly influenced by progressive intellectuals such as Sajjad Zaheer and Sibte Hassan.<sup>4</sup> She never said that her views had been genetically transmitted to her boy, but desperate people will put their hopes in anything.

Within a few months of Musharraf's seizure of power, however, there was already a strong indication that nothing substantial would change. The Chief Executive had appointed a friend and colleague, General Amjad, as head of the National Accountability Bureau, charged with rooting out and punishing corrupt officials, politicians and businessmen. Amjad was

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<sup>4</sup> The information had little impact in a country whose own history is barely taught in school or university. Zaheer and Hassan were two of the finest literary critics of the subcontinent. Both had joined the Communist Party of India during the thirties and were members of its Central Committee in 1947. After Partition, as senior Communists of Muslim origin, they were despatched to Pakistan to help organize the CP which had been denuded of its cadres, the bulk of whom were Hindus and Sikhs. The pair's intellectual skills did not transfer automatically to the organizational plane. Under pressure to achieve results after the surreal putschist turn by the Cominform in 1948, the two went underground. Zaheer became a Professor of Urdu literature and hid in our house. My mother's uncle, then Inspector-General of the country's police force, met him there by accident and was charmed. Later both participated in a half-baked attempt to take power, in league with nationalist elements in the Army. An unreliable brigadier lost his nerve and informed his superiors. A general and several junior officers were court-martialled, the CP banned. Zaheer, Hassan and the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz ended up in prison. The Inspector-General of police was not amused to see that his name was fifth on a list of notables to be executed without trial, and even less pleased to discover that the friendly professor he had met at dinner had compiled the list. Jawaharlal Nehru—a family friend of Zaheer—intervened and the latter was released and returned to India. It was quite bold of Musharraf's mother to claim friendship with two convicted traitors.

one of the few senior officers in the Army rumoured to have unpolluted hands. His reputation for 'playing by the rules' had made him a maverick, even as a junior officer. One story has it that he refused to allow a general to borrow the mess silver for a private dinner party, despite insistent requests. His colleagues, taken aback at his stuffiness, laughed at him in public while privately according him some grudging respect.

Musharraf's decision to put him in charge of the NAB had potentially serious consequences. Within a fortnight, Amjad had hired the services of a reputable non-establishment American lawyer, William Pepper, to track down the money spirited abroad by Benazir Bhutto and husband Asif Zardari. Simultaneously, Amjad ordered the arrest of industrialists who had borrowed money from the banks and failed to pay even the interest on it. A list of politicians who had done the same was published in every newspaper. The naming and shaming was punishing psychologically but was insufficient to deal with the cancer. Amjad reportedly told the Chief Executive that, to tackle the problem seriously, it would be necessary to create at least one completely clean institution in the country; only then would civil servants and politicians take notice. But any thorough purge of the Augean stables would have required the arrest of dozens of serving and former generals, admirals and air marshals, long rewarded for services to their country by the chance to engage in large-scale corruption. Musharraf naturally baulked at any such prospect, fearing it would divide and demoralize the top brass and could lead to a break-down in discipline. Once discipline went, the Pakistani military risked becoming little different from a Middle-Eastern or Latin American army where any Johnny, regardless of rank, thought he could seize power. Amjad was quietly shifted sideways, first as a Corps Commander and then as head of the Fauji Foundation, a military honey-pot where his own scruples will certainly be tested. The imprisoned capitalists were released, the shamed politicians heaved a collective sigh of relief and it was, in every sense of the phrase, back to business as usual.

### *A listing economy*

If the removal of Amjad had pleased local capitalism, the appointment of New York banker Shaukat Aziz as Finance Minister endeared Musharraf to the IMF. Pakistan's economy has long been crippled by exorbitant defence expenditure which, amplified by inadequate tax revenues, has



led to sky-rocketing debt-service costs. By 2001, debt and defence amounted to two-thirds of public spending—257bn rupees (\$4.2bn) and 149.6bn rupees (\$2.5bn) respectively, compared to total tax revenues of 414.2bn rupees (\$6.9bn). In a country with one of the worst public education systems in Asia—70 per cent of women, and 41 per cent of men, are officially classified as illiterate—and with health care virtually non-existent for over half the population, a mere 105.1bn rupees (\$1.75bn) was left for overall development.

Throughout the nineties, the IMF had scolded civilian governments for failing to keep their restructuring promises. Musharraf's regime, by contrast, won admiring praise from 1999 onwards for sticking to IMF guidelines 'despite the hardships imposed on the public by austerity measures'.<sup>5</sup> Impoverishment and desperation in the burgeoning city slums and the countryside—still home to 67.5 per cent of the population—were exacerbated further. Some 56 million Pakistanis, nearly 40 per cent of the population, now live below the poverty line; the number has increased by 15 million since Musharraf seized power. Of Pakistan's four provinces the Punjab, with around 60 per cent of the population, has continued to dominate economically and politically, with Punjabis filling the upper echelons of the Army and bureaucracy and channelling what development there is to local projects. Sind, with 23 per cent of the population, and Baluchistan (5 per cent) remain starved of funds, water and power supplies, while the North West Frontier's fortunes have been increasingly tied to the heroin economy.

