

PTM, irredentist Afghan claims on Pakhtunkwa & Pakistan army

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, PTM, is a peaceful movement for people's rights violated in the war on terror that especially devastated certain Pashtun areas in the northwest of Pakistan. Political parties of Pakistan could not change the military controlled Afghan policy that was causing the devastation and Pakistan army allowed all the devastation as 'collateral damage'. The result: within about one and a half decade the PTM emerged in the area, driven by the 'children of war'—former child victims of the war. The movement is led by 24 years old Manzoor Pashteen, who also grew up a war child.

Civilian governments in Pakistan have little control over Afghan policy of Pakistan and expecting anything from them is useless. The PTM, therefore, directly addressed its demands to the concerned authorities: the power generals of Pakistan. The demands include: end to extrajudicial killings; end to forced disappearance plus presentation of the disappeared persons to the court of law ; dignified treatment of public at military check posts in the war on terror affected areas; removal of landmines in Waziristan and justice for Naqeebullah Mahsud, an emerging fashion model, extra judicially killed by, Anwar Rao, the police officer known to have extra judicially killed 100s of innocent Pakistanis in Karachi.

The initial reaction of the generals was careful, to an extent positive and a bit of a 'guarded sympathy'. Major-General Asif Ghafoor, former director-general of Inter-Services Public Relations (DGISPR), who met Manzoor Pashteen, called him 'a wonderful young boy'. He even said that the army chief had given strict instructions not to deal with PTM gatherings with force. Some of the demands put forward by the PTM begin moving towards resolution. Pashteen has confirmed it in his social media talks that since the emergence of the movement, 100s of disappeared persons have come back to their homes and the intelligence agencies' practice of disappearing people has slowed down. Extra judicial killings of Pashtun, which were happening on almost weekly bases in certain areas in Pakistan, such as Karachi, have been reduced. The army check posts guarding security forces' behavior with people have improved. Another PTM's demand—that Anwar Rao, killer of Naqeeb Mahsud, must face the law, was also partially addressed in the sense that the case is in the court now and Anwar Rao is no more in his police position.

It looked as if the wish of 1000s of political workers, who gave their lives or suffered state oppressions in other forms for rule of law in Pakistan, have begun to materialize. At last, Pakistan got a lawful, law-abiding civilian force that can look straight into the eyes of the country's powerful generals and make them address the army's wrongdoing. In that sense then Pakistan is lucky to have PTM—an embodiment of the promise of rule law in Pakistan. For me as Pashtun, it is matter of pride that such brave force has emerged among Pashtun, and not among Punjabis who are the majority of this country, who should have taken lead in making Pakistan army respect the rule of law.

Any political movements when emerged- no matter how genuine their cause of creation may be vulnerable to manipulation or co-option by opportunist waiting for occasions to promote their vested interest. It looks the vulnerability with PTM too. Opportunists Pashtun nationalists in Afghanistan and among Afghan diaspora in the West and some Pashtun nationalists elements from Pakistan are seeing a lifetime opportunity in PTM to review their

tried and failed politics of irritant Pashtun nationalism. The movement that emerged from real life, mass scale sufferings of people and stands for their right claims is being hijacked by the vested interests.

A section of population in Afghanistan holds Pakistan wholly responsible for the destruction of Afghanistan since the days of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Others have never accepted Pakistan as state and would like to eliminate it at the first available opportunity. They have claims on Pashtun areas of Pakistan and have declared it 'Pakistan occupied part of Afghanistan' or 'occupied Pakhtunkhwa'. More unfortunately, the anti-Pakistan people of Afghanistan are fired more by racism and hate against the Punjab and far less by reason and historically verifiable facts in their case against Pakistan. They see an opportunity in PTM to disintegrate Pakistan by encouraging the Pashtun of Pakistan revolt against the federation. In other words, they want to use the Pashtun of Pakistan as their proxy to break Pakistan and satisfy their urge of revenge against the Punjab and the Punjab-dominated army of Pakistan. The Afghan diaspora have created platforms abroad in the name of PTM where they routinely use abusive language against Pakistan army, verbally express racism against the Punjab and entice the Pashtun of Pakistan to revolt against the 'Punjabi army' and break the state Pakistan as soon as possible. The situation becomes more suspicious when the PTM leaders in Pakistan begun addressing such overseas PTM gatherings via Skype or telephone. Unfortunately, some of PTM leaders also use some of the same Afghan narrative conspicuous for its racism against the Punjab and hatred of Pakistan army. Sometimes it looks that some of the PTM narrative, despite its main thrust on the rights claims within the constitution of Pakistan, is resonating more with the anti-army and anti-Punjab narrative of the Afghan diaspora.

