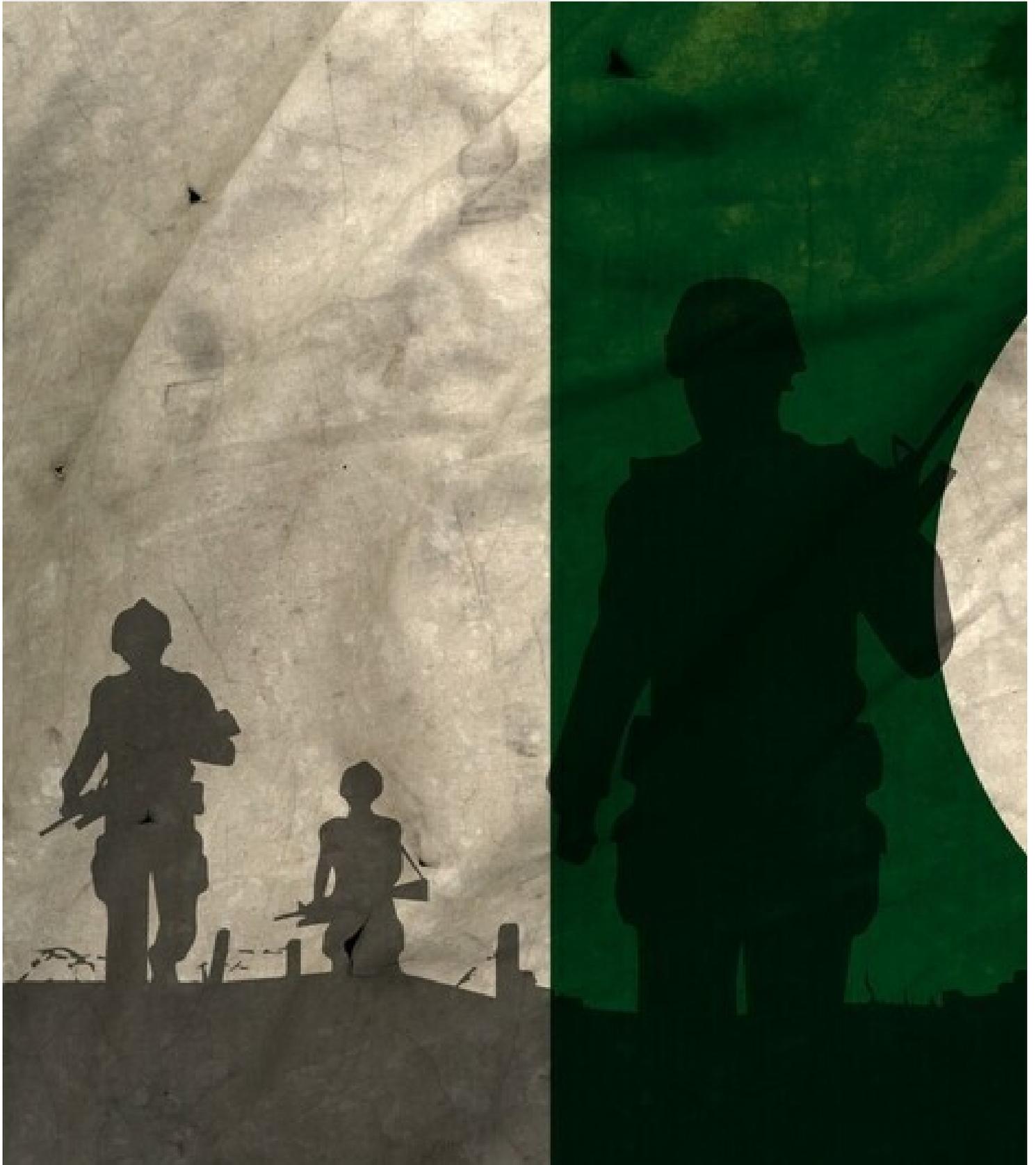


DAWN

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# Will Pakistan's 'Nazuk Mor' ever end?