The problem is structural. The economy rests on a narrow production base, heavily dependent on the fallible cotton crop and the low-value-added textile industry; irrigation supplies are deficient, and soil erosion and salinity widespread. More damaging still are the crippling social relations in the countryside. Low productivity in agriculture can only be reversed through the implementation of serious land reforms, but the alliance between khaki state and local landlords makes this virtually impossible. As a recent Economist Intelligence Unit report on Pakistan noted:

Change is hindered not least because the status quo suits the wealthy landowners who dominate the sector, as well as federal and provincial parliaments. Large landowners own 40 per cent of the arable land and control

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<sup>5</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Pakistan, Afghanistan*, London 2002, p. 18.

most of the irrigation system. Yet assessments by independent agencies, including the World Bank, show them to be less productive than smallholders. They are also poor taxpayers, heavy borrowers and bad debtors.<sup>6</sup>

The weak economy has been further skewed for decades now by Pakistan's vast military apparatus. For 'security reasons', its costs are never itemized in official statements: a single line records the overall sum. In Pakistan, the power of any elected body to probe into military affairs has always been strictly curtailed. The citizenry remains unaware of how the annual \$2.5bn is distributed between the Army (550,000-strong, with two-thousand-plus tanks and two armoured divisions); the Air Force (ten fighter squadrons of forty combat planes each, as well as French and US-made missile systems); and the Navy (ten submarines, eight frigates); let alone what is spent on nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

### *Military Keynesianism*

This lack of transparency is extended to the maze of loss-making business enterprises run by the Army. The oldest of these is the Fauji Foundation, established as a charity for retired military personnel in 1889. It has since become a giant conglomerate in its own right with controlling shares in sugar mills, energy, fertilizer, cereals, cement and other industries—combined assets worth 9.8bn rupees. The Army Welfare Trust, set up in 1977 under General Zia's dictatorship, controls real estate, rice mills, stud farms, pharmaceutical industries, travel agencies, fish farms, six different housing schemes, insurance companies, an aviation outfit and the highly accommodating Askari Commercial Bank, many of whose senior functionaries had earlier served at the discredited Bank of Credit and Commerce International; the AWT's assets have been valued at 17bn rupees. The Air Force and Navy chiefs also have their own troughs: the Shaheen and Bahria Foundations.

Many of these enterprises have been engaged in corruption, although scandals usually erupt only when civilian businessmen have become too greedy in exploiting the opportunities they offer, or where the fall of a government has exposed its shady deals. Benazir Bhutto's spouse Asif Zardari was implicated, via an intermediary, in short-changing the Air Force's Shaheen Foundation in a dubious media venture. In another

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<sup>6</sup> EIU, *Pakistan, Afghanistan*, p. 26.



case, it emerged that a private businessman had bribed senior naval personnel in the process of defrauding the Bahria Foundation over a land-development deal. A lawyer petitioned the Supreme Court to outlaw all use of Army, Navy and Air Force insignia in private enterprise. He demonstrated how the foundations were contravening the Companies Ordinance of 1984, accused them and their partners of collusion and corruption, and pleaded with the Court to outlaw all commercial activities by the armed services. Unable to contest his arguments, the judges dismissed the case on a technicality—thereby revealing their own subordination to the colour khaki.

Contrary to the widely propagated myth that the Army can at least run things efficiently ('probably the only successful modern institution Pakistan possesses', according to an admirer in the *London Review of Books*), a detailed investigation by Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha has recently revealed that most of these businesses are run at a loss, with the generals siphoning off funds from the bloated defence budget to make up the difference.<sup>7</sup> The military are also entirely innocent of modern accounting systems: their books tend to ignore such factors as personnel and utilities costs, and in any case government auditors are warned not to examine them too closely. Meanwhile, their stranglehold over many areas of the economy stifles normal development. In the construction and transport sectors especially, the ability of Army-run companies such as the National Logistics Cell and the Frontier Works Organization to monopolize government contracts, whether under civilian or military regimes, forces smaller companies out of business.

### *Musharraf's war on terror*

By 2001, as a result of skewed spending, stagnating agricultural and industrial sectors and grotesque military mismanagement, the country was groaning under a burden of a \$27bn external public debt. Then came September 11. Mercifully for Washington, the Army was already in power in Pakistan. The Pentagon and the CIA were spared the time and energy needed to organize a new military coup. At such a moment

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<sup>7</sup> Anatol Lieven, 'In Pakistan'; Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha, *Pakistan's Arms Procurement and Military Build-up, 1979–99: In Search of a Policy*, London 2001. See also her paper, 'Power, Perks, Prestige and Privileges: Military's Economic Activities in Pakistan', presented at an international conference on 'Soldiers in Business: Military as an Economic Actor' held, appropriately enough, in Jakarta, October 2000.

of tension, institutional continuity must have been reassuring.<sup>8</sup> As the B52s roared into the newly won bases in Kyrgyzstan, and secret sites along the Baluchistan border were reactivated for Special Service use, the IMF approved a three-year poverty-reduction loan of \$1.3bn and helped reschedule over \$12bn in debt—resulting in massive budgetary relief for Pakistan, and allowing its State Bank to build unprecedented foreign-exchange reserves (some \$7bn by July 2002). By this time, the IMF had also disbursed soft loans totalling around \$400m.