Moreover, despite the clear instructions of the PTM leaders, some young, emotional PTM associates have been seen misbehaving with the army soldiers on duty in certain public places. Furthermore, PTM's initial claims- disappeared people, extra judicial killings, army soldiers' behavior with public on check posts, the Waziristan landmines and justice for Naqeeb Mahsud—have not yet been fully met by the army, but still PTM keeps expanding the circle of its demands. Now it also challenges the army control over the natural resources of Pakhtunkhwa and has even questioned the majoritarian democracy nature of the constituent of Pakistan, which in its view, does not fully protect the rights of the ethnic minorities of Pakistan. There is basically nothing wrong in questioning any shortcoming in the resource distribution and the constitution of Pakistan. Nevertheless, when seen in combination with the Afghan diaspora's activism in the name of PTM, the expanding circle of the PTM demands looks as if the PTM is out there to break Pakistan.

All this is too much for Pakistan army for the army to tolerate. One, PTM's association with anti-Pakistan Afghan groups resonates well with Afghanistan's old irredenta claims on the Pashtun territory of Pakistan. The claims, although rooted in feeble legal grounds, do pose a challenge to Pakistan- in the sense that the federation of Pakistan would confront an existential threat if some world power or regional power decided to support the Afghan claims against Pakistan.

The fact that the anti-Pakistan Afghans urge for revenge against the army is somehow resonating with PTM is absolutely unacceptable to the army. Certainly, the army dominated

Pakistan state would respond firmly. Resultantly, Pakistani media report nothing about PTM. PTM workers are routinely arrested and some have their families intimidated. Some PTM workers are killed and their violent deaths almost never get investigated. Even the top PTM leader, Manzoor Pashteen, was arrested under badly substantiated charges and so had to be released soon. Anyone in Pakhtunkhwa who sympathizes with PTM is potentially exposed to the intelligence' threats and intimidation.

On the other hand, revenge, normally seen as a deviant behavior in the most Western societies, is culturally prescribed in Pashtun tribal society and may at times be meaningful and even expected from the members of the society. This is especially true of the Afghan social universe where the state law has never been able to become the dominant regulatory norm in socio-political matters across the country. The Afghans now calling for destruction of Pakistan army coupled with their racist vocabulary against the Punjab is a tribal revenge case in point.

The Afghans, especially the Pashtun in Afghanistan, have so far failed to prove their worth as people capable of making a modern state even though they have the state since 1747. Afghanistan remains a tribal confederation as Ahmad Shah Abdali made it in 1747. It has no organized political parties and its state institutions remains in the basic evolutionary stage since 1747. Their educated class have failed to even get an international scholarly recognition for narrative of history that is more based on emotions and half truths rather than facts that are verifiable on scholarly forums. Their ruling elite, although ethnically Pashtun, have traditionally looked down upon Pashtun culture and language. They speak Persian language and culturally Persians. The Afghan tribal state could not even build a reasonable hospital for its population. Even in the most peaceful Afghan times in the recent times—the time under the King Zahir Shah— Afghans used to come to Peshawar for treatment.