Till the ideological foundations of the establishment remain uncontested, Pakistan's *nazuk mor* shall remain a perpetual roundabout.

Faiq Zafar | Published August 14, 2023

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**April 14, 1919.** The sun rose on an India gashed and mutilated by a horrific display of brutality, the likes of which she had seldom seen before. In Amritsar, more than 1,500 unarmed civilians — gathered at the Jalianwala Bagh to partake in the cultural festivities of Vaisakhi a day before — had met the unbridled wrath of the Raj.

The sheer callousness of the British military drew ire from even the most stone-hearted quarters. Even Churchill — for whom committing genocidal atrocities was like a regular Tuesday — was hesitant to lend his name to the bestiality that was the [Amritsar Massacre](#).<sup>🔗</sup>

A little north of seven months after the incident, General Reginald Dyer, the officer who commandeered the violence, was called in to testify before the Hunter Commission. The following is an extract from his [harrowing account](#):<sup>🔗</sup>

*"I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view not only on those present, but more especially, throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity."*

A century later, it is still interesting to contemplate the threat less than a couple thousand unarmed protesters presented to the all-mighty British Empire for Dyer to feel compelled into such extremities. Interesting still is that according to Dyer, the purpose of the violence went far beyond the corporeal elements of the gathering.

Legal historian [Nasser Hussain](#) expounds that the relationship between legal and extralegal violence used to frequently collapse in colonies in order to devise a permanent state of emergency. This peculiar situation would arise at the behest of an intrinsic sense of paranoia amongst elite echelons of the Raj, who feared that popular dissent could escalate into an open mutiny against the Crown as it did in [1857](#), leaving bare the fragility at the heart of colonial terror.

Reinforcing the political frameworks of the Raj was an elaborate substructure of historical and cultural violence, carefully manufactured and meted out over the course of a century. As anti-colonial sentiment peaked across the subcontinent, the foundational myths — upon which the Empire carried out its social and economic plunders — had begun to give way. And so when Dyer entered the gates of the Jallianwala Bagh that evening, he sought not only to defend the political authority of the Raj, but in his own words, the 'moral' and ideological writ of the Empire as well.

## Generational fallacies

To dismiss the disgraced general's anxieties as a one-off enterprise by a colonising regime desperate to sustain a dying empire is to miss the forest for the trees. In post-colonial Pakistan for instance, independence from British rule did little to uproot the colonial structures of governance. The new nation-state not only inherited the Empire's railway systems and ornate stone buildings, but her paranoiac behaviours too.

The phenomenon of a khaki-laden General speaking directly into a television camera to utter the ominous words, "*Mulk ek nazuk mor se guzar raha hai*" (The nation is going through a difficult turn) is one that hits a little too close to home for every Pakistani. Once the *nazuk mor* is established, a state of emergency ensues in which the military is granted unimaginable concessions. From wide-scale operations across cities to military courts for civilians, from massive cuts in the annual budget to policing speech on social media — on Pakistan's "*nazuk mor*", the state can do no wrong. After all, desperate times often call for desperate measures.

As we stand in the aftermath of the May 9 protests, we can clearly trace the ideological dimensions of Dyer's actions that evening play out in real time. At the time of writing,

one of Pakistan's largest political parties remains largely decapitated. Scores of its supporters await trials in military courts — [See: Can the military dispense justice](#) — while much of its top leadership faces a myriad of court cases (which seem to mysteriously vanish after the accused announce their resignations from the party). Journalists and activists hounded by unidentified men are all but a common sight on one's social media feed. The country seems to have back-pedalled into a time best described by [Faiz Ahmed Faiz](#) during his incarceration in Hyderabad in 1951:

*My salutations to thy sacred streets, O beloved nation!*

*Wherein a peculiar tradition has emerged- that none shall walk  
with his head held high,*

*Lest one walks in devotion to thee, they must walk, eyes  
lowered, the body crouched in fear*

Hardly two months prior, the situation was much different. The PTI chief's onslaught against the military establishment was beginning to draw first blood. Formerly the face of the same-page mantra, Imran Khan's firebrand of populist rhetoric, coupled with his domination of social media and strong political footprint in the establishment's legacy stronghold, Punjab, had carved an obvious split in what was hitherto the country's most organised institution.

