

The Sparks from Arab and Iranian Nationalism

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Islam rose from the Arab soil in the 7th century. The Arabs subsequently conquered Iran and Central Asia under the banner of Islam. The spread of the new religion was swift and in a short period of time, Zoroastrian, the original religion of the Arians was wiped out. The Arabs always thought they were superior to other people since they brought Islam to the world. This belief of superiority prevented them from treating other people as equals. They began to use the term 'Ajam' for non-Arabs, particularly Iranians, which denotes people without the ability to speak. On the other hand the Arians also took pride in their ancient civilization. This prevented them from complete subjugation of Arabs. They, instead, chose a different path within the religion of Islam which was later known as Shiaism. This is how the Arab Iranian clash of civilization took a new turn. In the first part of 16th century the Safavids of Iran declared Shiaism the state religion of Iran.

The Islamic revolution of 1979 under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini brought fundamental social and political changes to the entire region. After the expulsion of the Shah of Iran, Reza Shah, from Iran, a theocratic government came into being in Iran and the Shia religious leaders assumed the charge of governing the people of Iran.

Democracy came to an end. The people of Iran who were used to free way of life came under a new political system and had to contend with new social norms. Iran came under an autocratic government where one man's orders prevailed upon the elected assembly and government.

The revolution gave a new impetus to Iranian nationalism and the inherent desire of the Iranians to declare themselves' superior manifested itself in Iran declaring it the leader of Islam, particularly of the Shia sect under the doctrine of Vilayat-i-Faqiah (the rule of God through the clergy).

After consolidating their control over the Iranian people, the government of Iran began to export their revolution. A Shia organization was established in Pakistan with the declared intention to impose the Shia thought on the entire nation, notwithstanding the vast majority belonging to Sunni sect of Islam. In Afghanistan about a dozen Shia parties were brought on one platform by the name of Hizbollah (Note: This is not Hizb-e Wahdat – the Unity Party of Afghanistan. Hizbollah in Afghanistan was formed before Hizbollah in Lebanon came into being). Iran started interfering in the affairs of Lebanon. The newly created Shia party in Afghanistan began implementing its mandate given by the government of Iran. All Iranian efforts beyond their borders were meant to spread the ‘superior’ Iranian culture as part of the Iranian nationalism in the form of Shia sect.

The spread and popularity of Iranian agenda began to irk its historical adversary Saudi Arabia which was championing itself as leader of Islam. The Saudis began to realize this cultural and religious threat to their being the leader of Islam. This forced Saudi Arabia to react by actively supporting a Sunni extremist religious faction in Pakistan to counter the activities of Iranian sponsored Shia party. These two extremist parties working under foreign agenda and financial assistance were soon at each other’s throats and a new era of sectarian terrorism began in Pakistan. These two parties left no stone unturned to spread violent sectarianism in the country. On the other hand, the U.S. was busy advancing its proxy war in Afghanistan through Saudi Arabia and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. The then President of Pakistan General Zia ul Haq gained immense political and economic leverage from this situation. Pakistan’s patronage of extremist sectarianism in Afghanistan played a vital role in the spread of this menace in Pakistan as well. Like other provinces of Pakistan, Balochistan was also affected by this trend. In the beginning hundreds of people were killed in the Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces but the mid eighties witnessed the establishment and spread of violent sectarianism in Balochistan too. These sectarian organizations were playing at the hands of the two foreign sources. The multi ethnicity, mutual respect and equality among different groups of people played a role in saving the province from sectarian strife. The peace did not last long. The first terrorist attack on a Hazara occurred in

Quetta, Balochistan's capital in July 1985. Uncompromising sectarian mentality was the reason behind the tragic incident. The incident of 6 July 1985 was the first act of sectarian terrorism which not only created misunderstanding among brotherly ethnic groups of Balochistan, its effects are still being felt by the Hazaras. After this tragic incident Balochistan saw a long spell of peace. Its credit goes to the nationalist and democratic forces that were in the forefront bringing awareness to the people about the foreign hand in the sectarian violence in the country.

Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar faced a series of violent acts by these sectarian organizations. Murder of people in the name of sectarian leaders and their sects were the headlines of newspapers of the day on regular basis. In Afghanistan different factions were creating anarchy by fighting among themselves. The Pakistan government was busy preparing a new game in Afghanistan under the patronage of the United States. As a result of this, Pakistan gave the 'gift' of Taliban to this part of the world that brought terrorism, extremism and fanaticism with them. This gang of thugs imposed a 6th century Islamic system in Afghanistan and did their best to eliminate the Hazaras completely from Afghanistan. The destruction of the twin towers of world trade centre in New York City heralded a change in the entire world and 9/11 gave a pretext to the U.S. to invade other countries. The U.S. initiated its operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Soon the Taliban were removed from power. The creator of the Taliban, Pakistan was forced to take a U-turn on its Afghan policy and take the role of frontline state against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The defeat of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan had its impact on Pakistan. Talibanization began to take roots in all parts of Pakistan. It brought the same result to Pakistan as Zia ul Haq's jihadi culture, which introduced Pakistan to heroine and Kalashnikovs. Sectarianism got a new impetus from Talibanization.

In 1999 an attempt was made at the life of Sardar Nisar Ali in Quetta, a Hazara leader and provincial minister. Sectarian violence had returned to Quetta after 14 years.

Another 19 months and sectarian violence took a new turn when the focus was shifted from targeting individuals to mass killings of the Hazaras. A Suzuki van carrying Hazaras

was ambushed at Podgali Kerani Road, Quetta city in which 5 of the victims lost their lives. On 8th June 2003 eleven Hazara Police cadets were murdered. This wave of violence against the Hazaras continues to this day. In the last two decades more than 500 Hazaras have lost their lives and thousands sustained injuries. The situation in Balochistan, particularly in Quetta is quite complex. Baloch resistance movements are challenging the army and the state is responding in kind. This has completely destroyed the law and order situation in the province. Balochistan has become a focal point for the international powers seeking to protect their interests there. The strategic importance of Balochistan makes it vulnerable to the interest of world powers. The U.S. wants to contain Chinese influence in the area, monitor Iranian defense system and efforts to diminish its influence, influence on Mekran coast and control of jihadi elements for its own interests and purposes. In view of this, the U.S. wants to establish its presence in Balochistan. Efforts to establish a U.S. consulate in Quetta is not meaningless at this particular time. Pro Taliban religious parties have their own spheres of influence in the province. Iran is also not sitting idle. In order to protect their interests, Iranians have increased their activities in the province.

As far as Pakistan's rulers are concerned, they would do what their masters tell them to do. An accurate analysis of the Balochistan situation is not possible. However facts on the ground indicate that the people of Balochistan are being used in a proxy war. The worsening law and order situation in the province including target killings, kidnappings, sectarian violence and collective losses are efforts to achieve objectives of these powers. As far as causing collective loss to the Hazaras in Quetta, it is a fact that the Hazaras can not remain unaffected from things happening on international, national and regional level. On one hand the seeds of sectarianism are having their effect in Quetta resulting in the ongoing murderous game by the sectarian organizations. On the other hand the Taliban related activities around Quetta and in other parts of the country can also not be ignored. The mysterious silence of Pakistani rulers is meaningful. It is not surprising the Pakistani rulers, the U.N. and human rights groups are not moved by the murder of 500 Hazaras. Without a targeted plan and organized political movement no

one would heed to the cries of the Hazara. It is heartening that the Hazaras are marching towards unity during this difficult time. Though they lack organized planning, these initial steps of their unity would go a long way for their existence in Quetta for the future. It is important to realize that in this war of international interest and in the face of changing situation an organized political effort is a must, so that we could minimize the losses and incidents. In a proxy war the danger of loss is always there but we can minimize them. We can do away with fanaticism and extremism so that we are not used by foreign powers for their interests. We can divert the oncoming disaster through political wisdom, effort based on awareness and organized action plan.

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