Overnight, Musharraf had become *halal* in the West and was being fêted by Bush and Blair in the same venues in which Reagan and Thatcher had welcomed Zia and Osama's friends. For its part, the Army high command was united in the view that the born-again alliance with Washington was a severe blow against the Indian enemy. Pakistan's civilian elite, too, was in jubilant mood. Now at least they were no longer pariahs. A new imperial war, with their very own Army as the principal proxy and the whole country as a base of operations, meant they were needed once again. The more liberal wing of the elite dreamt of a permanent Pentagon–Musharraf axis that would destroy the hold of Pakistan's dreaded Islamists forever. Overlooking how many times their illusions had been betrayed in the past, its representatives now travelled to Washington to plead that the region never be left unprotected again. For their part, emissaries from the disgraced politicians Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto became familiar if pathetic figures at Foggy Bottom, pleading endlessly with junior functionaries of the State Department not to trust the Army.

The exact role of the ISI during this period remains unclear. In his 19 September broadcast, Musharraf had hinted that his loyalty to Washington's war on terror would be rewarded not just with cash but with an American wink at Pakistan's nuclear and Kashmiri aspirations—'our critical concerns', as he put it.<sup>9</sup> As early as November 2001, India was protesting at increased Pakistani-backed infiltration into Kashmir. On 13 December, armed gunmen allegedly linked to the ISI-funded Jaish-e-Mohammad attacked the Indian parliament building in Delhi, killing nine people. With tension rapidly escalating, the two countries

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<sup>8</sup> 'Before September 11 Musharraf's largest problem was that he was a dictator. Now it is his biggest asset', rejoiced Christopher de Bellaigue: 'The Perils of Pakistan', *New York Review of Books*, 15 November 2001.

<sup>9</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

mobilized close to a million troops along their common border—a mass militarization that served retrograde political interests on both sides.

### *Khaki democracy*

By this stage, Musharraf's own popularity had begun to list asymmetrically: the more he was appreciated by the State Department the less inclined he felt to undertake any serious measures at home—leave alone implementing the 'true democracy' he had promised. Instead, like Generals Ayub and Zia before him, the Chief Executive now attempted to make himself impregnable. Temporarily discarding his uniform, he dressed up in native gear, complete with a particularly stupid turban, and launched his political career at a 'public' rally, consisting of peasant-serfs bussed into a large field by a friendly landlord in Sind. The referendum is a time-honoured weapon of dictators in search of legitimacy; Musharraf's decision to rig the April 2002 plebiscite in his favour disillusioned even his most ardent liberal supporters. The majority of the electorate stayed at home while government employees, soldiers and serfs trooped to the polls and transformed the CE into the country's elected President.

The next step was equally predictable. The one thing every dictator needs in order to provide his regime with a civilian façade is a political party. Not a problem, Musharraf's sycophants assured him: a handy instrument could easily be fashioned from the debris of the past. Like an out-of-work courtesan, the Muslim League—the country's foundational party—was given a shower, dusted with powder and provided with a new wig, before being displayed to the growing queue of potential suitors. Ayub's pet name for his party was the Convention Muslim League; Zia preferred the Pakistan Muslim League, and allowed the Sharif family to manage it on his behalf. Musharraf, having ditched the Sharifs, needed a new name. A timeserver suggested the Quaid-i-Azam Muslim League and so it came about that this old-new entity entered the lists as the General's Party, in the General's Election of October 2002.<sup>10</sup> Its personnel were hardly unfamiliar, consisting of bandwagon careerists of every stripe. In the countryside, these were still the old landed gentry, eager to please the new ruler; in the towns, local notables who had accrued vast sums of

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<sup>10</sup> Quaid-i-Azam (the Supreme Leader) was the appellation inflicted on Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, by his devoted fans. The title stuck and is today almost better known than the name. Jinnah is usually referred to in Pakistani publications as the Quaid.

money, often through illegal means, and become procurers of power and influence. Where in the past a father or uncle had supported Ayub or Zia, now the son or son-in-law was eager to act as a prop for Musharraf. In the face of mass apathy the bureaucracy, past masters in the art of electoral manipulation, set about ensuring the required outcome.

The results of the October election were much closer than anticipated. Despite the low turnout—under 20 per cent, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan—and skilful ballot-rigging, the official Muslim League (Q) failed to secure an overall majority in the National Assembly, winning 115 seats out of 324, mainly in its traditional bastion of the Punjab. Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party secured eighty seats—again, largely in their Sindhi heartland—and the rump of the Muslim League that had remained loyal to Nawaz Sharif took nineteen. It was the Islamists who scored a really big hit. With 66 seats, their united front Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA—Unified Action Conference) gained the highest ever complement that Islamist parliamentarians had ever achieved in the history of this Islamic Republic, sweeping the Pashto-speaking regions along the Afghan border. Their colourful turbans and long beards literally changed the complexion of the National Assembly. True, they were helped by the first-past-the-post system inherited from the mother of parliaments; but Thatcher and Blair had both benefited from this without too many complaints. The MMA also emerged as the largest political force at provincial level in the North West Frontier, and a dominant influence in Baluchistan: the provincial Governments in Peshawar and Quetta are currently presided over by Islamist Chief Ministers.