Forced into uncomfortable [press conferences](#) and [startling admissions](#), it seemed the establishment had no idea how to deal with the Imran threat, mumbling and stumbling into a defensive position they had not occupied perhaps since Benazir Bhutto's massive election victory in 1988. Optimists among the lot saw the ex-prime minister's offensive against the powers-that-be as some kind of groundbreaking exposé, maybe even the genesis of a possible revolution. It didn't take long for the military to prove them wrong.

In December 2022, Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, in an [address](#) at the Pakistan Naval Academy in Karachi, dusted off the age-old playbook:

“Pakistan is passing through one of her most **critical junctures** and this requires development of national consensus by all stakeholders to sail through the confronted challenges of economy and terrorism.”

Once the narrative of the '*nazuk mor*' had been swung into play, the PTI's political dominance was but a house of cards, just waiting to disintegrate.

But the pertinent question still remains — how did the PTI's narrative collapse so quickly and so remarkably? To attribute it simply to Imran's political miscalculations (which, granted, were [more than a few](#)) is to operate within the same misapprehensions as the PTI chief himself — that the establishment's influence in Pakistan is purely and absolutely political and hence, can be mitigated through political action alone. In Pakistan's circular history, the PTI is hardly the first to pursue this line and fall, something the PPP of the 1980s, the MQM of the 1990s, and the PML-N of the early 2000s would wholeheartedly attest to. It would hardly surprise French Philosopher Louis Althusser who [posited](#):

“No class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the state's ideological apparatuses”

Not much unlike its European predecessor, Pakistan's military establishment is also a fundamentally ideological enterprise, one that frequently calls upon the trope of a perpetual '*nazuk mor*' to reassert its relevance in the country's political landscape.

What the PTI chief did not anticipate was that to palliate the political role of the military without engaging with the ideological underpinnings that perpetuate such a role in the first place is a fundamental logical fallacy. It would be akin to treating a patient diagnosed with malaria by handing them a handkerchief for the night sweats.

## The chronicles of two Pakistans

Even if we were to concede, however, that the deep-state is a fundamentally ideological apparatus, it hardly explains how success in the ideological realm translates into policy infrastructure in the material.

From the [Doctrine of Necessity](#)<sup>📄</sup> to the [Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2020](#)<sup>📄</sup> – which criminalised ‘intentional ridiculing of the Armed Forces’ – an entire judicial and legislative infrastructure ensures the military’s hegemony in the country’s political arena. To understand this enigma, one must go back to the history of the decade preceding Pakistan.

The winter of 1937 had been a particularly frosty one for Jinnah. The All India Muslim League had suffered grave embarrassment in the provincial elections, unable to secure a seat in a single province. The Congress, meanwhile, won 711 out of 1,585 general seats, going on to form eight provincial ministries.

As it turned out, the Muslim League had grossly misjudged the subcontinent’s political terrain. In areas where Muslims were a minority, the party still retained a substantive constituency amongst the Muslim electorate. However, much to the dismay of Jinnah, in the Muslim-majority provinces of the West, the popular vote fell neither to the Congress nor to the Muslim League.

This was largely due to the fact that within Muslim-majority provinces, Jinnah’s rhetoric barely left a mark. His appraisal of Hindu tyranny fell on ears that could not have been more nonchalant, especially since the threat of Hindu domination would be laughed off as heresy in provinces where Muslims held majoritarian status. Jinnah’s charisma held more currency in Muslim-minority provinces, where the possibility of Hindu domination was thought to be much more concrete.

In Punjab, regional Muslim parties – such as the Unionist Party – which were largely dominated by feudal landlords and *zamindars*, raked in massive poll numbers. Thought to belong to the martial races, these landlords and *zamindars* were absolutely integral cogs in the Raj’s machine. They were of prime importance to the Raj when limited elections were held, as they would use their economic hegemony to win their constituencies,

giving rise to the concept of electables — party-hopping constituency dealers — which continues to influence Pakistani politics to this day.