These are collective failures, which requires deep introspection. The Afghans have shown so far they are not capable of undertaking it. They opt for the easy way out: revenge—which is culturally meaningful and convenient to attract public imagination. The revenge, however, requires the 'other'—an enemy, who is deviant, devilish and a sinner, who must be eliminated to end the misfortune, destruction and troubles befalling Afghanistan. The end of the sufferings of Afghan people is so linked with the urge for revenge that in the public mind the elimination of their suffering and the tribal vengeance looks one and the same. In other words, the vengeance would automatically lead to the end of sufferings of people of Afghanistan. The target of their revenge are the Punjab and Pakistan army. Could the destruction of Pakistan army and a 'bloody nose' to the Punjab automatically end the sufferings of the Afghan people? Is the Punjab-dominated army led Pakistan the only external killer of the people of Afghanistan? What about the US, Europe, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran? Is there any guarantee these external killers would stop using Afghanistan as their proxy ground after Pakistan army has been destroyed and the Punjab humiliated? What would be the legal framework of the Afghan state if the Pashtun areas were joined into it—since the Afghan claims that Pakistan's legal framework is 'infidel' because it is inherited from the British? How the two section of the Pashtun society be reconciled—one that is used to living under a relatively modern state structure—the British and Pakistan, and the other under the tribal

structures. These and other such difficult questions are conveniently ignored under the urge for revenge.

The Afghan activists do not accept that minus a short period under the tribal confederation of Ahmad Shah Abdali, around 100 years, the Pashtun areas of Pakistan have always been under the rule of Delhi or other places east of the river Indus. They also do not recognize that whatever progress in education, economy and culture that Pashtun as wider society in Pakistan and Afghanistan have made so far is almost wholly concentrated in the Pashtun areas of Pakistan and the presence of modern state institutions, first British and then Pakistani in these areas are the main cause of the progress. The Afghans do not admit that people of Pakhtunkhwa do not want to disintegrate Pakistan in which they are already integrated, especially in the army and civil bureaucracy. They also ignore that Pashtun in Pakistan have no issues with the Punjab that would motivate their racism or violence against Punjab. More relevant is that the Afghan diaspora made platforms in the name of PTM are conspicuous for their lack of participation of Pakistani Pashtun. The key explanation is that Pashtun of Pakistan want to see PTM keep within the law of Pakistan and distance themselves from PTM gatherings abroad due to the domination of anti-Pakistan people in the gatherings.

Besides, the Afghans activists tend not to question their own state's consistent ambiguous position on Pakhtunkhwa. The Afghan state challenged Pakistan's creation in the UN in 1948 but back tracked from the UN. It did not exploit Pakistan vulnerability on the western border during Pakistan's wars with India in 1965 and 1971. But between 1973-1978 Afghanistan interfered so much in Pakistan's Pashtun issues that ZA Bhutto, the then prime minister of Pakistan, responded by inviting and training Afghan dissident leaders, such as Gulbadin Hikmatyar, for militancy in Afghanistan. This ambiguity has allowed the Afghan state to interfere in Pakistan's Pashtun affairs and simultaneously stay short of the nationalistic expectation, i.e. to snatch the Pakistan's Pashtun areas by force.

The perceived security challenge from Afghanistan is making it hard for the army to seriously consider that people in the border districts with Afghanistan have suffered enormously in the war on terror. The war caused several economic, security and basic human dignity and justice related problems that need to be resolved by the state—with or without PTM. The PTM would not have even emerged if the army operations have not caused the mass scale destruction that they have done.

What is the way forward now? I think important responsibility ahead lies with Pashtun intellectuals. They did an excellent job in exposing Pakistan army generals illegal power domination. They deconstructed in simple language the army approved narratives that reinforces the army's control over politics and made it easy for everyone to understand the army's control and its disastrous consequences for people of Pakistan. Their work motivated young Pashtun who tore apart the circle of fear of the army maintained, through media and various state channels, over decades to deter common people from questioning the army policy and actions. Inspired by the courage of PTM now even in the Punjab one hears defiant voices that openly challenge the civil-military imbalance in Pakistan. A good part of credit for this goes to Pashtun intellectuals.