Power brokers acting on Musharraf's behalf finally managed to confect a federal coalition that would exclude the MMA. A block of PPP members was detached from the parent organization with the inducement of senior cabinet posts. A Baluch landlord and hockey enthusiast, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who had been responsible for the brutal repression of peasants in 1977—ten were killed in clashes with the police—was anointed as Musharraf's new Prime Minister. Two decades before, Jamali had slaved to achieve the same position under General Zia, but the latter was not keen on hockey and preferred to employ the cricket-loving Nawaz Sharif as his factotum. Given that 70 per cent of Musharraf's new Cabinet, including Jamali, had featured prominently on General Amjad's list of corrupt politicians, the widespread public cynicism was hardly a

surprise. Far from regenerating democracy, the *khaki* election has bared the sordid reality of Pakistani politics; a large majority feels both disenfranchised and alienated from those who govern on its behalf.

The election campaign itself had been largely lacklustre, if not totally apolitical. The mainstream parties had no differences on ideological or policy grounds, either on the domestic or the international level. The People's Party had long abandoned its populism. Benazir Bhutto, wanted in Pakistan on charges of corruption, attempted to rule from her base in Dubai via her chosen proxy, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, a *Pir-cum-landlord* from Sind. Politician and religious divine rolled into one, Fahim is hardly a social liberal. Uniquely, even for Pakistan, all his four brothers-in-law are the Koran.<sup>11</sup> Like the different Muslim Leagues on offer, the PPP was concerned with power solely as a means to offer patronage and enlarge its clientele.

### *Maulana Diesel*

The Islamist alliance, for its part, had no disagreements with the other parties on the IMF prescriptions for the economy—there is, after all, a neoliberal reading of the Koran—but campaigned vigorously in defence of Islamic laws and against the US presence in the region. There was hardly a day without a newspaper headline highlighting MMA leader Maulana Fazl ur Rehman's hostility to the American troops: 'Fazl Demands Expulsion of US Commandos from Tribal Areas', 'West Bent on Initiating Civilizations Clash: Fazl', 'Fazl Says Sovereignty Mortgaged to US', 'Fazl Demands Halt to US Army Operations', 'Fazl Urges US Troops Withdrawal', 'MMA Vows to Block Hunt for al-Qaeda', etc.<sup>12</sup> Much of this was pure bluster, but it proved helpful electorally. The Maulana

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<sup>11</sup> Fahim's family claims descent from the first Muslims to enter the Subcontinent, the cohort of Muhammad bin Kasim who took Sind in 711. Women in early Islam owned and inherited property equally with men, a tradition that took root in parts of Sind. Landowners there devised an ingenious solution to prevent women from marrying outside the family, which could lead to the parcellization of the estates. The young heiresses were literally married off to the Koran—similar to nuns becoming brides of Christ. This preserved the girls' virginity, which in turn provided them with magic healing powers; but above all ensured that the property remained under the control of their fathers and brothers. The problem posed by the four wealthy sisters of the PPP leader was thus piously solved.

<sup>12</sup> *News*, 12 May 2002 and 3 June 2002; *Dawn*, 12 May 2002; *News*, 25 May 2002; *Daily Times*, 16 October 2002; *News*, 27 November 2002.

himself admitted that it was not religion that won him new support, but his foreign-policy stance. In discussions with Musharraf, he declared his willingness to establish a coalition with himself as prime minister. When the General pointed out that his anti-Americanism posed a serious problem, the cleric is reported to have replied: 'Don't worry about that now. We've worked with the Americans in the past. Make me Prime Minister and I'll sort everything out.' The offer was declined.

The MMA is a six-party alliance, with the Jamaat-Ulema-Islam—Party of Islamic Scholars—and the Jamaat-i-Islami, or Islamist Party, its two main pillars. Both JUI and JI have been active for decades, mainly in the frontier regions of the NWFP and Baluchistan. Traditionally, the JUI considered itself anti-imperialist and was involved in coalition governments with radical secular parties during the seventies, under the leadership of Maulana Mufti Mahmood, Fazl's father. It had always been hostile to the JI—regarding it as an instrument of the US and Saudi Embassies in Islamabad—and had opposed the military dictatorships of both Ayub and Zia; Mufti Mahmood had attended Peace Conferences in both Moscow and Beijing. His own death came just a few years before the collapse of the Communist world, and his son inherited the party. As a student Fazl had dabbled in poetry, writing verses in both Pashto and Urdu, and publicly declaring that the leftist Faiz Ahmed Faiz was his favourite poet. After his father's death he continued the old man's policies, working closely with Benazir Bhutto's government in the mid-nineties. But whereas the farthest old Mufti had gone was to collect his dollar *per diems* at international conferences, the son, as befitted the new times, was more market-oriented. In return for his active support for Ms Bhutto he succeeded in procuring a lucrative diesel franchise, which covered large parts of the country—and, after the Pak-Taliban victory, most of Afghanistan as well; it earned him the sobriquet of Maulana Diesel.