If Jinnah were to leverage support in the Muslim-majority provinces to secure greater concessions for Muslims in provinces where they were in minority, the support of these landlords was absolutely critical.

Therefore, post-1937, there was a massive shift in the political rhetoric of the Muslim League leadership. As the British and Russian empires locked horns in the Great Game, Jinnah realised there was gold in the streets. He turned his guns on the socialist quarters within the Congress, in a master stroke which effectively won him Pakistan. In an address to the Aligarh Muslim University in 1941, [he warned](#):

*“Another party which has become very active as of late is the Communist Party. Their propaganda is insidious and I warn you not to fall into their clutches. Their propaganda is a snare and a trap. What is it that you want? All this talk of socialism, communism, national-socialism and every other ‘ism’ is out of place.”*

Writing himself up as an imperial anti-hero to Nehru’s socialist slants, [Jinnah accused](#) the socialist quarters within the Congress, somewhat counterfactually, of aiding the rise of Hitlerism.

*“The Congress is struggling to achieve independence and to establish a communistic and socialist government ... This has been constantly dinned into the ears of the youth. When you think you will be able to destroy the British Government, the zamindars, the capitalists with one stroke, refer to the conditions of Europe. In Germany, Hitlerism came into existence because of socialistic and communistic movements. So did Fascism in Italy.”*

Jinnah’s newfound imperialist rhetoric was a political masterstroke, killing two birds with one stone. His propensity towards Western models of capitalism and his [proclivity](#) to join a prospective Commonwealth of Nations made him a favourable horse to bet on (as opposed to Nehru) for the British, who were looking to safeguard their own geopolitical

interests in the event of a Soviet expansion into Asia. According to General Officer Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Command, [Lieutenant-General Sir Franis Taker](#)<sup>📄</sup>:

*“There was much therefore to be said for the introduction of a new Muslim power supported by the science of Britain. If such a power could be produced and if we could orient the Muslim strip from North Africa through Islamia Desertia, Persia, Afghanistan to the Himalayas, upon a Muslim power in Northern India, then it has some chance of halting the filtration of Russia towards the Persian Gulf.”*

Ergo, Jinnah's imperialist rhetoric effectively aligned the bifurcation of India with Britain's geopolitical strategies in a post-colonial world order.

But it did much more than that. The Unionist Party, which was largely regional in its political footprint, saw Jinnah as a worthy political investment to shelter itself from a united India, wherein the Congress' socialist tendencies would bereave its landowning members of their lands. Vying for economic survival, large groups of feudal lords threw their weight behind Jinnah's movement for Pakistan, culminating in a [massive election victory](#)<sup>📄</sup> for the Muslim League in 1946.

In a conversation I had with historian Dr Akbar Zaidi, he attributed this change in rhetoric, not only to a political sleight of hand, but also to the Quaid's ideological subscriptions: “Jinnah tended to look at Muslim interests from an economic point-of-view. His concerns lay with what he termed the ‘*salariat*’ (salaried) classes of the Muslims, who he thought would succumb to majoritarianism and would not be able to maintain their economic hegemony in a post-colonial India.”

So when Pakistan finally achieved nationhood, it was built on the backs of India's economic elite. With Partition allowing them to consolidate their power like never before, Pakistan's new feudal class leveraged an unprecedented amount of political currency, and any lingering hopes of fundamental economic reform waned into a distant dream.

*When the events of 1947 finally came to pass, what was created was not one but two Pakistans – one for the people, who to this day, endure gut-wrenching poverty, and one for a tiny elite, who have managed to retain an exorbitant amount of the country's resources.*

In 1945, despite being persuaded by the younger ranks of the Muslim League, Jinnah did constitute a committee to investigate the problem of mass land ownership. The nominal agriculture reform [committee](#) of the Muslim League, headed by Mumtaz Daultana (another Oxford-educated heir to enormous lands) marked [80 per cent of land in Sindh and over 50 pc in Punjab](#) as being owned by landlords.