That said- it also remains a sad fact that the Pashtun intellectuals' focus is single-handedly on the Pakistan army. This is misleading because the Pashtun reality, like other socio-political realities in the world, is multidimensional. The other dimensions are equally important. With the exception of Akhtar Khan Wazir, lecturer Wali Khan University Mardan, and Juma Khan Sufi, no other Pashtun intellectuals hardly ever questioned the baselessness in the Afghan history narrative and the shortcomings of the Pashtun nationalism.

The Afghan narrative to some extent resonates, intentionally or unintentionally, with the PTM narrative and has the potential to just as much mislead the Pashtun masses as the Pakistan army backed Afghan Jihadi narrative of the 1980s did. In my view, it would be an unforgivable crime of the Pashtun intellectuals if they let it happen unchallenged. The Pashtun intellectuals now have to behave like true scholars and be as objective and as critical as possible so as to help the Pashtun masses make informed opinion about the issues that are vital for peace in the area. Moreover, it is also their responsibility to keep questioning the anti-Punjab racist overtures in the Afghan narratives.

The biggest responsibility lies with Pakistan army. The army must understand that from the Afghan perspective the more violence in Pakhtunkhwa, the better. The more the army deal PTM with violence, threats and intimidation, the more the Afghan case- that Pakistan army is killing & oppressing Pashtun- would be strengthened. Peace in Pakhtunkhwa is in the interest of the army and peace is what people of Pakhtunkhwa want. The peace will come when Pakistan army come forward to address the war on terror induced problems of Pashtun. Pashtun do not want to break away from Pakistan but they also want solutions to their problems and the army must use its power to realize solutions.

Additionally, a concern is that besides Pashtun masses, certain Pashtun in civil bureaucracy also support PTM. Some Pashtun civil servants even attended the PTM Jalsa in Peshawar last year—an act that was seemingly resented by the army generals. It is difficult at this point to ascertain whether or not Pashtun in the armed forces of Pakistan too support PTM.

Nevertheless, some PTM leaders claim that some Pashtun in the armed forces of Pakistan confidentially give them statistics about the war on terror related to death and injuries among the armed forces. The statistics, they claim, basically show that more Pashtun men in uniform disproportionately got killed & injured in the war on terror than men of other ethnicities. If this is correct then it simply reinforces the PTM narrative that the war on terror was basically a war on Pashtuns of all kinds—children, women, men- both in uniform and civvies and that the Pakistan generals basically amassed dollars with Pashtun blood. This must be a matter of deep concern for the army—which takes prides in its professionalism- sees itself beyond ethnic divisions- and also the fact the army is trying hard in the recent years to expand the ethnic bases of the army by bringing relatively unrepresented ethnicities in to the army. The army must remember that the PTM narrative is deeply rooted in Pashtun suffering and has the potential to resonate with Pashtun in any positions in Pakistan—in and outside the state setups.

It is, therefore, of utmost importance to deal with PTM peacefully, empathetically and legally rather than in the army's usual dealing with dissent—threats and violence. This practically means that the army must use its power to solve the people's problems caused by the war on terror and restrain its tendency towards violence and intimidation. At the same time the army

should strictly deal with those who pose threat to the state security but that dealing must be based on well-founded intelligence and should not go beyond the contour of the law.

The Afghan diaspora dominated propaganda in the name of PTM also needs to be countered. Pakistan embassies abroad should facilitate Pakistani gatherings abroad to highlight the Pakistani 'ownership' of the PTM as a rights movement for the rule of law in Pakistan. Last but not least it remains the responsibility of the largest federating unit, the Punjab's intellectuals and opinion makers to motivate the public opinion in the Punjab against the civil-military imbalance in Pakistan's power politics. It is also their responsibility to raise public support in the Punjab, the main recruiting ground of the army, for the PTM's right claims.

In Pakistan our ethnic diversity should be our strength and not a source of tension to each other. Together we, the diverse ethnicities of Pakistan, stand a chance to make an impressive contribution to human civilization, especially to the Muslim part of it : a rule of law based unity in diversity that is modern and dominantly Muslim. Pashtun, Sindhi and Baluch have sacrificed far more than their share towards achieving the contribution. Now is the turn of the Punjab to stand up and be counted.

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