The bearded, rotund Diesel soon became a great favourite of Benazir's Interior Minister General Naseerullah Babar, architect of the Taliban triumph in Kabul. Fazl's political, ideological and commercial links with the Taliban leadership always remained strong, enabling him to outflank his local JI rivals, whose pawn Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—much fêted by Reagan and Thatcher in the eighties—had been effectively sidelined by the new student clerics in Kabul. After the US assault on Afghanistan, the bulk of the Taliban melted into the hills along the Pakistani border. There many of the returnees swelled the ranks of the JUI and other

Islamist parties, and the JUI took the lead in organizing mass rallies against the ‘foreign occupiers’. It was Fazl who realized that, given the first-past-the-post system, the Islamists could be wiped out electorally if they remained divided. The Alliance was his initiative and he was duly elected its Secretary-General even though, at 49, he is fifteen years younger than his main coalition rival, Qazi Hussain Ahmed.

### *Zia’s orphans*

Qazi Hussain’s election as Amir of the Jamaat-i-Islami marked a generational shift in an organization that had remained under the control of its founder Maulana Maudoodi and his deputy, Mian Tufail, since its origin in 1941.<sup>13</sup> Where the JUI was populist, had support in the villages and collaborated with the Left, the JI was built on the Leninist-cadre model. Its recruits were literate and carefully vetted, most of them students from urban petty-bourgeois backgrounds. Many had been tested in the campus struggles of the sixties and seventies. During the semi-insurrection of 1968–69 that had toppled the Ayub dictatorship, the Left had dominated the action committees that led the fight. To support the JI in those days required a real commitment to the cause. Its motto: religion is our politics and politics our religion.

Qazi Hussain, a leader of the JI student faction at Islamia College in Peshawar, spent his formative years in battles—some of them physical—against the Left. He joined the parent body in 1970, when the JI’s branch in East Pakistan collaborated fully with the Army in its attempt to destroy the Bengali nation. Their cadres in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet compiled lists of ‘undesirables’ for military intelligence, which were then used to eliminate the opposition. ‘Chairman Mao supports us, not you’, was a taunt they regularly hurled at the Bengali Left of the time. China and the US both supported the Pakistan Army’s brutal assault on its own people, aimed at nullifying the dramatic 1970 election victory by the Bengali-nationalist Awami League. The Army’s onslaught backfired badly. Bangladesh is the direct outcome of a military refusal to recognize the will of the electorate. In the circumstances, the Army’s self-image as the only institution that holds the country together is somewhat grotesque.

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed account of the Jamaat-i-Islami see my *Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, London and New York 2002, pp. 174–81.

The JI's role in the 1971 break up of Pakistan had the effect of drawing it closer to the intelligence apparatuses of the rump state. When Zia seized power six years later and joined the US jihad in Afghanistan, the JI became the main ideological prop of the military regime. Qazi Hussain defended the new turn; his skills were noted and he began his rise through the JI apparatus. A former geography lecturer, he now abandoned the low-paid chores of the academy to open a Popular Medical Store in Peshawar's Soekarno Square. The shop was not just an informal meeting place for local JI cadres but a successful commercial operation, soon to be joined by a Popular Medical Laboratory and a Popular X-Ray Clinic.<sup>14</sup> It now became clear that he also aspired to a more popular Jamaat-i-Islami. Hussein knew that it was not easy for a vanguard party that had always prided itself on its elite character to re-brand and market itself in a more accessible style; in politics, as in business, there is always an element of risk when you decide to expand. His decision to join the 2002 Islamist alliance must have been as carefully calculated as the trim of his pure-white regulation beard (in marked contrast to the wilder salt-and-pepper variety sported by Maulana Diesel).

### *A rhetorical shift?*

Incapable of serious opposition to either Musharraf or his Washington backers, the MMA concentrates its fire against women. It has declared its intention to ban cable-TV channels and co-education, and to institute the *shari'a* in the provinces under its control. Given the disaster that befell a more extreme version of this programme in Afghanistan, this could be mere rhetoric designed to keep their followers inebriated while embarrassing the occupant of President's House. The MMA's triumph may or may not have been aided by some independent campaigning from sections of the ISI but it has undoubtedly put pressure on

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<sup>14</sup> These medical facilities undoubtedly made a handsome profit, but they also served a useful political function. The poor were sometimes provided with free medicines and treatment, which they naturally identified with the JI. In Cairo last year, an Islamist parliamentarian boasted of how his organization controlled the leadership of the doctors' union. We were conversing in his clinic, where a majority of those waiting to see him were the Cairene poor. Like some sections of the Latin American church, these Islamists try to provide a substitute for the dismantled welfare functions of the state. The effects are limited, but their psychological impact in the poor quarters should not be underestimated.



the regime to release more of the Islamist militants imprisoned when Musharraf joined the ‘war on terror’; some of the diehard Sunni terrorists responsible for appalling atrocities against minority Shia and Christian communities had already been freed before the election.