But after the League's landslide victory in 1946, land reforms faded from Jinnah's concerns, never to surface again. He remained aloof when his constituted committee described landlordism as "benevolent and in the best interests of the peasant". The repulsion towards any institutional reform finally reached its logical culmination in 1989, when the [Federal Shariat Court declared land reform](#) to be "unIslamic".

According to the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (Piler), [5pc of agricultural households](#) in Pakistan own nearly two-thirds of Pakistan's farmland today.

The country's inability to implement basic economic reform gave rise to a political class dominated by feudal elites. In 1951, [around 70pc of the Second Constituent Assembly's members](#) were of feudal lineage. These feudal classes, which have since entered marriages of convenience with the deep-state, are at the helm of every major political party and drive nearly all policy reform. The country's Parliament serves as a nepotistic dump for their children and is frequently used to secure massive tax concessions on income and land revenue.

The establishment ensures that the external and internal political climate remain conducive for the sustenance of the feudal elite. Though it is international financial

institutions that ensure that the country's economy artificially stays afloat, in the realm of geo-economics, there is no free lunch. To assist the economic structure on which the elite build their havelis, the state [uses its strategic significance](#) to act as a guard for Western, imperialist powers. Driven by the reckless extravagance of its national elite, the state facilitates global capital by prostituting its territory for the strategic interests of the Global North.

The state also ensures the management of internal dissent, cracking down heavily on all calls for fundamental reform. Alternative economic ideas are censored, a tradition which emerged out of 1954, when the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) became one of the first political parties in the country to be banned. The [custodial murder of Hassan Nasir](#) – a proletarian leader of the CPP – in 1960, and the [judicial murder of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto](#) – the socialist prime-minister who nationalised vast amounts of industries and lands – in 1979, speak to a systematic uprooting of alternative economic ideas.

In return for this generosity, the country's elite leverage their constitutional power and massive political footprint at the grassroots to construct a praetorian legislative infrastructure which all but ensures the military's hegemony in the political sphere. Whilst inhabiting the mecca of the country's democracy, they owe their loyalties neither to their constituencies nor to the political ideologies they claim to espouse.

RELATED

### The Parliament that murdered democracy



So when draconian bills such as the recent [Official Secrets Act Amendment Bill 2023](#) – a death knell for due process in the country – are [bulldozed through the Lower House](#) in the wee hours of the night by a party decrying *izzat* for the vote just a couple of years ago, it should hardly be a surprising development in the Parliament's long, tragic history of bending its knee to undemocratic powers.

## Prisoners of the present

But had the bid for Pakistan merely been economic, it would not have stirred up the mass mobilisation that it did. Jinnah knew that an ideological layer would be critical in securing a sustainable political currency amongst his electorate. And although Sir Syed's infamous Two-Nation Theory had been frequenting book stalls, libraries and study circles around Aligarh for a while, it trickled into the streets as an independent idea when it was picked up by the rhetoric of the incredibly charismatic, dangerously articulate barrister in Jinnah. In a [letter to Gandhi](#) dated Sept 17, 1944, he detailed the ideology in a manner as coherent as it was concise:

*"We maintain and hold that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of a hundred million, and what is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradition, aptitudes and ambitions – in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law, we are a nation."*

The problem, however, was that the Two-Nation Theory wasn't entirely an accurate depiction of historical reality.

Long before the British set sight on the subcontinent, Muslims and Hindus of the region shared a common political ancestry – they collectively identified as belonging to something known as 'Hindustan'. Mediaeval historian Manan Ahmed in [The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India](#) details Hindustan as a place of territorial integrity that encompassed the entire subcontinent and that diverse communities of different faiths, castes, and creeds inhabited in tranquillity from AD1000 to AD1900.

Enter the British. To govern a people they did not fully understand, it was essential that obscure versions of history were developed to cohere with European post-enlightenment notions of rationality. Colonial archives reinterpreted, omitted, and rewrote much of the literature from native historical accounts. What emerged was a subcontinent where Muslims were caricatured as invaders and outsiders, prior to whom the subcontinent was populated by "timeless, history-less Hindus", a land of primitive

people without any political or social agency. The idea of 'Hindustan' faded away and a faith-differentiated India was manufactured. It was within this India that the Two-Nation Theory was conceived.

Fundamentally built around a Muslims-are-different-from-Hindus philosophy, the discourse which drove the Pakistan Movement never really discerned the subcontinent's pulse. Within this discourse, the movement for independence from British colonialism became inconsequential, and was replaced by a more teleological — something which serves as a function of its end as opposed to its cause — Pakistan 'freedom movement'. The antagonist in the country's grand crusade to freedom was no longer the British imperialist, but the Hindu from whom the Muslims of India are said to have won their political freedom.

Today, Pakistani students are seldom aware of the critical role played by Gandhi, Nehru, Gokhale, Patel, and Bose in bringing independence for 300 million colonised Indians. Legacies of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh (who fought the last battle of his life in Lahore), Udham Singh, Rani Lakshmbai, and Sukhdev Thapar have been systematically wiped off of national syllabi.

[See: Is the Taj Mahal Pakistani?](#)

This contortion of the past divorced an entire people from their own historical evolution. Memories of colonial subjugation were wiped off and replaced with imaginary battle lines drawn where none had historically existed. And the post-colonial Pakistani, whose memory of the colonial project had been effectively erased, was to become ripe for the state project forevermore.

Consequently, when the country's feudal elite and military establishment fraternise in a 'partnership' reminiscent of the vice-regal democratic system instated by the Raj post-1857, none really seem to bat an eye.

And when sitting MNA Ali Wazir is jailed for more than two years on charges barely worth the paper they are printed on, none seem to draw parallels with the contentious relationship the Raj had with its own dissidents.

And when the PTI is systematically dismantled to create the [Istehkaam-e-Pakistan](#) and the [PTI-P](#) in an effort to undercut Imran Khan's political footprint in Punjab and KP, none seem to remember the Raj's reliance on kingmakers to give some semblance of democracy to an India crippled by exploitation.

But premising national identity on such fallacious ideas of being and belonging was to give rise to more than just a dilemma of knowledge. It birthed a forever war that all but solidified the military's relevance in Pakistan's political sphere.

## The forever war

To justify a partition that killed millions, it was necessary for the Two-Nation Theory to materialise as a potent nation-building tool, and fast. From day one, the theory [pitted Pakistan and India as ideological counterparts](#) to one another.

This ideological conflict did not take long to disintegrate into a geopolitical rivalry — a defining feature of the country's 'national interest' for decades to come. From securing strategic depth against India via a Taliban-led Afghanistan, to nurturing a Pak-China camaraderie to neutralise Indian power in the subcontinent, Pakistan's foreign policy has long [revolved](#) around resolving the Kashmir crisis, often at the expense of its social development.

[According](#) to an assessment by former COAS Mirza Aslam Baig, Pakistan has had to ensure its survival in the face of a constant threat posed to it by a country which is much bigger in terms of population, territory and military spending. This view has had its dissidents, even within the armed forces. Air Marshal Asghar Khan, for instance — the man credited for organising and training the Pakistan Air Force — [pointed out](#) that of the four military conflicts with India, all have been a result of Pakistani adventurism and ambition.

Another obstacle the country had to overcome was the [growing realisation](#) that the Pakistan Movement took place far beyond the borders of what eventually became Pakistan. To acquire credibility amongst the people it now governed, the new-born

nation-state of Pakistan was compelled to partake in a mission of elaborate nation-building.