More striking was the MMA’s success, in November 2002, in dragooning virtually the entire National Assembly—there were two exceptions—to observe a minute’s silence in memory of the ‘martyred Aimal Kansi’, whose body had been returned to Pakistan after his execution in a US Federal penitentiary for the murder of two CIA officials in Langley, Virginia in 1993.<sup>15</sup> Earlier, some 70,000 people had attended Kansi’s funeral prayers in Quetta, also organized by the MMA. Why did the National Assembly agree to mourn him? Pakistan has not outlawed capital punishment, so it could hardly be seen as a liberal protest. The simple answer is that the MMA’s success has worried its opponents and they are hoping to defeat the Islamists on their own ground. Bhutto *père* made a similar error in the seventies and paid the price.

### *Rural intifada*

A striking example of the political parties’ unwillingness to defend even the most elementary needs of the population can be seen in their reaction to the two-year struggle that has been waged by tenants working on state farms leased to the Army. Rarely has an event spotlighted the bankruptcy of traditional politics in Pakistan so vividly. The British colonial administration had first leased what were then known as ‘Crown lands’ in 1908, setting up military farms to produce subsidized grain and dairy products for the British Indian Army. After Partition, management of the farms—scattered around Lahore, Okara, Sahiwal, Khanewal, Sargodha and Multan, mainly in the Southern Punjab—passed to the Ministry of Defence and the provincial government. The Army controlled 26,274 acres, the remaining 32,000 acres were leased to the Punjab Seed

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<sup>15</sup> Kansi and his father had been recruited in Baluchistan to work for the CIA during the First Afghan War (1979–89). Once US aims in the region had been accomplished it dumped most of its unofficial agents, while continuing to work with and through the ISI. Kansi’s family—perhaps expecting a pension—felt betrayed. Kansi flew to the US to avenge the insult, targeting two senior CIA officials; he shot them dead and flew back to Pakistan. Whatever else, Kansi was clearly a well-trained agent; the CIA deserves the credit. A big reward was offered for his capture and he was ultimately betrayed by his brother-in-law, apprehended by the ISI and handed over to the US authorities. Over to Hollywood?

Corporation. The tenant families who work the farms are the direct descendants of those first taken there in 1908. Forty per cent of them are Christians: mosques and churches function side by side. The religious parties have failed miserably in these regions and the peasants have, since the seventies, tended to vote for the People's Party. No longer.

The *de facto* merger of Army and state on virtually every level has meant that the generals act here as a collective landlord, the largest in the country, determining the living conditions of just under a million tenants. The functionaries of the khaki state regularly bullied and cheated their tenants: they were denied permission to build brick homes; the women were molested; and management approval had to be obtained—and paid for—to get electrification for the villages or build schools and roads. Bribery was institutionalized, and the tenants suffered growing debt burdens. The unconcealed purpose of this ruthless exploitation was to drive the tenants off the land so it could be divided into private landholdings for serving and retired generals and brigadiers. The rationale of the prospective new owners was that, when the time came, they would re-employ the evicted tenants as farm-serfs: it would be better for everyone. The aim of such 'modernization'—in Okara and Sargodha as in Rio Grande do Sul—was, of course, deregulation, privatization and the destruction of tenant solidarity.

The authorities, khaki and civilian, had been attempting to loosen the grip of the tenants over the land by offering short-term contracts and replacing *battai*—share-cropping arrangements that allowed tenants to keep half of what they produce—by cash-rents. Till now, the colonial administration's Punjab Tenancy Act of 1887 has safeguarded their rights: male tenants and their direct descendants who had cultivated the land for more than two generations had the right of permanent occupancy. It was illegal to eject them from the land. Despite the misery inflicted on their families, the tenants defied all attempts to divide them along religious lines and remained united in a single body: the Anjuman-i-Muzaireen Punjab, or Punjab Tenants Organization, set up in 1996.

In June 2000, without any consultations, the khaki landlords announced the conversion from a system of shared-produce to cash-rents. The tenants were outraged. Every evening there were informal assemblies to discuss the resistance, involving the entire village—women and children were to play a leading role in this rural *intifada*. Angered by the daily

harassment, the tenants refused merely to defend the status quo and retaliated by demanding complete ownership of the land that their families had worked for decades. Their slogan, *Malkiyat ya Maut*—‘Ownership or Death’—echoed that of similar struggles in other continents. The first public protest took place on 7 October 2000: a four-hour sit-in on the lawn in front of the Deputy Commissioner’s office in Okara—the second most-powerful post-colonial bureaucrat in the city—by a thousand tenants protesting against the new scheme. Two days later, the Deputy Director of the military farms rang the local police chief and informed him that the tenants were threatening violence and had, in some villages, prevented the managers from removing (i.e. pilfering) wood. The Frontier Constabulary and Elite Force Rangers—their main function to prevent smuggling over the Indian border—arrived in the village and began roughing up the tenants. As women and children saw their fathers, brothers and husbands abused and kicked, they poured out of their homes to hurl stones at the police. A number of tenant activists were arrested.

As news of the confrontation spread to neighbouring villages, the protests began to grow. Attempts by the authorities to divide or buy off tenants were a failure. In the spring of 2002 the Rangers opened fire on protesting tenants: some were killed. Organizers were arrested and beaten up in full view of their families. Women—Christian and Muslim—marched to Okara, carrying the wooden bats they use to beat the clothes as they wash them in the river, and surrounded the police station. Nothing like this had been seen before. The Army realized that, short of a massacre, this could be a protracted struggle. Ironically, the large presence of Christians excluded a blood-bath; it might annoy their co-religionist in the White House. On 9 June 2002, a thousand armed police and rangers surrounded the village of Pirowal. The siege lasted for seven hours, but the police failed to capture the organizers, despite threats to burn the entire cotton crop of the village. They had underestimated the power of peasant solidarity.