Jinnah himself hoped that in due time, cultural and linguistic 'angularities' would equalise into a meta-narrative of Pakistaniat. In his [presidential address](#) to the first Constituent Assembly on Aug 11, 1947, Jinnah asserted:

*"In course of time, all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community – because even as regards to Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis and so on, and among Hindus you have Brahmins, Vashnavas, Khattris, also Bengalese, Madrasis and so on – will vanish."*

Dr Zaidi recorded his disagreements with Jinnah's expectations: "The way to address these 'angularities' would have been to create multiple administrative units in Pakistan, where different provinces are opened up into different units based on linguistic, economic, and ethnic demographics. The problem even today is that after 76 years, we are still looking at colonial administrative units, and we think that this is God-given."

Jinnah's sentiments were also [echoed by his lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan](#) who declared in March 1948: "We must kill this provincialism for all times to come."

It is no coincidence that two years into the country's first bout with martial law, Gen Ayub Khan thought it necessary to replace 'history' with 'Pakistan studies' – an implicit effort to indoctrinate a diverse population into a singular Pakistani identity. KK Aziz, in [The Murder of History](#), evaluates each Pakistan studies textbook to highlight inaccuracies, distortions, and exaggerations.

In the [words](#) of Dr Zaidi, "Pakistan's history and a history of Pakistan's people and their land, become two conflicting narratives". He was also quick to point out the comedic paradox that ensnares the country to this day: "It is ironic that Muslim nationalism, led by Mr Jinnah, achieved statehood based on her minority status. Yet, its own minorities, whether they be ethnic, national, or religious, remain gravely repressed."

It turns out, however, that repression hardly entails an end to unwanted realities. During its formative years, the country was mired in sectarian, linguistic and ethnic violence. The

crises in Balochistan and KP seem to aggravate by the day, with Sindh not faring any better. Religious minorities are subjected to horrendous crimes on the regular, with little to no reproach from the state. From secessionist struggles to terror outfits, the state seems to have entangled itself in a Gordian knot of internal chaos, one that requires enormous amounts of political concessions to the military.

In Pakistan's forever war, the establishment retains monopoly over the mass production of traitors and patriots. From autocratic prime-ministers like Bhutto to eccentric poets like Jalib, from journalists like Hamid Mir to civil activists like Asma Jahangir, all have found themselves having to battle the same, worn-out labels — 'RAW-funded', 'pro-Indian', 'communist'.

Even Fatima Jinnah, the "Mother of the Nation", was called pro-Indian during her opposition to Ayub's tyrannical reign in the '60s. These labels tend to last just so long as it is politically expedient.

## Naya Pakistan

But some demons simply cannot be exorcised. When she lost her Eastern wing in 1971, Pakistan also lost something intrinsic and metaphysical to her foundational idea. After decades of economic and political depredation, Bengal bid adieu to her Western counterpart in a bitter divorce that left thousands dead. A grim sadness permeated the air, best expressed in a [1974 ghazal](#) <sup>📄</sup> penned by Faiz.

*We stand estranged, after countless hospitalities,*

*How many meetings will it take for us to get acquainted once  
more?*

## *When will we behold the unblemished bloom of viridescent fields?*

### *How many rains will it take to wash away the stains of blood?*

As the flag of Bangladesh rose in Dhaka amidst cheers, her Muslim brethren in the West looked on in unrelenting disbelief. ***The Two-Nation Theory was dead.***

The surrender to India had left the military utterly humiliated. More than 90,000 of her civilians and military personnel became Indian prisoners of war and Gen Yahya Khan, architect of the great secession, was forced to make a dishonourable exit from the corridors of power. With the establishment on the verge of collapse for the first time since Ayub's martial law in 1958, Bhutto assumed the reins of power.

In a hectic reign spanning 6.5 years, Bhutto dominated the political arena. He was an enigma — democratic but authoritarian, populist but vindictive. The India-centric orientation of the Pakistani state, however, remained **unchanged**. Instead of looking inwards at the decades-long mistakes that led to the creation of Bangladesh, Bhutto bolstered the age-old doctrine that a credible defence against a hostile India was imperative to Pakistan's survival.

His reign was marked by a **tormented Ahmeddiya community**, victimised political opponents, a war-torn, insurgent Balochistan, one rigged election, and a political impasse with the **Pakistan National Alliance (PNA)** that deadlocked the nation. His autocracy lent life-support to the demoralised military, a sleeping monster he thought he could tame. As time would go on to prove, Bhutto himself threaded the noose from which he was later to hang.

With the Two-Nation Theory under attack and the political climate in upheaval, Zia inherited a highly volatile Pakistan. By overthrowing an elected, highly popular prime-

minister, Zia had to devise a strategy that would secure the military government's political hegemony and popularity.

Consequently, more than any other ruler of Pakistan, he sought to resuscitate the Two-Nation Theory, not merely as an ideological concern in relation to India, but as an ideological enterprise in its own right.

Thus began Zia's infamous Islamisation project – an ideological and [cultural indoctrination of the military](#) as an Islamic fighting force armed with offensive capabilities to deal with a Hindu India. Borrowing the dogmas of Maududi (the founder of political Islam), Zia sought transformative nation and state building. According to [renowned historian Tariq Ali](#): “It was General Zia who created a ‘Naya Pakistan’. The current version is counterfeit.”

In Zia's Pakistan, being Muslim was no longer a mere nationalist marker but a theological one as well. The pre-existing nexus between the military and the economic elite was bolstered by a third, more powerful force – the religious clergy. It was to act as an ideological guardian of the praetorian influence of the military in Pakistan's internal political arena. By curating an interpretation of Islam that glorifies jihad, conquest, military prowess, and pan-Islamic domination, the clergy ensure a subconscious admiration and adoration for the military. If Pakistan is a fortress for Islam, her military is its valiant keeper.

According to [political scientist Carol Christine Fair](#), “Articles in Pakistan's professional military journals also use Islam to sustain popular appetite for unending conflict with India and the army's continued dominance over Pakistan's internal and external affairs”. The military frequently tends to garner support by describing its adversary, often Hindu India or its “agents”, as nonbelievers and framing the conflict primarily in religious contexts.

Consequently, the struggle with India is depicted as a jihad against nonbelievers who pose a sustained threat to Islam as a whole. As Pakistan's forever war ensues, in the mind of the people, the enemy transcends their somatic significance to a potentially ideological one as well.

Within this narrative, the military assumes the role of guardian, not only of the country's physical frontiers, but of its ideological ones as well. A fifth-generation war, the reality of which has been refuted by numerous political scientists, adds another dimension to the country's *nazuk mor*.

Within this [discourse](#),<sup>📄</sup> the enemy is no longer one who will knock on our front doors with thunderous pounding and blazing guns. They might not even be seen. The enemy approaches with alternative ideas of change, which threaten existing, archaic ideas. Hence, when the state fails to address the material needs of her population, the people are distracted with cultural anxieties to suppress alternative ideas, vindicate political opponents, and maintain the status quo of distortion and manipulation.

## The sole exit

Till the ideological foundations of the establishment remain uncontested, Pakistan's *nazuk mor* shall remain a perpetual roundabout. The sole exit is best manifested by [an incident](#)<sup>📄</sup> that transpired during a Sindhi demonstration in the early '80s.

After the decision to execute Bhutto went public, rural Sindh became highly volatile. Paramilitary police units were called upon by the Zia regime to quash ensuing demonstrations. The policemen had been taught to taunt the Sindhi protestors by questioning their loyalty to Pakistan by repeatedly shouting, "Your Bhutto's mother was Hindu!" This of course was a well-known fact and the response was nearly always along the lines of "She had converted to Islam". But this response was playing within the ideological confines set by Zia's regime. Being Hindu or being Muslim should have had no bearing on how Pakistani Bhutto or his supporters were.

So during one such demonstration, when a policeman repeated the supposed slur in the face of a Sindhi peasant woman, she innocently retorted, "Was our Prophet's mother a Muslim?" Utter silence prevailed. The policeman was left flabbergasted. He had nothing to say.

It is within these dialectical questions that real change lies.

*Special thanks to Dr S. Akbar Zaidi*

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