In a sharply worded editorial the Karachi daily, *Dawn*, commented on 24 June 2002:

To win back the confidence of the restive and distraught farmers, the police force sent to harass and terrorize them should be withdrawn immediately and any ill-conceived notion of teaching them a ‘lesson’ must be abandoned. Cases should be registered against government and farm management

officials who ordered the police action that led to deaths . . . Once these confidence-building measures have been taken, the government should sit down and negotiate with the tenants, perhaps through the Punjab Tenants Organization, on how to grant the ownership rights due to them.

The generals ignored the advice of a newspaper that has usually been sympathetic to their needs. Instead, Musharraf's new status as the trusted ally of the West was used against the PTO, and its non-violent leaders charged under the new 'anti-terrorist' legislation—just as the real terrorists, most of whom have, at one time or another, been on the payroll of the military intelligence services, were being released. Despite the fact that Pakistan has been a regular port of call for Western media pundits over the last year—the *New York Times's* Thomas Friedman preening himself on his intimate knowledge of frontier conditions—none of the visiting journalists deemed this struggle worthy of attention. It distracted from the only story they wanted to tell: fundamentalism. In fact, of course, mullahs are most effectively marginalized when people see them as irrelevant to their real needs—as the PTO farmers have shown. During the campaign of the last two years, church and mosque have alternated as their meeting places. In a discussion with two of their leaders—Dr Christopher John, the PTO senior vice-president, and Younis Iqbal, general secretary—in Lahore in December 2002, both stressed that religious divisions had played no part whatsoever in their conflict with the state. At their meetings, Iqbal said, 'You couldn't tell the Muslims and the Christians apart'.

### *Heroin economy*

The only serious breach in the wall dividing an English-educated civilian and military elite—with access to Western universities, medical schools and military academies—from the rest of the population, illiterate or semi-literate (largely, but not exclusively, the product of the *madrassahs*), has been the one made by the 'black economy'. Over the last two decades, the cultivation of poppy orchards in Afghanistan and the NWFP has produced a fine crop of heroin millionaires. Many are of peasant or urban petty-bourgeois stock, but their money has funded every political party and thoroughly penetrated the armed forces: cash, kalashnikovs and Pajeros—Japanese Range Rovers—have been distributed in all directions. In return, the humble heroin merchants have been loaded with honours and public displays of affection. As good fathers, they made

sure their children were properly educated and became part of the elite. The upward mobility of this layer has slightly altered the composition of the property-owning fraction, without changing much else. Money remains the great leveller in the upper reaches of society, while the price of urban land has reached astronomical heights: the price of an apartment in the Defence Colony of Karachi or the fashionable Parade Ground in Lahore does not compare badly with New York or Berlin.

During the nineties, heroin had been despatched to Europe and North America via two routes. The first led along the Grand Trunk Road from Peshawar down to Karachi and thence in container ships to Mediterranean ports. The second, policed by the Russian mafia, went from Afghanistan via Central Asia and Russia to the Balkans, and then to the capitals of the West. The defeat of the Taliban after 9.11 has brought about the virtual collapse of the Pakistani heroin networks. The Northern Alliance now monopolizes the trade and it is their old Russian friends who prosper, while Kosovo has become the main distribution point for most of the world.<sup>16</sup> The Pakistani economy has only withstood the blow because of the cash that has smoothed the path of the American troops.

Since the country's foundation in 1947, the Pakistan Army has been the spinal chord of the state apparatus. The weakness of political institutions as the state emerged from British rule, the absence of a bourgeoisie and domination by a rural elite—a parasitical excrescence of the worst sort—led to an over-reliance on the civilian bureaucracy and the Army. Since there was no real consent for landlord rule, force—both direct and indirect—had to be brought into play. Both institutions had been created by the colonial power, which formed them in its mold.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the civil service was soon mired in corruption, the Army held out for a little longer. The impression was created that, while individual officers

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<sup>16</sup> It would not come as a total surprise to discover that Western soldiers and civil servants, policing the Balkan protectorates on behalf of the *basileus* in Washington, were also benefiting from the poppy trade.

<sup>17</sup> The needs of the post-1858 civil servants of the Raj were supplied by the colonial state precisely in order to prevent the corruption that had characterized the rule of the East India Company and led to the vilification and prosecution of its most successful agents, Robert Clive and Warren Hastings. The hierarchical discipline of the British Indian Army was combined with its subordination to the senior civilian ruler—governor-general or viceroy. The only breach in this custom was the celebrated clash between Kitchener and Curzon, which the former won: the youngest viceroy was recalled to London.

might be susceptible to bribes—they were, after all, human—the institution itself was clean.

Two long periods of martial law destroyed that image. General Ayub Khan's family became extremely wealthy during his rule from 1958 to 1969, as did some of his collaborators. And between 1977 and 1989, at least two of General Zia's Corps Commanders were centrally involved in the heroin trade and gun-running. Corruption on a lesser scale spread through the junior ranks. The failure to crack down on these practices was hardly accidental. The generals adopted a materialist approach to the problem, seeing it as an easy way to preserve the unity of the Army. The loot could not be shared equally since that might promote egalitarian tendencies among the colonels and majors; but at the same time, the subalterns could not be denied some protection money for their crucial role in 'protecting' Pakistan.

### *Military threat?*

Does Pakistan really need such a large defence establishment? The khaki ideologues insist that ever since Partition there has been a permanent military threat from India. The notion, as I have argued elsewhere, is ludicrous.<sup>18</sup> On all three occasions on which the two countries have gone to war—twice over Kashmir, and Bangladesh—the initiative was taken by Pakistan. The Indian Army could have taken West Pakistan in 1971, but was not allowed to cross the international border by its political leaders. Today, with both countries in possession of nuclear delivery systems, it is obvious that neither the Kashmir issue nor any other dispute can be resolved through war. Even an India dominated by Hindu chauvinism and saffron demagogues is hardly likely to attempt a conquest of Pakistan. Who would it benefit? It might be different if Pakistan had limitless quantities of oil lying just beneath the surface. In fact, there is no rationale behind the fear of India. It serves only one purpose: the maintenance of the huge military-industrial complex that sprawls across the country and sustains khaki hegemony.

In truth, the threat to the Army's predominance has always come from its own people. The only time the old Pakistan was genuinely united was

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<sup>18</sup> See *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power?*, London and New York 1971; *Can Pakistan Survive?*, London 1983.

during the 1969 uprising from below that saw students and workers in Dhaka and Karachi, Chittagong and Lahore, topple the dictatorship of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. The Army never forgave its Bengali citizens this act of treachery, and embarked on a bloodbath when they proceeded to elect the leaders of their choice. It is worth stressing the point, glossed over in so many recent accounts, that the Army which demands such vast sums to preserve the state actually provoked its break-up in 1971.

The Army is now the only ruling institution; its domination of the country is complete. How long can this be sustained? Till now it has managed to preserve the command structure inherited from the British: Pakistani generals often boast of its inviolability when compared to the Middle East or Latin America. But a great deal has changed since the sixties. The officer corps is no longer the exclusive domain of the landed gentry—a majority of officers come from urban backgrounds and are subject to the same influences and pressures as their civilian peers. Privileges have kept them loyal, but the processes that destroy politicians are already at work. Whereas in the recent past it was Nawaz Sharif and his brother, or Benazir Bhutto and her husband, who demanded kick-backs before making deals, it is now General Musharraf's office that sanctions key projects.

Of course, high—even stratospheric—levels of corruption are no bar to longevity, if a military regime has sufficiently intimidated its population and enjoys solid enough support in Washington, as the Suharto regime in Indonesia testifies. Can Musharraf look forward to this sort of reign? The fate of his dictatorship is likely to depend on the interaction of three main forces. First will be the degree of internal cohesion of the Army itself. Historically, it has never split—vertically or horizontally—and its discipline in following a 180-degree turn in policy towards Afghanistan, whatever the sweeteners that have accompanied it, has so far been impressive. It is not impossible that one day some patriotic officer might deliver the country of its latest tyrant, as Zia was once mysteriously sent on his way to Gehenna; but for the minute, such an ending appears improbable. Having weathered the humiliation of its abandonment of the Taliban, the high command looks capable of brazening out any further acts of obeisance to orders from the Pentagon.

What of parliamentary opposition to military rule? Vexing though the upshot of October's election, for all its fraud, proved to be for Musharraf,

the parties that dominate the political landscape in Pakistan offer little hope of rebellion against him. The cringing opportunism of the Bhutto and Sharif clans knows few limits. The Islamist front ensconced in Peshawar and Quetta is noisier, but not more principled—cash and perquisites quickly stilling most of its protests. Popular discontent remains massive, but lacks any effective channels of national expression. It would be good to think that their performances in office had discredited the PPP and Sharif's clique forever, but experience suggests that should the regime at any point start to crack, there is little to prevent these phoenixes of sleaze from arising once more, in the absence of any more progressive alternatives.

Finally, there is the American overlord itself. The Musharraf regime cannot aspire to play the same role as regional satrap that Zia once enjoyed. Pakistan has been ousted as imperial instrument in Afghanistan, and checked from compensating with renewed incursions in Kashmir. But if Islamabad has been forced into a more passive posture along its northern borders, its strategic importance for the US has, if anything, increased. For Washington has now made a huge political investment in the creation of a puppet regime in Kabul, to be guarded by US troops 'for years to come', in the words of General Tommy Franks—not to speak of its continuing hunt for Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants. Pakistan is a vital flank in the pursuit of both objectives, and its top brass can look forward to the kind of lavish emoluments, public and private, that the Thai military received for their decades of collusion with the American war in Indochina. Still, Washington is pragmatic and knows that Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif were just as serviceable agents of its designs in Kabul as Zia himself. Should he falter domestically, Musharraf will be ditched without sentiment by the suzerain. The *Pax Americana* can wage war with any number of proxies. It will take an uprising on the scale of 1969 to shake Pakistan free of them.